

You Told Me

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You Told Me

– work stories and video essays/
verkberättelser och videoessäer

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Abstract – You Told Me

- Work stories and video essays

You Told Me is a practice-based research project and consists of three video biographies (the *Who is...?* series), and two video essays (*Kumiko, Johnnie Walker & the Cute* (2007), *Madame & Little Boy* (2009)), an introduction with a contextualization and methodology of the field, and three essays.

The dissertation is an observation and analysis of certain functions and meanings of narration and narratives in contemporary art, as well as being an experiment with roles, methods, actions, and narrative functions in an artistic medium – the video essay. Using the methods of “pilgrimage” (Chris Marker) and essayistic practices, and by revisiting and retelling biographies, this work tries to find a place in between collective and personal memory.

During the practical process and the reflective theoretical work the different elements or instances of the video essay are identified: the subject matter, the images (the representation), the artist/author, the narrative/text, and the narrator/voice. In documentary film the lack of natural correspondence between these entities is often dissolved or denied – this work instead exposes the instances as separate units. A question arises: What alternative roles can be established between these elements, for example by negotiation and transference between them?

The methodological part of the text focuses on the conceptual invention made during the process, which I have called *work story* [verkberättelse]. A work story is a written or oral narrative about the forming of materials, immaterial units, situations, relations, and social practices that constitutes, or leads to, an artwork. By discussing analogies between storytelling, collecting, and biographical accounts together with examples from conceptual art, the dissertation shows how the work story is not only crucial for the understanding of the artwork but that the act of making and the very order or sequence in which the making proceeds often have symbolic, metaphorical, metonymical, political, and even epistemological meanings.

In an extended form a work story disseminates meaning rather than capturing it. This is the essayistic work story that permits a writer/artist to wander off and touch upon a subject as if in passing, reproducing its neglected genealogy and destiny in the detailed materiality of the work story.

1. You told me

An introduction

In the same way that the storyteller doesn't exist without the story the methodology and subject-matter of research in this dissertation project are inseparable. In this process I am striving to explore constructions of narratives of life stories and stories about the making of art. The means for this examination rhymes with the field of investigation: I am telling stories and at the same time experimenting with the forms and strategies to create such stories within the context of contemporary art. Or even more simply: I want to bring narratives into art, but also, I want to bring up narratives from their existence in the undercurrents of art.

You Told Me – the three words can be seen as the morphemes of my dissertation project. Three words and two persons are involved. The “You” is not a complete stranger, since “Me” is addressing “You” in the past tense. A continuation is also implied; you told me *something*. This something may be a story, or may be a fact. Depending on which syllable the emphasis is placed on, the three words may indicate other plausible implications: for instance, that the initial telling of something created a binding relation, that the telling was a performative act.

This dissertation consists of an introductory text, three text essays, and five video works.¹ The videos are grounded in the *You Told Me-*

1. Three video biographies (*Who is Zdenko Bužek?*, *Who is Eva Quintas?*, *Who is Dimitris Hourliarakis?*) and two video essays (*Kumiko, Johnnie Walker & the Cute, Madame & Little Boy*).

situation and the different resonances of the act and context of utterance. The fundamentals for the works are meetings, conversations, and storytelling, activities that are closely linked to the biographical genre, but also – as I will argue – to the dissemination of artworks.

Each of the video works has an independent status as artwork and has been shown in exhibitions and film festivals without the company of the text essays and this theoretical introduction. However, in this context they are inscribed in (but hopefully not framed and restricted by) another system of meaning, institutionally (the University) and epistemologically. The last two works (the video essays) were created within the framework of my PhD-studies and are, of course, permeated by the epistemological process of a dissertation work, although this most often is an unknown factor when the works are shown in exhibitions and movie theaters.

As a biographer I have in this project traveled in the footsteps of films and staged different memory acts together with the “biographized.” The method of repetition I use coincides with and is inspired by a method in one of Chris Marker’s work: in his video essay *Sans soleil* he calls it *pilgrimage* – a method through which he is able to bring forth many of his key motifs: the return, the search, multiple identities, the connections of memory, the situations and the events when the pasts manifest themselves in the presence.

In my *Who is...?* project (which forms the background and starting point for this project) I reenact small fragments of a person’s life story together with the subject. The methods are traveling to certain places, meeting certain people and asking the main character to “act”² according to my manuscript. While in the *Who is...?* series I am working with people that I already know, I seek out people in the video essays that I have learned of through film (*The Koumiko Mystery* by Chris Marker) and through media (the story of Choi Eun-hee). In these works the meetings and conversations with the biographized are crucial as well as the reenactment of certain questions in earlier works by other artists (*The Koumiko Mystery*). Here the conducted research of archives, films, and documents and the traveling has a lot in common with journalistic

2. Acting, in this case, has a very reduced meaning. It rather means to place oneself in a certain situation; to situate oneself in an emblematic relation to places and people.

research and academic research within the humanities.³ During this work I have been curious about some of the many threads that I discovered in the biographical weaves of the individuals, and also how these threads sometimes have been interwoven.

One can consider *You Told Me* as a sort of phenomenological study connected with a certain form of collecting. Collecting – the bringing together, arranging and presenting of “things” from very diverse realms in a “room” – can historically be linked to three different spaces: the cabinet of curiosity, the art space and the filmic room. The cabinet of curiosity does not primarily have to assemble marvelous, bizarre or sensational things, rather “curiosity” in this context (connected with the art space and the filmic room) means to observe and care about details, and curiosity can be seen as an act of displacement of the self from itself (Sina Najafi).⁴

The “things” collected in “the room” of this dissertation may be political discourses, texts, reflections, experiences, stories, places, events, phenomena.... To mention some of the more significant things (without hierarchy or chronology): Yugoslavian conceptual art; Korean film history; cuteness as an aesthetic category (and its political implications); the role of soft power; the role of voice-over, relations between word and action: relations between words, myths, and propaganda; the meaning of names and naming; the Japanese occupation of Korea; Kim Jong Il’s role in North Korean film industry; the cities of Zagreb, Rijeka, Tokyo and Harbin; the film city outside Pyongyang and the Nike Missile Site outside San Francisco.

However, this dissertation does not only trust in presentation and representation of conversation, storytelling, archive studies, and collecting as methods. Besides narration of a process it consists of argumentation. To discuss the meaning of different forms of narration in art is for me crucial not in the least from the perspective of artistic research. The aim of making the process transparent, of discussing methods and contextualizing and observing the artistic process, is closely linked to these narratives. The stories in focus in this dissertation text are *the stories behind and within an artwork*. I call them *work stories*

3. For instance, research in the national film archives in Tokyo and Seoul was crucial for the development of my two video essays.

4. Sina Najafi, “Cut the Bean: Curiosity and Research in the Pages of *Cabinet Magazine*” in *What is Research in the Visual Arts?: Obsession, Archive, Encounter*, eds. Michael Ann Holly & Marquand Smith, Clark Studies in the Visual Arts 2009.

[verkberättelser].⁵ A work story is, to use a very condensed description, a written or oral narrative about the forming of materials, immaterial units, situations, relations and social practices that is, or leads to, an artwork. The concept emphasizes the process and the methods of art, giving a value to the account of the sequence of makings, but also taking into account the considerations (theoretical and practical) and the biographical elements. In conceptual art, the work story is not only crucial for the understanding of the work – the very order of the sequence of the making and the action have symbolic, metaphorical, metonymical, political and even epistemological meanings and cannot be excluded from the presentation or the physical form of the work.

In this text I don't strive to create a coherent definition of the term/concept work story, but rather to propose and examine different forms, functions and possibilities. Basically I consider the work story to be an integral part of an artwork. Firstly, it is a sequence of doings, a latent story of the process that can be deduced or extracted from any artwork, regardless of media. Secondly, as a meta-activity, it is performative and during the contingent and shifting orbit of its social existence, the work story aggregates meaning that becomes a part of the artwork to which the story refers. As an *emplotment* of experience (Paul Ricœur)⁶ it gives the storyteller a sense of continuation, coherence, connection and meaning. Here lies one of the many resemblances with the functions of the narratives of life stories. Furthermore, work stories can merge with life stories to make an inseparable unit.

In this text, work stories are also connected to life stories, to *post-construction* [efterkonstruktion] and to reenactment. But while the telling and dissemination of a work story is basically a linguistic activity, the center of gravity in reenactment lies in action, even though action [*handling*] is implied in all narratives, as discussed in this dissertation (Hannah Arendt).⁷ Besides being a narrative of an account of sequences of doings and considerations, a work story can function as an *instruction*, or a score, which was the term used in Fluxus art.

5. "Work story" is a translation of the Swedish term I first started to use: "verkberättelse". The first published version of the term was "story of a work" in Magnus Bärtås, "Talk Talk" in *Geist*, "Method", No. 11, 12, 14 2007–2008.

6. See, for instance, Paul Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol 1, The University of Chicago Press 1984.

7. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, The University of Chicago Press 1998 (originally published 1958).

In an extended form, a work story disseminates meaning rather than capturing it. This is the essayistic form of work story to which I have devoted myself in this dissertation – an “extended work story.” The essayistic mode permits the writer/filmmaker to wander off and touch upon subjects as if in passing, and at the same time, paradoxically, give them careful attention, reproducing their neglected genealogy and destiny in the detailed materiality of the work story. The essay is the study of detail, the unnecessary detail: a detail that is supposed to be ignored in documentary reporting about an event.⁸

As indicated above I believe life stories and work stories have a lot in common. They most often seem to share the same (basically hermeneutical) statements that strive to situate the self: “This is where I come from,” “This is who I am,” and “This is where I am going.”⁹ Storytelling adds to or restricts the meaning of the interpretation of the work/life; it can simultaneously frame and disseminate meaning. Directed to different audiences, it may have different form and content, and from a temporal perspective, it will change and transform. As an activity performed in retrospect, the story functions as a reconstruction after the fact, a “post-construction” as I like to call it. It stages the work/life and emphasizes certain aspects, and as in the case of all narratives, what is excluded is as important as what is included.

Post-construction is a tool of the work story and as such has dimensions of self-reflexivity, self-alienation, mythologization while also reflecting the contingent nature of work stories. Post-construction as a narrative is also directed at ourselves; as acts of promises or as invocations. The two directions – to others and to ourselves – share the ethical dimension, and are implied in the last of the hermeneutical statements: “This is where I am going.” In this text (chapter 3) I will also discuss the collectiveness of the process of post-construction, for instance with the example of Gordon Matta-Clark’s work *Reality Properties: Fake Estates* (a work story examined by Jeffrey Kastner, Sina Najafi and Frances Richard).

The title of this text (*You Told Me*) refers not only to relations and social practice between humans, but also to interrelations between the narrator, the viewer, images, and the artist. As Harun Farocki has said,

8. I am indebted to Irina Sandomirskaja for this description of essayism.

9. Any artwork can be said to host the same temporality: “Someone did this. This is the presence of this work in this room. You may try it out for yourself.”

the making of a video essay means talking and listening to images. In the practice of the video essay – a practice that to a higher degree than traditional conceptual art has a reciprocal relation to the (filmed) material – the narration reflects and comments on its own process: its practical, relational, and ethical aspects. Thus, in the video essay, the work story is present to different degrees, though often fragmented or embedded. Here it exists in a polyphonic situation. It is a story among multiple narratives.

In this dissertation some questions reflect and establish different stages of contextualization and framing of my work: first, as an observation and analysis of the function and meaning of narration in contemporary art and secondly, as an examination of possible roles, methods, actions, and narrative functions in a genre or artistic field (the video essay). And thirdly, the question arises as to how these narratives stage, situate, and represent an individual's place and role in a societal text and as a part of history.

During the practical and reflective theoretical work with the video essay, I distinguished five elements or instances of the video essay: the subject matter, the images (the representation),¹⁰ the artist/author, the narrative (the text), and the narrator/voice. In most documentary films the existence and the lack of natural correspondence between these entities are dissolved or denied – I rather wanted to expose them as separate units. I asked myself: What alternative roles can be established between these instances, for example, by negotiation and transference between them?

Here I also encountered the conflict between the essay as form and the function of a story. The essay can contain storytelling, but is the narrative drive in a story served by essayistic elements? Does not the meandering structure of the essay distract and distort the functionality or efficiency (and unifying tendency) of the narrative? A “good story” has a defined shape, like a nicely sculpted mental object, whereas the essay is characterized by “/.../ an amoeba-like versatility often held together by little more than the author's voice.”¹¹ This conflict between the efficiency of narratives and the amorphous essay became one of the

10. Even though my work is strongly concerned with the relation between word and action, I decided to not to involve a semiotic analysis in this PhD thesis.

11. Reda Bensmaïa, *The Barthes Effect: The Essay as Reflective Text*, The University of Minnesota Press 1987, ix.

points of examination in this project.

Besides the many subjects I came across in my research of the life stories of the characters in my videos – many of them are treated in my “extended work stories” in this book – some common questions and subjects bind the video and text works together and are emphasized at the end of this introductory text: the role of reenactment, the function of voice-over and the meaning of names. These themes are here theorized by a clustering of observations and considerations, together with examples from my practice, rather than an analytical exegesis of the history and meaning of these terms.

Although I am aiming in this dissertation to look beyond the impulse to make art, there is a level of desire in this work that should be acknowledged. Something in this work is somehow more impelling than formal questions (although I disregard the division between form and content). It might be self-evident but it has to be emphasized that it is the narrative urge and desire – the impulse to tell stories – that is the driving force behind the works in this dissertation. The biographies of Zdenko Bužek, Kumiko Muraoka, Johnnie Walker and Choi Eun-hee are the axes that these works revolve around. Their stories have in different ways been mediated by themselves and others (in installations, documentaries, fiction, articles, and memoirs). My task became to find interconnections, correspondences, openings, patterns, and figures by revisiting and retelling “their” stories and to find connections with social, political, and aesthetic issues in the past and the present.¹² That means trying to find a place in between collective and personal memory.

About the content and structure

It may be needless to say, but in this dissertation project these questions and the conducted research have not been developed and performed in a strictly linear or analytical way. It has been a process of learning by doing and observing what had already been done. Several aspects of this research process came about in an unexpected way. The underlying wish was to expand and deepen a critical, reflexive practice. I raised questions but basically wanted to “answer” the questions in and th-

12. Zdenko Bužek exhibited “himself” in the exhibition *Biography* (in Zagreb, 2001). In the case of Kumiko Muraoka I got in contact with her life story through the work of Chris Marker. And Johnnie Walker’s and Choi Eun-hee’s life stories automatically connected my research with other artists: Haruki Murakami and Shin Sang-ok.

rough art with my video and text works.

The task of a PhD in artistic research is somewhat ambiguous. Artistic research is a form of contract where the artist agrees to establish a level of transparency, to some extent share his/her considerations and accounts of the trajectory of the processes of the making of art and to mediate this in a careful and formalized way. So, on the one hand, the aim is to give a fair account of what an artistic process can mean. On the other hand, a PhD project is supposed to establish a meaningful, coherent discourse. But an artistic discourse is not a streamlined creation, it includes hesitation, flaws, unproductive detours, and sometimes failures. I assume it is somewhere in between the enticement to create a well-shaped discourse and the attempt to fairly represent the artistic process that the reflective and contextualizing work of the dissertation is conducted.

I wrote most of this introduction in English and had some parts translated from Swedish and/or checked (by Bettina Schultz, Sina Najafi, Kalle Melander, Christy Koch and Lynn Preston). The three essays are largely written in Swedish and translated (by Sonia Wichman, William Jewson and Kalle Melander). Considering the emphasis on the essay as an artistic/research genre, I was eager to have both language versions available in this book. The texts for the video essays were written by me in English and then checked (by Roger McDonald and Joshua Weber).¹³ Obviously a lot of different people have been involved (and I am deeply grateful for their work, their dedication and skill – see acknowledgements). But what this collectiveness has done to the overall coherence in the style, formalities, use of terms, etc., I am not fully able to evaluate. I just hope the level of polyphony is not too disturbing and that it hasn't resulted in a scattered and inconsistent text.¹⁴

As mentioned previously, in this dissertation project I try to look beyond the impulses to create artworks. I also try not only to see their validity as comments and reflections of reality, but also to examine

13. I have decided to not have any subtitles in the video essays. The major reason is the wish to enhance the very situation: the screening of a video essay as an event comparable with a reading or lecture, a situation where the audience's attention is at times absorbed by images and a times by voice, sound, or text. This is a situation where the consciousness is oscillating between different representations and realms.

14. Japanese names in this text are written according to Western standard (first name plus family name) whereas Korean names are used according to Korean standard (family name plus first name). Here I was guided by how the two main characters in my two video essays – Kumiko Muraoka and Choi Eun-hee – regularly spell their names.

some mediational processes through which the real is staged and transformed. Here the essayistic mode became a tool for criticality and a form of expression in text and video practice and their common field. I hope this dissertation can contribute to knowledge within this field. Knowledge, along with its performative dimension, has become a commodity and an end product in itself in a paradigm called “a knowledge-based economy.” From a certain angle, it may look like the linguistic turn in art – the dematerialization of art and the privileging of language and intertextuality, together with the staging of discourses around art – fits perfectly with the development of a global economy based on immaterial values, brainpower, knowledge-based industries, information technology, PR, services, and marketing. For universities, this often means that autonomy and independence in research are gradually replaced by the idea of usability of knowledge.¹⁵

When it comes to artworks, one could laconically say: one can never tell whether a particular artistic utterance does anyone any good. However, veracity is a problematic issue in representation of all kinds, not least in works occupied with processes of history and memory where the temporal and spatial lag between the events becomes crucial.¹⁶ Neither do I believe that art is “good,” “useful,” “applied,” or “truthful” in any instrumental or rhetorical meaning. Accordingly, I don’t think artistic research can meet the demands from the “the knowledge-based economy” although I strongly believe this research can expand the knowledge about artistic practice and its methods.

In the section which I have called “Background,” I discuss a series of works that were the point of departure for my research. The *Who is...?* series is a biographical experiment that started as a text work and was later transformed into different forms, that is, into a video, a web project, and live readings. I go on to describe how this work came to form the platform for my research and how it raised questions about “pilgrimage” (Chris Marker) and reenactment, voice-over, reading, and storytelling. Here, I also discuss the interconnections between storytelling and the acts of collecting and editing, and how this research pro-

15. See Simon Sheik, “Talk Value: Cultural Industry and the Knowledge Economy”, in *On Knowledge Production: A Critical Reader in Contemporary Art*, eds. Maria Hlavajova, Jill Winder, Binna Choi, BAK/Revolver 2008, p.187. See also Sven Lütticken, “Unknown Knowns: On Symptoms in Contemporary Art” in the same anthology.

16. See Nora M. Alter “Memory Essays” in *Stuff it: The Video Essay in The Digital Age*, ed. Ursula Bierman, Institut für Theorie der Gestaltung und Kunst Zürich and Voldemeer 2003, p. 14-15.

ject has a starting point in the biography and the personal history. This can be seen as a metonymical/phenomenological standpoint where one dwells on the experiences of certain individuals as a means of understanding history.

The reader of the methodology section will not find any extensive discussion about artistic research and epistemology. Hopefully the different parts of this dissertation will, in their own right, argue for a knowledge production that is particular and situated. I think the most productive parts of my investigation have developed their own inherent logic where experiments are born out of curiosity and questions will lead to new questions and new experiments. In this section, I discuss how the work story is latent, or present within the artwork itself, and deduced, or extracted and/or told by people (as a meta-activity). Here I investigate the different functions and uses of work stories, their connection with life stories and their performative qualities.

Regarding the work story, it is important to state that it – in my use of the term – does not primarily aim to “explain” or interpret art. Its core function is to give an account of (or reenact) a temporal sequence – like a commentary track – although, as discussed below, a work story sometimes also contains accounts about considerations and relational sequences when making art. A work story can be and constitute the artwork itself, but it can also kill a work of art if it doesn’t give space for reflection and, most of all, interpretation. Reflection connotes not only “thought” but also “shimmering” and “reverberation”, as Reda Bensmaïa has pointed out in his book on essayism.¹⁷ This means that reflection needs, in the reception or participation of any work of art, “a space” within the work.

When it comes to my own video essays, and their most important factors, I actually know very little about how they are received by a viewer. I do believe that work stories can enrich the experience of any work of art (and sometimes they are crucial, as mentioned before and shown later on in this text), but as in poetry, “the agency” in art is activated in between, above, under, and after the words. I believe the act of juxtaposition, the very combination of objects, images, words, and actions and the temporal elements in the sequences of combination are crucial for any artwork. I think this is clear for anyone who is editing a film or a video: it is in between the images – in the joints and splices

17. Reda Bensmaïa, *The Barthes Effect: The Essay as Reflective Text*, p. 105.

between images – that we can experience something unknown and upsetting. And I also believe that without these activated unknown, strange, and upsetting in-betweens, artworks are either empty and boring or function only as pieces of information.

The practice of the video essay and conceptual art form the basis of the discussion of artistic methodology in this text. With regard to this context, it should be mentioned that I speak from a position colored by my background in literature and fine arts. I assume that this background, which takes its basic methods and inspiration from the history of conceptual art and language-based art, to some extent provides me with a different approach to the process of working with moving images than that which artists educated in film production of various sorts employ when they produce feature films, documentaries, or experimental films.

The video essay, and its close connection to the literary essay, is, in my understanding, ontologically concerned with form and methodology. In the section following the one about artistic research, I discuss the video essay as a critical and self-reflexive practice. The genre has the potential to explicitly acknowledge and discuss the working process and the representation of the process; in other words form as politics, the ethics and methods of editing, the relation between subject and object, and the role of the narrator. Self-examination, blurred narrative boundaries, heterogeneity, modularity, disunity, and instability (of the subject, time, space, and style) are some of the characteristics of the essayistic mode often mentioned. In the section on the video essay as form I also discuss the *benshi* – a narrator in the Japanese silent film history. The *benshi* is here viewed in the light of the video essay practice – as a narrator who emphasizes, lectures, explains, comments, or digresses in poetic excursions, or even objects to the narrative.

In the chapter on biographies, naming, voices, and storytelling (no. 6), I try to foreground some recurrent themes explored in the video works and the essays. I touch on the use of objects as emblems of a life story, as one of the many strategies among people to find concluding and encapsulating forms and representations for life stories. I discuss the meaning of the remake and the reenaction in relation to my material as well as the role of the voice-over in my video essays. Here, I also want to contextualize my interest for proper nouns and the act of naming.

In the three “extended work stories,” I try to contextualize the video works and to offer an insight into my artistic process that comprises experiential, practical, and theoretical aspects that include a range of considerations, adaptations, and reevaluations. The text essays function partly as itineraries of the processes and partly as post-constructions of the works, hopefully both reflecting on and, at the same time, performing their subject matter, that is, telling stories of the methods and reflecting on sequences of the history of the work.

In the chapter “*Who is Zdenko Bužek?* (an extended work story),” I tell stories about and dwell on the process of creating the video biography *Who is Zdenko Bužek?* (2001), which I consider to be the actual starting point for my research project, even though I didn’t know it at the time. This process is connected with my traveling to the Balkan countries over a period of years. Above all, I tell a story about the subject of my film, the artist Zdenko Bužek, his apartment, and his neighborhood in Zagreb and also about his art projects, his friends, and his family. The work with voice-over in *Who is Zdenko Bužek?* was my first attempt to undermine the role of a superior omniscient voice guiding the viewer.

In the chapter “*Kumiko, Johnnie Walker & the Cute* (an extended work story),” the questions concerning voices and reading, as well as the role of the mediator and reading as an act of abuse are developed. A dialogue with the works by French filmmaker Chris Marker and his interest in the representation of the past in the present and the future takes place in this work. His film *The Koumiko Mystery*, which was more of an experimental documentary than a video essay, is based on his meeting with Kumiko (her present spelling) Muraoka in Tokyo 1964. Marker declares his interest in “banalities,”¹⁸ and the level of banality of his meeting with Kumiko has been discussed (Nora M. Alter). I here question this affirmative use of the word and re-visit some of the themes in the film through my meeting with Kumiko Muraoka in Paris 2007.

One of the contemporary “banalities” is cuteness (*kawaii*). Through my research in Tokyo, Johnnie Walker’s ideology, some motifs in *The Koumiko Mystery*, and by theorizing cuteness as an aesthetic category

18. “He liked the fragility of those moments suspended in time. Those memories whose only function it being to leave behind nothing but memories. He wrote: I’ve been round the world several times and now only banality still interests me. On this trip I’ve tracked it with the relentlessness of a bounty hunter.” Chris Marker, *Sans soleil*, 1982.

with political implications (Sianne Ngai) I place the Cute as a generic character in my video essay.

In the chapter “*Madame & Little Boy* (an extended work story),” I elaborate on my considerations about how to mediate a story that has substantial historical and political implications. Here I explore the life story of the South Korean actress and director Choi Eun-hee and her husband the director Shin Sang-ok, their actions, accomplishments, and roles. In the essay, I try to place their biographies in the context of the history of Korean film and I discuss the role of melodrama in Korean propaganda. My meeting with Choi Eun-hee in Seoul in 2008 and my trip to North Korea in 2009 became crucial for the research process. In the account of my travels, I discuss the meaning of witnessing and the relation between words and myth. Choi and Shin’s last film as abducted filmmakers in North Korea – *Pulgasari* – has a certain position of importance in my work and the chapter includes a discussion of its genealogy within the monster-film genre.

The rhythm of the text and mode of writing of the voice-over for *Madame & Little Boy* is created for Will Oldham, based on my experience of his voice, and as an interpretation of his work as a musician and actor. In this context, he represents a contemporary carrier of the tradition of *Americana*. Thus the story is distanced from my own subjectivity and filtered through Will Oldham’s presence and intonation. The site of narration, Oldham’s temporary studio in the building next to the Nike Missile Site outside San Francisco, is meant to function as an intersection of the present and the past. This is also where we encounter Choi Eun-hee’s gaze, filmed in a hotel lobby in Seoul.

2. Background

Zero out the narrative line

As an illustrator (for educational books and newspapers) with an academic background in literature,¹⁹ and lacking any formal qualifications as a visual artist, I developed, at an early stage, a transdisciplinary practice that I have sometimes considered “homeless,” or “spaceless” in relation

19. My final term paper in literature was a study of a collection of texts by the Swedish writer Erik Beckman – *Sigges gäng* (Bonniers förlag, Stockholm 1993). The texts in *Sigges gäng* are difficult to categorize, since they are partly poetry, partly critique, and partly essay. See “Att komma från många olika håll,” Stockholm University 1994.

to the dominating models in both visual art and literature in Sweden at the time (the end of the 1980s). I found a small group of kindred spirits, fellow artists working in a similar way in terms of their interest for narratives and transdisciplinarity, in the group VAVD Editions. These included Peter Andersson, Lars Svensson, and Måns and Pål Wrangé. VAVD devoted themselves to curatorial practice, seminars, exhibitions, and the making of printed matter and multiples. As far as their line of work and events is concerned, they are most noted for *The Aerial Kit*, a yellow mailbox that contains objects (called conversation pieces) connected with airborne communication. The book that accompanies the objects consists of a collection of stories and interviews and demonstrates an inquiring attitude, as a kind of triangulation of their subject matter.²⁰

The modus operandi of VAVD was, as I understand it, Peter Andersson's driving force. Peter Andersson is a former performance artist who nurtured a link with Fluxus art.²¹ He developed and maintained an international network, which was rare at the time. One of the artists involved in this network was the American artist David Robbins, who visited Sweden for a seminar in 1991, invited by Peter Andersson, after recently having published *The Camera Believes Everything*. In an interview with Hans Ulrich Obrist more recently (2007), Robbins explained that he got the art context fundamentally wrong when he entered it, and that he gradually built this misperception into an alternative to it. Robbins understood that the visual art context was a field at odds with his cultural starting point – the theater and television.

The visual art context is really designed for people who want to, or already do, seek to align their emotional and psychological lives with the neutrality of form, while theater more fully recognizes the narrative dimension of human life – tragedy and comedy. The

20. In a review of *The Aerial Kit* in the magazine *9OTAL* (no. 2/3 1991), Anders Olofsson wrote: "The *Aerial Kit* consistently gives the events and phenomena that occur on the absolute periphery of history and society an extra polish. Here, the point of departure is a critical approach to the stance that has prevailed during the last 200 years, which looks at history from a 'mainstream' perspective, and where marginal phenomena, which do not carry development 'forward', are more or less discreetly filtered away in the documentation process."

21. The minor history of Swedish conceptual art remains to be written. Bengt af Klintberg gives some interesting accounts on a fraction of the scene connected with Fluxus, for instance Peter Andersson and Mats B's reenactments of Fluxus work on stage in the mid 1980s. See *Swedish Fluxus/Svensk Fluxus*, Rönnels Antikvariat 2006.

art world is always suppressing the narrative line, looking for ways to take it out or play it down, to zero it out.²²

During my initial years as an aspiring artist, I strongly experienced a similar dominating tendency to “take out,” “play down,” and “zero out” “the narrative line” in the visual art context. This attitude is rooted in the idea that art primarily is the field of the image, or an object that precedes the symbol, in other words, something before language. Colleagues of mine that graduated from the Royal Academy of Art in Stockholm at the beginning of the 1990s reported how the word “literary” was used by the professors in their studio visits at the time.²³ By calling something “literary” one could attack one of the work’s weaknesses, instead of saying that the work was unoriginal, and lacking in both independence and sensuality.²⁴

22. David Robbins with Hans Ulrich Obrist, “Forming Fun” in *XTRA*, summer issue 2007 ([http://www.x-traonline.org/past_articles.php?articleID=70, 17/4](http://www.x-traonline.org/past_articles.php?articleID=70,17/4) 2010). An introduction to David Robbins’s idea about objects that move between different contexts, “multi-contextual” objects as he puts it, can be found in “Konkret komedi” in *9OTAL*, no. 13 1993 (originally published in *Art Issues* as “A Comic Object”). Pointing out the origins of his practice named “concrete comedy” he speaks about the three fathers of “comic objects”: Karl Valentin, Robert Benchley, and Marcel Duchamp. Valentin was a popular Munich comedian (1882–1948) who made props for his cabaret and music hall shows, objects that had an independent existence outside the performance situations (for instance one small and one big umbrella together with the handwritten sign “Vater und Sohn”). Robbins considers Valentin’s work to be the “earliest link between the comic performance and the making of conceptual objects.” Valentin’s humor also had a major influence on Bertold Brecht and German filmmakers such as Werner Herzog and Herbert Achternbusch (“Their sense of the contradictory and grotesque elements in human behavior, their predilection for ‘blunt thinking’ and satirical materialism” as Thomas Elsaesser writes in “Political Filmmaking after Brecht: Harun Farocki, for Example” (*Harun Farocki. Working on the Sight-Lines*, Thomas Elsaesser (ed.), Amsterdam University Press 2004)). Robert Benchley was a frequent contributor to *The New Yorker* in the 1920s. He made over forty comic short films, many of them were a parody of educational and scientific films, with titles such as *How to Sleep*, *How to Vote* and *The Romance of Digestion*. The props made for these films “/.../ established a relation between object and photographic art that still is explored today” (Robbins). What makes these three characters the fathers of the “comic object,” according to Robbins, is their sensible way of creating “multi-contextual” objects, objects that not only can be moved from one context to another but that also simultaneously activate a series of contexts and media (for instance the public realm, the photo, the press, and the radio). Robbins argues that these three “father figures” paved the way for artists like Marcel Broodthaers, Piero Manzoni, and Öyvind Fahlström.

23. The idea of “the literary” as something hostile to art, or even a negation of it, is reminiscent of Michael Fried’s attack on minimalism for its “theatricality” in “Art and Objecthood,” in 1967 – an essay that inspired many counter perspectives as well as agreement. Martha Rosler, for instance, responded ironically to Fried’s criticism of “theatricality” in art with an exclamation of “Bingo! That’s it!” (see Paul Wood, *Conceptual Art*, Tate Publishing 2002, p. 71), whereas Jeff Wall praised Fried’s essay in “Frames of Reference” in *Artforum*, vol. 42 September 2003.

24. See Magnus Bårtås, “Om – några slogans om konstens natur” (English translation: “About – Some Slogans About the Nature of Art”), Riksställningar/Norrköpings konstmuseum 2005.

This attitude has slowly disappeared during the last twenty years. However, it is wrong to assume that the “literary” (a term that I am not very fond of – I personally prefer to use the term “narrative,” “narration,” or “narrativity”), still finds a natural place in contemporary art.²⁵ David Robbins has noted how this suppression of “the narrative line” continues, and I would agree having noticed that the most “functional” art in the institutional frameworks of museums and galleries avoids more complex narrative structures. This art relies instead on images (still or moving) and objects that bring out their presence in a room in a visually stable and reliable emanation. This leaves the narrative operations to the audience’s own spatial movements as well as to their own mental ordering of the sequences of the objects and images experienced in the exhibition space. Adopting the visual “minimal narrative strategy” i.e. the use of one single image, one single visual event, one single performative scene, is still the most privileged and thereby “successful” way to act in the art context even for a video artist (not least when it comes to group shows). The “functionality” of the loop-based video, with its single scene or a small number of repeated scenes that you can enter and leave whenever you like, is strongly related to the social, spatial, and temporal conditions of art institutions and unites a wide range of works by celebrated video artists (from Pipilotti Rist to Aeronaut Mik to Sam Taylor-Wood to Bill Viola – all of who differ a great deal in their means of expression and the content of their works). This “loop-friendly” video art is also a consequence of the specificity of the short history of video art that, as Michael Renov has pointed out, “/.../ has retained an attachment to the performative and the corporeal that is historical and is distinct from cinema.”²⁶

But even though the narrative line is still zeroed out at “the front side of art” (the visual domain), narratives do in fact play a crucial role in the art world, as discussed in this dissertation. Unofficially or secretly the narrative undercurrent does constantly have an impact on the art world; as records of work processes, as conceptual strategies, as performative discourses, in documentation of actions and events,

25. Fredrik Bäck means in *Essäfilmen – försök till en karakteristik* that the essayistic film has have a similar status in the film context. By giving the strong importance to the text essayistic film often has been considered as “non-filmic”, literary rather than relying on the “pure” filmic elements. See Fredrik Bäck, *Essäfilmen – försök till en karakteristik*, thesis at Konstindustiella högskolan, Helsinki 2009, p. 9 and pp. 102–103.

26. Michael Renov, “The Electronic Essay” in *The Subject of Documentary*, The University of Minnesota Press 2004, p. 185.

in the reception and interpretation of works and deeds, in the post-construction and creation of provenance, in the writing of history and mythologizing.

Works with narratives

In a series of works, I have been using and examining different aspects of storytelling and narrative structures. Some of them are ongoing works and often have the character of growing collections, and they all, to some degree, have relevance to and influence my research project, although they are not formally included here. Even though the following descriptive résumé is plain and rhapsodic, it may serve as contextual background and provide some elements for the understanding of the development of *You Told Me*.²⁷ The chronology of this description gives glimpses of the orbit of my work as an artist. Given my background in literature and illustration (e.g for newspapers), and having worked with text as a compliment to photo-based works and installations (text installations), I have recently been exploring the video essay, which can be seen as a synthesis of text and visual practice. Many of these earlier works stem both from different experiments with taxonomies and from how certain condensed narratives that strive to embrace complicated and large courses of events function in the context of contemporary art – experiments that are highly relevant for this dissertation project.

From my very first exhibition (1990) onwards, I have written different texts to accompany my installations. These have taken the form of fiction, essays, and various comments. Initially, these texts (sometimes signed with pseudonyms and sometimes with my real name) were presented parallel to the installations, most often in catalogues and artist's books. After a few years, the texts were gradually integrated in the physical artworks and installations.

At the beginning of the 1990s, I was interested in text forms based on reduction and condensation, such as medieval ballads, poetry,²⁸ parables, epigrams, and epitaphs, lists and enumerations as well as postcards, news items, and short descriptions of film narratives in newspapers. Not least the writing of Georges Perec became important during this period.

27. See also <http://www.magnusbartas.se>.

28. At this point in time, I was interested in the modern epigrammatic tradition in poetry and paid a lot of attention to Edgar Lee Masters's *The Spoon River Anthology*.

For the exhibition *Bergtagen (The Magic Mountain 1993)*, dedicated to a friend that had disappeared, I used the written greetings on a series of used postcards. I isolated and re-photographed one sentence from each text and confronted it with the motif of the actual postcard. These sentences functioned in a similar way to micro stories or “short short stories” or “flash fiction” (to use some terms used in literature).²⁹ Around 1995, I made posters with composite texts, text signs in different materials, and an artist’s book with short biographies of people in an unnamed small town (*The Predicament, 1996*). The text-based works were presented together with photos and embroideries.

From 1994 (and onwards), I have been working with a piece that has been constantly expanding: *The Disappointed and Offended*.³⁰ The first version of this work consists of 1137 images with adjoining, related texts. The images are reproduced with a very simple technique often used by children. The melting wax of a candle is dripped onto portraits in newspapers. After the wax has dried and become hard, it is carefully removed, and has an imprint of the face on it. The reasons behind every case of these disappointed and offended faces are presented in one sentence, like a condensed short story. In the installations, the faces and stories of complaining people, invariably collected from Swedish newspapers, are inscribed in something between an archive or a wailing wall, i.e, where an accusing gaze is directed at a central position – the supposed position of the viewer. According to my lists, some of them consider themselves to be subjected to conspiracies, others complain about unfair treatment and offensive behavior by doctors, landlords, neighbors, and the tax authorities and all seek redress in different ways. Here, the unjustness, the mishaps, accidents and distresses of everyday life may seem to emanate from chance and unfortunate circumstances, from the absence of the political. In this sense, this “collection” may document a change in Swedish society, and maybe a change into an individualized and atomized society, where motivation for social change is turned into the notion of the offence of private

29. See the catalogue *Bergtagen/Zauberberg/Spirited Away* (I later used a different English title: *The Magic Mountain*, which corresponds better to the German title borrowed from Thomas Mann’s novel.) The exhibition was shown at Index Gallery, Stockholm and Norrköpings konstmuseum. For stories about the creation of the work, see Magnus Bårtås, “Foreign Accent Syndrome” in *OEI* nos. 33-34-35, 2007.

30. The work was called *The Disappointed and Offended* then renamed *Tribute to the Tribune* and later went back again to the first title.

interests and rights.³¹

In a commissioned site-specific work (*The Fältöversten Quarter*, 2004–2005), I used the combination of painting, wall text, and a sofa sculpture with an interactive sound function to discuss and tell the story of a building that had a remarkable political history.³² *The Fältöversten Quarter* was initially created as an experiment to host representatives of the average Swedish population in one block of flats in a central and traditionally bourgeois part of Stockholm. This combined apartment building and indoor shopping precinct was inaugurated in 1973. It comprised all kinds of services, for example a book café, a room for physiotherapy, a wrestling hall, and an office that was given the name “Storbyrån” (“the Large Bureau”), which collected all kinds of social services under one roof. The tenants were allocated by quotas based on maximum income and certain categories based on their belonging to groups that were considered marginalized, such as being disabled, single mothers, etc., in order to represent the average population of Sweden.

I interpreted the whole project as a political demonstration of the social democrats, as an attempt to reach deep into the heart of the high bourgeoisie by inserting a living miniature model of “ordinary Sweden” into the very rich district of Stockholm. Considering the many interesting implications of the Fältöversten project (the construction and demarcation of normality, the utopian wish to create a space for all human needs, the heterotopic aspect of its location, the reverse quota system of the tenants compared to the system that is used to select tenants in apartment buildings in Stockholm today), the major task for me was to bring back this history (a suppressed history) from the

31. In *Little Big Stories*, the curator and theoretician Suzana Milevska used this work (according to the catalogue) as a starting point for her curatorial process of the show. Milevska contextualized the piece with a discussion about “the grand and small narratives.” *Little Big Stories* was “/.../ imagined as interference between the little and grand narratives from past and present times, from the lives of the big and little heroes around us or invented for the need of the historical narratives.” (“Once Upon a Time...” catalogue text in *Little Big Stories*, Skopje 1998).

32. The work, installed in February 2005, was made in collaboration with Fondation de France (FdF), a group of “mediators” (curator students at the International Curatorial Program at the University College of Arts Craft and Design, Stockholm, (Konstfack) and a group of people living in this area, according to the working model of FdF called New Patrons. The New Patrons programme enables people without a background in art to initiate and commission a public artwork by a contemporary artist. See <http://www.nouveauxcommanditaires.com> and http://www.3-ca.org/?page_id=131 (12/12 2009). For the creation of the “sound furniture,” I collaborated with the Swedish design group Front.

past (i.e. create this narrative) and confront it with the site of today, a site that represents totally different values and political discourses. Today, the majority of the public spaces in the indoor shopping precinct have been turned into commercial spaces, and the original tenants miss the places they had for relaxing and bonding or just sitting down without being required to consume. This privatization and fragmentation, which reduces the rights of the citizens to use public space, have been documented in many areas of Swedish society in the past ten years, but have seldom been so clearly expressed as in the narrative of the Fältöversten building.³³

Parallel to these works I have had another text practice, which was a collaborative practice. Together with the writer Fredrik Ekman, I have published two books of essays that both have relevance to my research project: *Orienterarsjukan och andra berättelser* [The Orienteer Disease and Other Stories] and *Innanför cirkeln – en resa bland yezidier, damanhurianer och swedenborgare* [Inside the Circle – a Journey Among Yezidians, Damanhurians and Swedenborgians].³⁴ In these two books we worked with an essayistic mode of writing that contained elements of (or rather oscillated between) the travel story, the reportage, the es-

33. The work was installed in one of the major entrances to the building complex. Here, a visitor could sit in a red sofa made of PVC material (designed by the design group Front) and press six buttons in order to hear voices that comment on the history of the building, as well as on contemporary life in the Fältöversten quarter. The text on the wall was an information-like sentence about the premises and the conditions there, whereas the large-scale painting reminded us of the Swedish flag. If the visitors moved in relation to the painting, they would discover the bottom of a monochrome red acrylic box placed behind the yellow and blue colored candle wax. This "red flag" formed the background to a painting that resembled a national symbol, which was initially disapproved of by the socialists but later on embraced. The interactive sound of the sofa/sculpture consisted of five edited interviews and one poem, each one of them becoming available by the press of a button. These included: the voices of a couple from the suburbs, who were among the first to move in and who still lived in the same apartment; the radical ex-politician, who was a driving force behind the creation of the original prospect; the civil servant, who tried to find practical and political solutions for the quarter; a woman who had worked in the Fältöversten public library for many years, and a man who had visited Fältöversten at 4 am every day for the last 30 years. The sixth button triggered the reading of a poem ("Halva huset" in *Nya sidor och dagsljus* 1952) by Ragnar Thoursie, a poet who I think articulated the hopes and agonies of collectivism which has had a significant role in Swedish modernity. In 2008 the Fältöversten building was bought by the British company Boulton and the commissioned artwork was removed shortly thereafter.

34. Bokförlaget DN, Stockholm, 2001 and 2004. In *Orienterarsjukan och andra berättelser*, we examine, in a series of motifs, different threats to the idea of the uniqueness of humans – as a transgression of the demarcation line to animals, the double, mind control technology, and inventions and theory in neuroscience and cognitive science. A frequent point of conflict in these motifs is the clash between the different interpretations of phenomena by biologists and social constructivists.

say, and the critique (or cultural theory). A common denominator for these books is their interest in marginal and often suppressed history together with studies of situations and phenomena where an inverted relation between normality and the deviant occurs.

In *Innanför cirkeln* we bring together three texts about three groups of people, who, from our understanding, have drawn a very strict line between themselves and the outer world. These include a Kurdish minority group called the Yezidians, the Damanhurians (a New Age cult group as well as social experiment) in Northern Italy and the followers of the Swedish sixteenth century theologian, writer and scientist Emanuel Swedenborg.

The research on the Yezidians, who are a “minority of a minority” that live in Northern Iraq (Kurdistan) and Armenia, influenced the narratological perspective I adopt in this dissertation. The Yezidians have maintained an ancient, Gnostic cult of the peacock angel (Melek Taus) and pass on their myths by means of oral tradition. In modern times, stories and the theories of western anthropologists and travelers have influenced their mythologies and beliefs and have thus had an impact on the narrative of their ethnicity. The following subject matters had an indirect and implicit impact on this research project: the storytelling tradition, the tradition of taboo that is based on linguistic homonyms; the magical use of words in the Gnostic tradition (and the Western occult tradition as an alternative epistemological model); the tradition of name-giving within the Yezidi communities as well as in the Kurdish communities as a whole.³⁵

35. The work is based on our travels and conversations and interviews in Sweden, Austria, Armenia, Turkey, and northern Iraq (Kurdistan) between 2002 and 2005 (assisted by the Kurdish writer, translator, and editor Firat Ceweri). The major text sources for this essay were: John S. Guest, *Survival Among the Kurds, A History of the Yezidis*, Kegan Paul International 1993; *Fire, Snow & Honey – Voices from Kurdistan*, ed. Gina Lennox, Halstead Press 2001; Isya Joseph, *Devil Worship – The Sacred Books and the Tradition of the Yezidiz*, The Gorham Press 1919; Maria Anholm, *Jesidkurder (djävulsdyrkare)*, ed. Rohat Alakom, Apec förlag 2001; Philip G. Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism – Its Background, Observances and Textual Tradition*, The Edwin Mellen Press 1995; Austen Henry Layard, *A Popular Account of Discoveries at Nineveh*, J. C. Derby 1854; E. S. (Ethel Stefana) Drower ('Lady Drower'), *Peacock Angel. Being some Account of Votaries of a Secret Cult and their Sanctures*, J Murray 1941; Victoria Arakelova, "Healing Practices among the Yezidi Sheiks of Armenia" in *Asian Folklore Studies*, Volume 60, 2001; G.I. Gurdjieff, *Meetings with Remarkable Men*, Arkana Paperbacks 1985; Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism. Secret Aryan Cults and Their Influence on Nazi Ideology. The Ariosophists of Austria and Germany 1880–1935*, New York University Press 1992 and Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Black Sun, Aryan Cults, Esoteric Nazism and the Politics of Identity*, New York University Press 2002.

The third (unpublished) book³⁶ in the series has a certain status in this context; it coincides and overlaps with the last part of my research project, that is, the making of the video essay *Madame & Little Boy*. In our manuscript *Alla monster måste dö* [All Monsters Must Die], we focus on the same story as the video essay: the abduction of the South Korean actress Choi Eun-hee and the director Shin Sang-ok to North Korea. Although the manuscript of the book establishes a different context, in that its core discussion concerns the relation between the artist and the power structures (especially the relation between the emperor and the artist), this part of the research process is, to a large extent, made in collaboration with Fredrik Ekman. I am indebted to him for many of the ideas, discussions, experiences, and findings that came about during this process (a process that could be traced back to 1994 when we published our first essays in *Index Magazine*, Stockholm). I am deeply grateful for our collaboration over the years, since this has had a major impact on my methodology, my lines of thought, and my artistic research as a whole.

Who is...? – a question leading to questions

“Who is...?” is a question that can also be posed as: “What can one say about a person?” It is a question about what we are like and where we are. As in the case of “I am,” “Who is...?” has an intention. The question must also have a continuation; this is a purely grammatical fact. “Who is...?” can be asked over and over again about the same subject. New questions will break old answers open.³⁷

When Gertrude Stein arrived in the USA in the mid 1930s, a journalist asked the who is-question about her partner and assistant Alice B. Toklas. She gave a compressed answer:

Q: “Who is Alice B. Toklas?”

A: “Someone who made my life comfortable.”³⁸

Gertrude Stein had at the time just published her autobiography

36. The book will be published in the spring of 2011.

37. “Who?” is the simple and basic question that guides the entire semantic, hermeneutical and philosophical investigation that constitutes the narratological study of Paul Ricœur’s book *Oneself as Another*: “/.../ we have in the same stroke opened the way for the genuine polysemy inherent in this question itself: Who is speaking of what? Who does what? About whom and about what does one construct a narrative? Who is morally responsible for what? These are but so many different ways in which ‘who?’ is stated.” Paul Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, The University of Chicago Press 1992, p. 19. See also pp. 57–61 and p. 297.

38. See Marina Gržinić, *Fiction Reconstructed*, Springerin, Edition Selene 2000, p. 145.

with the confusing title *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. It seems that Gertrude Stein with the title made the counter-move to the who is-question, inherent in the genre of the autobiography. “Who is...?” is inevitably a question directed to an absent person or to no one. Since the imaginary receiver does not exist, the question bounces back to the questioner with the character of an invocation. The “impossibility” of the question has to do with the fact that humans are changing all the time and thereby never can be framed. To be able to answer the receiver must be a complete person, an idealized other, like the object for love. By giving her autobiography the name of her lover she reflected this idea of a complete, idealized receiver of the who is-question.

By the end of the 1990s, I began to use a kind of mnemonic observation technique whenever I met people for short periods of time, most often on trips. After spending some time with a person, I would write down a kind of statement comprised of short sentences. The resulting epigrammatical texts have the form of a refrain or repetition, where the particular stands alongside the general, like a mix of information and narrative. The idea was to latch on to a few details (the source of which was these very “facts,” that is, the conversation) and let them be repeated and let them accrete. The simple fragments built up a number of diachronic themes that were layered and repeated. I imagined that this mode of writing offers a consistent pattern or a signature theme that anyone can adopt. The people I have become involved with through this project have had the ability to articulate their experiences in such a way that details become interesting. In writing these details down, I did not to any greater degree reflect on how representative these fragments were for a biography, but rather, the form of the statements in the texts had their own independent logic, as if the words were made to be incorporated into a system of information and presentation.

I wrote nine biographies according to this method and presented the texts in installation form for several years in galleries, museums, libraries and reading rooms, with microfilm readers, on panels, banners, and, on one occasion, directly on a reading desk in a library (by printing text on transparent adhesive film).³⁹ In all cases, styrofoam letters with the words “who is” followed by a name were used.

During this time I perceived working with text in the exhibition

39. In the exhibition *Ventspils Tansit Terminal*, in Ventspils, Latvia, 1999 (arranged by Sorors Center, curated by Kristaps Geltzis).

space as a difficult and unexplored question. What kinds of reading are possible in this context? How do they differentiate themselves from the kinds of reading used for different types of literary works, or informational texts? I realized how difficult the task of introducing a literary language in the art context would be (if by “literary” one mean a high level of openness to interpretation and complexity). Literary texts in the exhibition space have a tendency to create an overlap or “doubling,” which has detrimental effects.⁴⁰

There is, of course, a weakness inherent to any text medium that cannot be named (other than as “text in an art space”). But I had no term for the texts other than “biography” (which was an exaggeration) or “presentation”. “Who is...?” is, as mentioned, such a mundane, and yet such a complicated, not to mention impossible question. And to offer an answer to that question in terms of such simple observations was a way to present the story as a primitive claiming of territory, or an attempt to cling to reality. There is a closeness here to the poetry of simple lists and enumerations, which in turn is connected to the urge to collect.

In the initial part of my research, I undertook a process of transforming these text works into video biographies, where the people portrayed played the role of themselves and followed the same scripts (earlier exhibited as text).⁴¹ Inspired by information film and psychodrama and in collaboration with the people who were “biographized,” I transformed the text works into reenacted biographies. In order to recreate and illustrate the fragments, in a strict, conceptual but also naïve manner, we had to carry out certain actions as well as travel to find specific people. In the process of negotiating how we were to recreate, situate, or reenact the script, we challenged the credibility of the

40. Jörgen Gassilewski claims in an essay that all text in the art space has to be considered as a metaphor for text. He has an important point in this observation but this assertion loses its credibility when one discuss genres such as video, film, and the video essay. See Jörgen Gassilewski, “Plocka löss,” in the anthology *Textst*, ed. Magnus Bårtås, Konstfack 2004. *Textst* (made as a so-called KU-project at Konstfack) collected examples of contemporary text practice in art in Sweden and was an attempt to discuss different strategies and terms for reading, writing, and installing text in the art context. The word “*textst*” refers to a text form that operates as a hybrid form between literature and art. See, for instance Joanna Sandell, “Texten tar plats i konsten” in *Svenska Dagbladet* 26/11 2003 and Johanna Härenstam, “Ska vi dansa på alla kemiböcker kanske?” masters dissertation, Uppsala University, Institutionen för ABM, Biblioteks- och informationsvetenskap 2005.

41. *Who is Dimitris Houliarakis?*, dv 10 min, 2005; *Who is Eva Quintas?*, dv 10 min, 2003; *Who is Zdenko Bužek?*, dv 9 min, 2003.

people portrayed in the role “of themselves.” In the chapter “*Who is Zdenko Bužek?* (an extended work story),” I tell stories about this work and discuss its social and political layers and connections, as well as the meaning of this biographical form itself.

In 2006, Agence Topo in Montréal made a web version of *Who is...?* Agence Topo is an artist-run center dedicated to the production, dissemination, and distribution of independent multimedia works. Their interest is to mobilize the web so that it becomes an instrument and a space for the renewal of the narrative genre. During a residency in Montréal with them they proposed their multimedia adaptation of my work. Taking the narrative method of the project as their starting point, Agence TOPO added an even further element to it by opening a section where Net surfers can, in their turn, build a portrait. In its interactive form, the project would play with the questions of identity with regard to the Internet.⁴²

During the past few years, I have arranged live readings together with screenings of the three *Who is...?* films (in Tokyo and Shanghai). Here, the text has been translated into the native language (Japanese and Chinese) and a person has read the translated text of the subtitles. Thus, we found ourselves in a situation of a voice-over over a voice-over.⁴³ The presence and the role of the mediator/reader became of increasing interest during this series of work. I will discuss this in the chapter “Voices and experience.”

42. The agency declared: “Between the ‘googlisation’ of people, the multiplication of the data banks and the self-representation of Net surfers who draw themselves a profile real or idealized in the community’s sites, the questions of identity remain fundamental while being sources of fiction, of staging. Translated into several languages (French, English, Spanish, Swedish, Russian and Latvian), the original work of Bärtås makes it possible for TOPO to approach the universalization of the communities increasingly curious to communicate and elucidate the eternal mystery of Who is... Who.” See www.agencetopo.qc.ca. Although I approved this version of *Who is...?* – a fragmented, non-linear version with a different logics and expression – I was not so convinced by the interactive part (and the result). Although I believe the mode of collecting information and writing in this project could be adopted by others, the motivation for creating biographies in this form is not evident. (The web-version has also been presented at Boona Café in Shanghai, in February 2008, within the framework of the exhibition *Intrude: Art & Life*, arranged by Sendai Moma, Shanghai. See <http://www.intrude366.com/en-US/intrude366/Project.aspx?articleid=222, 2/12 2009>)

43. In “Upplevelse,” Annika Wik discusses the different forms of showing *Who is Zdenko Bužek?* See *Film och andra rörliga bilder, en introduktion*, ed. Anu Koivunen, Raster Förlag 2008, pp. 208–211.

A collection in a space: concordance and discordance

The artworks mentioned above, as well as other series in my body of work, have basically been created with the same methodological sequence of: 1) collecting, 2) organizing and 3) presenting. Many of my works could, as mentioned, actually be viewed as presentations of collections. Sometimes, as in the case of *Who is...?*, a fourth step is added, i.e. the collection is reorganized and thereby undergoes a “reconfigured intentionality.”⁴⁴

Collecting has to do with our need to make visible our own reality.⁴⁵ According to Mieke Bal, it is an “.../ essential human feature, that originates in the need to tell stories, but for which there are neither words nor other conventional models. Hence, collecting is a story, and everyone needs to tell it.”⁴⁶ Things in the collection do not, in this context, have to be material things, but can also be stories, information and even events. For example, people collect concert memories, even without the paraphernalia associated with these events, such as tickets, t-shirts, and other gadgets. The collecting of memories with the help of a camera also seems to be becoming an immaterial activity where it is only the actual moment of shooting the picture that becomes the ritual that marks the “collected” moment.

The collector, like the artist, may not always be clear about what the reason and driving force behind the attraction of certain “things” are. They may explain their activity as an obsession with the beauty and history of an object, an interest in the social ritual, the will to compare things, or the belief that things can tell stories. Few of them would admit the omnipotent aspect of collecting. The omnipotence of the collector may take the form of an interest in the mimetical or metonymical quality of things, since model worlds, exact copies, and minia-

44. The term “reconfigured intentionality” is borrowed from Wendy Tronrud’s text “I Write to You: Poetics of the Letter in Translation” in the catalogue for the show *unrest/nemir* by Alejandro Cesarco at Galerija Miroslav Kraljević 2004.

45. See John Windsor, “Identity Parades” in *The Cultures of Collecting*, eds. John Elsner & Roger Cardinal, Harvard University Press 1994, p. 51.

46. Mieke Bal, “Telling Objects: A Narrative Perspective on Collecting” in *The Culture of Collecting*, p. 103.

tures appeal to him.⁴⁷ They both experience how things are talking or rather whispering to them. The things are calling for attention, asking for understanding; they want to be transformed into *semaphores*, which is Krzysztof Pomian's term for an object in which meaning has been invested.⁴⁸ As *semaphores* they are inscribed in new systems of signs and in relations between signs. Roger Cardinal, editor of *The Cultures of Collecting*, connects the collection with the collage, which is ".../ a concerted gathering of selected items which manifests themselves as a pattern or set, thereby reconciling their divergent origins within a collective discourse."⁴⁹

The artist/collector is striving to create his/her own order and take a part of reality aside in order to organize it. The artist/collector aggressively tries to dominate and colonize the world or he quietly holds his sway over a small fraction of the world. The artist/collector wants to postpone the slow and gradual disappearance of things.⁵⁰ They share the instinct for preservation with the documentarian and the archivist. The ".../resisting of erosion of memory, the inevitability of passage – is the motor force behind this, the first documentary's aesthetic functions."⁵¹

47. Dubravka Ugrešić's novel *The Museum of Unconditional Surrender* (New Directions Publishing Corporation 2002) begins with the description of the objects discovered inside the stomach of a gigantic walrus named Roland in the Berlin zoo: a pink cigarette lighter, a small doll, a box of matches, a baby's shoe, a little plastic bag containing needles and thread. Altogether these objects can be seen as a museum of confiscated memories. When Svetlana Boym, in an interview (in *Bomb*, no. 80 Summer 2002) asks Ugrešić if people in exile have a special propensity for becoming collectors, she responds: "It only seems so. In exile, it becomes clear that our emotional property changes its value, and with time it tends to lose it, like an old currency. It also becomes clear that one can't reconstruct a lost home, a past life. The job of collecting is a nostalgic and consoling activity, but it can't bring to life what is lost." (www.bombsite.com/issues/80/articles/2498, 14/2 2010).

48. Krzysztof Pomian, *Collectors and Curiosities*, Polity Press 1990, pp. 5 and 30.

49. Roger Cardinal, "Collecting and Collage-making – The Case of Kurt Schwitters" in *The Cultures of Collecting*, p. 71.

50. The framework of a fictitious collector and novelist "living in an exquisitely crafted modernist house" established the framework of Elmgren & Drangset's installation *The Collectors* at the Nordic and Danish Pavilion at the Venice Biennale 2009 (an installation where they both functioned as curators and artists). The artworks and design objects (some of them historical works) in the pavilion were either subordinated to the narrative or reflective or enhancive (the contemporary works), whereas the works in the Danish pavilion represented the act of collecting as idiosyncratic utterances and statements in between the private obsessions and the will to order or sort. Some existing collections were included here, for example the fly collection of the Swedish writer and journalist Fredrik Sjöberg (see also Sjöberg's book *Flugfällan*, Bokförlaget Nya Doxa 2004, where he discusses the impulses and drives of collecting).

51. Michael Renov, *The Subject of Documentary*, p. 75.

I connect my own work processes not only with the collector's mind-set but also to the attitude of the editor. The editor, like the collector, gathers and assembles material, but is to a larger extent involved in presentation. (There is a thin line between composition and presentation.)⁵² The collector may in his solitude rely on the power of the accumulated amount of objects or the archival pleasures of ordering, whereas the editor has an urge to present and expose the collection. The collector, for instance, may experience how, in the different cases that are assembled in a category, something that they have in common floats up to the surface and that this something which was previously invisible is made visible when the elements are put together. Whereas the collector might be satisfied with this observation, the editor's wish is to demonstrate this generic quality.

Traditionally, the art space – here considered as an “editorial space” whether it be a real room, an imaginary room or a single image or film – is a place where the artist brings together a selection of “things”: these can be objects, images, phenomena, ideas, events, or actions. (A similar metaphor for the artwork is the room itself, i.e. an architectural construction with an entrance, different exits and communicating corridors and pillars that keep the construction upright, depending on how they are mutually distributed.)

However, the expanded space of art, the expansion into the public realm or even the *gesamtkunstwerk* do not change the idea of an editorial space. The intervention in reality, the creation of networks and the act of drawing up protocols of actions and events *all* precipitate narrativity. The resulting narratives from these actions contain temporality and each one of them becomes “a subjectively focalised sequence of events” which is “presented and communicated” (Mieke Bal).⁵³ Even art in the public realm has to emphasize certain aspects, things, buildings, streets, individuals, and institutions. It needs its specific entities, or agents, to make a *fabula* into a plot. Narration is a method to put

52. In this context “a collection” has, as mentioned in the introduction, its roots in the pre-modern subjective collection, the cabinet of curiosity, and not in the museum collection primarily representing a canonical, educational, or representative view.

53. Mieke Bal, “Telling Objects,” p. 100. “Focalisor” (focalizer) could be described as the subjective overview in narratives or the primary consciousness of a story. Bal compares, for instance, the Freudian and Marxist subjects, two narratives with two different focalisors, one of individual development and one as a grand narrative. The Marxist subject is living his historical role and the Freudian subject is acting out. In both cases, there is a discrepancy between the narrator (living in or acting in the world) and the focalisor, she says.

“things” together, to include and exclude, and this method supports the similarity between the editor and the narrator (and the collector). The narrative act, as well collecting and editing, has in other words a compilatory function and the narrative form as such could be seen as a “cognitive tool.”⁵⁴

The “things” in the editorial space established by the artist, as “normal” and futile as they ever are, may look strange. Actually, to produce this distance, this estrangement to the “things” is one of the artist’s major tasks (and epistemology and ethics are also interwoven in this task). Svetlana Boym, who refers to the Russian formalist Victor Shlovsky, writes:

By making things strange, the artist does not simply displace them from an everyday context into an artistic framework; he also helps to “return sensation” to life itself, to reinvent the world, to experience it anew. Estrangement is what makes art artistic; but, by the same token, it makes life lively, or worth living.⁵⁵

Estrangement is what Mieke Bal calls making objects “absolute other” after they have been given the status of being “not-other” (through subordination, appropriation and de-personification) – a process of “/.../ paradoxical meaning production in collecting.”⁵⁶ The “absolute other” status appears when things are cut off from their context.

In our encounter with “the absolute other,” we experience something we cannot trace to the recognizable. It is a moment of suspense. A correspondence has to be established between our experiences and the unrecognizable/unknown. I believe it is an artist’s task to insist on the validity of this correspondence and the meaning of this relation.

The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poet Michael Palmer claims that his room for poetry is a democratic room. It is “/.../ a house with four walls but no ceiling or floor.”⁵⁷ This is the art space not as a fixed or stable construction but as a sprawling form with blurred boundaries

54. See Paul Ricœur *Memory, History, Forgetting*, The University of Chicago Press 2004, pp. 241–242. Ricœur here refers to Louis O. Mink’s book *Historical Understanding*, Cornell University Press 1987.

55. “Estrangement” here has another notion than the in the use of the term Bertold Brecht established in theater – as a method of criticality and awareness of the levels of fiction. Svetlana Boym, *Architecture of the Off-Modern*, Buell Center/FORUM Project & Princeton Architectural Press 2008, p. 18–19.

56. Mieke Bal, “Telling Objects,” p. 105.

57. Michael Palmer, “I ett X” in *OEI*, 2001:6, p. 51.

to reality. This art claims to be as real as reality and denies a hierarchal relation between the artist (author) and the viewer (reader). I am not so convinced by this supposedly equal relationship between the artist and the viewer/reader.⁵⁸ The encounter with an artwork is like entering a party that has been going on for a while. I assume that both the artist that still believes he or she is “responsible” for the editorial space and even admits a hierarchal relation between the artist and the audience invited to this room and the one who denies this hierarchal relation would suggest that some relations exist in the space. They would both suggest that the “things” in the room have something to do with each other, that they are demarcated and that they collide, impart something or correspond even though no one else, at first sight or thought, finds it obvious.

A number of factors determine the meaning of this room: the extension and spatial conditions of the room, the taxonomic act of giving things names, the combination of “things” and the sequence of the combination, the amount of “things” in the room, and the balance between concordance and discordance. If concordance here means the arrangements and ordering, discordance means dislocations, juxtapositions and unexpected connections. In collecting as well as telling our life stories (and work stories) concordance is an object of desire. Paul Ricœur discusses this struggle between concordance and discordance (/.../ the competition between a demand for concordance and the admission of discordance /.../).⁵⁹ These combinations (how the collection is arranged) may, to some extent, be a matter of the manipulation of the viewer/reader, whatever Michael Palmer says.⁶⁰ Ricœur does not use the term “manipulation” but “configuration” for “/.../ this art of composition which mediates between concordance and discordance

58. Roland Barthes claimed the death of the author. In recent time I think we have rather seen the death of the reader, a situation where everyone writes but very few people read properly. Consequently new publishing companies (like Swedish Vulcan company) realise that the one to charge is the writer and not the reader, i.e the writer pays to have his book published.

59. Paul Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, The University of Chicago Press 1994, p. 141.

60. In film the “Kuleshov Effect” was seen as the most convincing demonstration that it is not the content in detail which is important but the combination of “things.” Russian filmmaker Lev Kuleshov (1899–1970) edited together shots of an expressionless face by a famous silent film actor (Ivan Mozzhukhin) with various shots (a girl, a plate of soup, a little girl's coffin). The audience believed that the actor's face was expressing radically different emotions when being juxtaposed with the different shots although the footage of the actor's face was the same.

/.../,⁶¹ and the narrative operations work in the line of *connectedness*, the synthesis of the heterogeneous, Ricœur says.

Together, all the things assembled in the collection of the editorial space form one or several utterances, thought figures or theories in their own right, models for thinking and viewing. In this respect, every work of art carries an instruction, whether this is a hidden or open instruction, and a request for action.⁶² On a semantic level this is expressed in the Swedish word *handling* (*Handlung* in German) where “action” is not differentiated from “story.” Hannah Arendt writes, in *The Human Condition* (1958):

The realm of human affairs, strictly speaking, consists of the web of human relationships which exists wherever men live together. The disclosure of the “who” through speech, and the setting of a new beginning through action, always fall into an already existing web where their immediate consequences can be felt. Together they start a new process which eventually emerges as the unique life story of the newcomer, affecting uniquely the life stories off all those with whom he comes in contact. It is because of this already existing web of human relationships, with its innumerable, conflicting wills and intentions, that action almost never achieves its purpose; but it is also because of this medium, in which action alone is real, that it “produces” stories with or without intention as naturally as fabrication produces tangible things. These stories may then be recorded in documents and monuments, they may be visible in use objects or art works, they may be told and retold and worked into all kinds of material.⁶³

Lawrence Weiner’s text works, for instance, are basically descriptions of making and acting. “A removal to the lathing or support wall of plaster or wallboard from a wall / One standard dye marker thrown into the sea / A series of stakes set in the ground at regular intervals to form a rect/angle.” Presented in a book with the title *Statements* (in a 1968 exhibition at the New York gallery run by Seth Siegelau), his twenty-eight phrases also form a narrative with different scenes. The view of the artwork-as-instruction (an example of a work story) undermines the authoritarian authorship (although not totally dissol-

61. Paul Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 141.

62. Joseph Kosuth wrote: “Behind every text about art lies the possibility of an artwork, if not the presence of one.” Joseph Kosuth, *Art After Philosophy and After. Collected Writings, 1966–1990*, The MIT Press 1991.

63. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, pp. 183–184.

ving a hierarchy). People can, for instance, use the artist's models (the combinations) and make their own versions. The receivers ("users") of an artwork can build on to the work, or re-build it, as in fact forgers, copyists, imitators, post-producers, reenactors, fans, parasites, or samplers do.

Perhaps even more important is the act of reading or the act of viewing/participating is an *event* that the artist/author has indeed constituted but does not control. Although texts, films and most artworks are non-organic, whereas reality is organic, and texts, films and artworks are organized, whereas reality is unorganized, and even psychotic, the very act of reading/viewing/participating is an event and, as such, as real as any reality.

Since reality is historically constructed and narrated even art has the potential to create reality, as Felix Vogel argues in his concept paper for the 4th Bucharest Biennale 2010 (departing from Hanna Arendt's discussion on *Handlung*). This is why art can be or act at the very beginning of the appearance of political action, Vogel says, though he makes a distinction between activism and art which I believe is of value:

Whereas activist processes are taking place in the macro-political area, indicating the orientation at the established order, artistic processes are facing on the threshold between this established order with its clear representations and an unutterable, invisible reality that is in the becoming. Exactly in this localization of art lies its potential to change and therefore its potential to produce possibilities of *Handlung*.⁶⁴

To collect and arrange things in sequences, to juxtapose and estrange them is what an editor of a video does. In *Sans soleil*, for instance, Chris Marker appears as an "/.../ itinerant gatherer of images and sound."⁶⁵ Alexander Kluge talks about the montage as the "theory of relationships" and the "morphology of relation" [die Formenwelt des Zusammenhangs].⁶⁶ And the arrival of the digital image has enhanced the sequential structure and the method of organizing. Harun Farocki

64. Felix Vogel, "Handlung. On Producing Possibilities," the 4th Bucharest Biennale 2010. Vogel refers to Suely Rolnik's approach on theorizing the connection between art and activism. See Suely Rolnik, *The Body's Contagious Memory* (<http://transform.eipcp.net/transversal/0507/rolnik/en>, 20/3 2010).

65. Michael Renov, *The Subject of Documentary*, p. 73.

66. Alexander Kluge, Thomas Y Levin & Miriam B Hansen, "On Film and the Public Sphere" in *New German Critique*, nos. 24/25 (1981–1982), p. 206 and 218.

claims that the digital image in video, in contrast to film, works like an information panel. “The organisation of images appears much more important than the method used to record or generate them,” as Christa Blüminger writes in a text about Farocki.⁶⁷

Everything starts from the individual

There is stupid being in every one. There is stupid being in every one in their living. Stupid being in one is often not stupid thinking or stupid acting. It very often is hard to know it in knowing any one. Sometimes one has to know of some one the whole history in them, the whole history of their living to know the stupid being of them.

Gertrude Stein, *The Making of Americans*

This project favors a perspective directed at individual history, biography, instead of a generalized notion of “Man” or “Humans.” When explaining his aim of making every trivial detail into a chronicle of history Palestinian poet Mourid Barghouti says: “Everything starts from the individual – the body’s pleasures and pains. If you don’t see that you misunderstand history.”⁶⁸ Barghouti is advocating body phenomenology in the basic sense which does not disconnect itself from the factualness of life.

Not just listening to my own urge to tell stories but also placing this urge and giving it a form in the art system, I was eager to keep and even nurture certain discordances and conflicts that occurred during the process, some of them intentionally provoked by myself. I have already mentioned one of them, it belongs to the dissonance between the essayistic and the narrative. Some of them concern the act of nomination, yet others concern the abusive dimensions in telling a story about another, either having to do with the question of truth or being of mimetic nature. Yet another conflicted and potentially abusive dimension concerns the role of the camera-eye, the act of looking and the ethics of editing.

In this dissertation I ask: Which are the “tell-able selves” in contemporary society? We live in an historical period where complex and diverse migratory phenomena create increasing social refraction. Meet-

67. Christa Blüminger, “Harun Farocki ... The Art of the Possible” in *Stuff it: The Video Essay in The Digital Age*, p. 100.

68. Interview by Maya Jaggi in the *Guardian*, 13/12 2008.

ings occur repeatedly which cause “/.../ the binary opposition between the foreign and the familiar to break” (Sarat Maharaj).⁶⁹ Refraction is a term used in physics (from the Latin word *refractus*, to break open, break up), that denotes the “/.../ deflection or deviation of a wave (e.g. a beam of light) from one straight path to another when passing from one medium (e.g. air) into another (e.g. glass) in which speed of transmission of the wave is different” (*Longmans Dictionary*). Refraction is also an artistic method (crossing discourses) but the concept can be used to describe the effects of movements between societies and cultures (social refraction) as well. Social refraction rarely occurs in isolated, closed or strictly controlled societies. It requires mobility. Thus, social refraction arises from tourism, social mobility, and migration. It is a metaphor for an encounter between two individuals, or two cultures or systems. As for this metaphor, one can make a choice about the positions and roles of the two entities: either the individual is the light that is refracted by the new situation and the new place (the glass or water) or the individual is the prism or the water and reality is the light that refracts off it and changes direction.⁷⁰

I believe there is a sense of estrangement in a meeting with another human being that is valuable and can be differentiated from hate, revulsion, and suspicion toward the stranger. It is valuable insofar as it clarifies differences and lack of understanding. Social refraction makes visible ideas and liberates aesthetics, systems of thought, and habits.⁷¹ It is true that nationalism offers an answer to the who is-question, but nationalism is a metaphor of organic development, of genealogy. It is a monstrous answer because it claims the organic over metonymy and hybridity. Can then essayistic storytelling (and the creation of biograp-

69. Quoted in Alejandro del Pino Velasco's summary of “An Unknown Object in Uncountable Dimensions: Visual Arts as Knowledge Production in the Retinal Arena,” a presentation by Sarat Maharaj, *On Knowledge Production*, p. 133.

70. The latter metaphor seems to tend towards Émile Zola's famous phrase about naturalistic art: “reality viewed through a temperament.” But this phrase is based on a stable subject – firm and monolithic, immobile – through which reality refracts and is strengthened. I would rather imagine a “temperament” that is relational, temporal, and involved with spatiality. Refraction here only arises as an effect of social actions. In a contemporary situation, one must extend the metaphor to a hall of mirrors, or rather a prism, where light is refracted over and over again. I used the term “social refraction” for the first time in an essay in an anthology of artists' writings: Magnus Bårtås, “Refraction” in *We are All Normal (and Want Our Freedom): a Collection of Contemporary Nordic Artists Writing*, eds. Katya Sander & Simon Sheik, Black Dog Publishing Limited 2001.

71. See also Magnus Bårtås: “Another Voice” in *Reshape! IASPIS-catalogue at the Venice Bienale 2003*, eds. Sara Arrhenius & Karina Wärm Ericsson, IASPIS 2003.

hies) function as a suggestion for acknowledging the other and a way of co-existing in the age of social refraction?

3. About methodology

Virtual expression of art is not as important as why you're doing it.

Dennis Oppenheim

Methods as a way of being in the world

I am not an artist that explores one medium and elaborates on the qualities and possibilities of this one medium. Rather I try to invent a technical and mental process for each series of work, as a specific chain of actions and techniques that ideally has its own logic, a logic that works as an integral part of the idea and relates to the subject matter(s) of the work (although the technical structure sometimes has a resistant position or being in conflict with the subject matter(s)⁷²). In analogy with this the research/art process here means the performance and examination of a methodology for each series of work – *a minima poetica* – a small poetics (as opposed to a poetics that traditionally is associated with regulatory and universal claims).

In fact all methods hold their own aesthetics and carry their own gestures, discourse, and history within a work of art. Methods manifest their cognitions (performances) in the work as well as representing a model of being and acting in society. Methodology situates an individual at the same time as it suggests a way to relate to and act in the world. (I am convinced that an artist like Sarah Sze with her tiny works of paper and paper clips, acts in and relates to the world very differently from an artist like Richard Serra with his ten ton sculptures.) A diverse methodology means to try and experiment with different roles, and by extension the interrogation of the functions of different roles.

Drawing, for example, is one field where the different methods of creating the lines call forth different scenes. The lines produce the image of a person working: a teenager, a child, an art student, an amateur, a mentally handicapped person, a Renaissance artist – they can even all act in different parts of the same drawing. A major part of the language

72. For instance, in *The Disappointed and Offended*.

of a drawing is actually the staging of scenes of people working.⁷³ The methods contain tableaux that create a non-linear narrative embedded in the overall story – in other words the motif of the work.

This does of course not only apply to art. In science research methods carry all kinds of tropes and discourses: aesthetics, politics, history. Yet, in cultural theory there has been much more talk of the methodology of aesthetics than of the aesthetics of methodology.

Many discussions have been concerned with the tension between the discursive and non-discursive in art. Sometimes a false bipolarity has been constructed, as if discursive elements could be distributed free from aesthetics and vice versa.⁷⁴ Joseph Kosuth has been advocating conceptualism as a “drive towards propositional content”, and the opinion that art is not a question of morphology but of function, that it is the product of the artist’s “total signifying activities”.⁷⁵ In the 1970s it was pointed out, for example by curator/dealer Seth Siegelaub, that a catalogue can be the primary source for art and the physical exhibition merely auxiliary to it. This was, according to Siegelaub, due to a turn in media: “/.../ a photograph of a painting is different from a painting,

73. If you for instance recognize how Jockum Nordström in a certain part of a drawing represents the masts of a ship you would simultaneously in this section see a scene in front of you. You would see a boy in cruel adolescence, a boy that still has a certain ability to daydream but already has started to rationalize his expressions and therefore uses a ruler because he is convinced that this is the right solution, that he from now on will get his act together and straighten things out.

74. See, for example, Douglas Heublers statements quoted later on in this text. The separation between the discursive and non-discursive was strong in essential modernism (à la Clement Greenberg). In Mike Bode and Staffan Schmidt’s thesis *Off the Grid*, Art Monitor 2008, the two artists argue for a separation of essentialism from the privileging of the non-discursive. They want to find a third position in relation to the discursive versus non-discursive approach (the latter they call, for their own practice and with a reference to Russian formalism, a constructivist/constructionist approach). They find the non-discursive approach particularly problematic (“a masochist relation to its object” (p.74)). But they also point out the problematic issues in discursive art: it has difficulties to “recognize its ‘worldliness,’ or in other words, its historical specificity and contingency” (p. 73). Discursive art also requires its special, informed audience, they argue, which creates an epistemological situation that is related to Michel Foucault’s concept *episteme* and Ludwik Fleck’s *thought collectives*. If non-discursive art has a masochistic relation to its object, discursive art has “a sadistic relation to its object” (p. 74).

75. Peter Osborne uses the expression “drive towards propositional content” in *Philosophy in Cultural Theory*, Routledge 2000, p. 98 and in “Conceptual Art and/as Philosophy” in *Rewriting Conceptual Art*, eds. Michael Newman & Jon Bird, Reaktion Books Ltd 1999. Kosuth spoke about “the total signifying activities” of Ad Reinhardt’s work, which for Kosuth did not just consist of his paintings but also his lectures and seminars. See Alexander Alberro, *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity*, The MIT Press 2003, p. 42.

but a photograph of a photograph is just a photograph.”⁷⁶ Even though Siegelaub here disregards many crucial considerations among artists working with photography, such as scale, surface, mounting, installation – factors that state and communicate both the discursive (the image genre and the social use) and aesthetic standpoints of the artist – his observance still has some relevance.

In *Situational Aesthetics* (1969) Victor Burgin commented on the linguistic turn in art: “In its logical extremity this tendency has resulted in a placing of art entirely within the linguistic infrastructure, which previously served merely to support art.”⁷⁷ Even though the linguistic turn did not get rid of materiality, as one could believe, history certainly shows analogies between conceptual art and the development of immaterial labor and “talk values” (Simon Sheik) in the Western world.

Work story

In the work of art, I have gradually come to understand the ideas performed by methodology, which is a considerable part of it, from a narratological perspective.⁷⁸ From my narratological point of view, an artwork is a more or less clearly composed (or edited) sequence of actions which can take the shape of, or result in, a more or less solid physical object, a time-based work (video or film), or an event which most often is documented.⁷⁹ This sequence of actions is fundamental to the understanding of the work – often this is the conceptual strategy – and

76. Seth Siegelaub in Lucy R. Lippard, *Six Years: the Dematerialisation of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972...*, The University of California Press 1997 (originally published 1973), p. 125.

77. www.ubu.com/papers/burgin_situational.html, (5/2 2010).

78. I have not been using pure narratological research methods to collect life stories. And my dissertation work does not meet the criteria of a narratological study in general. Hence I am not making the sort of clear judgments and choices of my subjects of study as a researcher in this field normally would make, i. e. choice of method of interview (regarding narratological methods see, for instance, Anna Johansson, *Narrativ teori och metod. Med livsberättelsen i fokus*, Studentlitteratur 2005, pp. 244-251). Most often I do not interview my objects but rather hang out with them, sometimes I know only in retrospect who my objects are. My basic methods for collecting stories have been studies of media/media consumption (newspapers, magazines, Internet) and conversations. Both activities are interwoven with the practice of everyday life. See also Bengt Molander's discussion of dialogue as epistemological form in *Arbetets kunskapsteori*, “Dialog, förändringsarbete, demokrati”, Dialoger 1997.

79. Sol LeWitt writes in his famous “Paragraphs on Conceptual Art” (*Artforum*, June 1967) that artistic ideas are “/.../ in a chain of development that may eventually find some form.” He also adds: “All ideas need not be made physical.” (<http://radicalart.info/concept/LeWitt/paragraphs.html>, 14/4 2010), The Croatian artist Zdenko Bužek (see “*Who is Zdenko Bužek?* (an extended work story)”) and I issued from a similar standpoint when we created the web project *The Resort of Homeless Ideas*.

it can be reproduced or retold. Within the art world, works of art are often mediated as stories and are allocated a place within circulation and reception first and foremost as a story of a series of actions. I call the account of these actions a *work story*.

According to my description, a work story is basically an account of action, a series of makings, but the story often also contains accounts of considerations and relational moments (to the situation where the actions were performed). Being a meta-activity – as any narrative – a construction in retrospect, the work story has elements of self-interpretation and self-reflection.

A work story is constructed, shaped and maintained in a system of talking, staging, performing, dissemination and circulation as well as re-contextualization. Adjacent to the mediated story of the making of art are the stories of reception, reaction and consequences of the work. Told and retold, these stories become a part of the work; i.e. fragments of the reception of the work are internalized in the work.

In terms of narration, I believe there are three different forms or layers in artistic practice (concerned with representation) and that the work story is activated in the last level. But in one way or another, they are all interconnected and interact with one another and sometimes coincide in a performative unit (even if not all of them are always present in one and the same work).

The first layer is the motif of the work, to the extent that the work is telling a story (something not all works do, obviously) or is suggesting a plot. “Motif” may be a suspect term here when considering the fact that many of the artworks of today do not operate primarily within the means of representation, but function as events, social interactions or as communicative acts. But even these works, sometimes inscribed in relational and participatory practice, seem to create models of the world where the demarcation of the work (through the art context) creates what resembles a “motif.”

The second layer is the factual orbit of the process. It is the very making of the work, the *potential narrative of the methodology* that can be deduced or extracted by observing, or by other means taking part of, a work. As described before with the examples of drawing, here the technique, combined with the performance as well as the sequence of actions that has led to (or constitute) the work, forms a self-sufficient narrative (which, as mentioned, also has mimetic and aesthetic dimen-

sions). The methodology can be detected by cognitive means, for instance by observing the strokes of a brush or the style of lines in a drawing, and the ability to understand or capture the methods is very much due to the experience and knowledge of the viewer.⁸⁰

The third layer is the meta-layer. It is an account of the second layer, reconstructed and/or post-constructed. This is the *work story* which is performed by others and/or the artist him/herself. This third form is in constant transformation, is remodeled, displaced, reduced, or extended. Biographical contents are often added with various levels of mythologization. The second and the third layer are naturally at work in the discipline of artistic research.⁸¹

Actually, I realize that I lack first-hand experience of many of the artworks I know of and believe I can relate to. I know many of them from images and texts in printed matter, but in the case of several of them I have only heard of them in conversations, lectures, discussions, and seminars. Nevertheless many of these unseen works are active in my mind; they are imagined and visualized, sometimes probably also idealized. Through the medium of storytelling I have my own “experience” of these artworks (although I, in the process of reception, interpretation and imagination, sometimes might have partly or totally misunderstood their intention or physical appearance, distorted their concepts, and of course added to or reduced their meaning.)

The fact that the art world to a large extent is a place for stories points to its folkloristic aspect.⁸² In other words, the art world is a place for transmission: someone has seen or heard of someone who has done something. The story is told and retold. As in any other oral culture

80. In *The Politics of Small Gestures, Chances and Challenges for Contemporary Art*, (art-ist 2006), Mika Hannula speaks as (an informed) viewer about the small but crucial gestures and instructions in the making of artworks: “/.../ these embedded gestures and choices that make the given work what it is; i.e. what makes it tick and what turns it into something special. They are gestures that make the work become special.” The knowledge and/or observation of these gestures in the process of making and performing trigger experiences of alternative ways of being with oneself and with one’s surroundings –“to becoming a place,” (p. 7).

81. Mieke Bal speaks about three layers in narration (which are not easily transferred to the three layers I use in this text): the fabula, the story, and the (narrative) text. A narrative text is a story told by an agent in a medium (composed of language signs). Mike Bal speaks about two types of fabula: a series of logically chronological events that are caused by and experienced by actors and a memorial trace that remains after the story has been received. See *Narrative Theory: Major Issues in Narrative Theory*, ed. Mieke Bal, Routledge 2004.

82. See also Bengt af Klintberg’s text on the connection between Fluxus art and folklore; *Fluxus Games and Contemporary Folklore: On the Non-individual Character of Fluxus Art*, Konsthistorisk Tidskrift 1993.

there are misunderstandings, details, displacements, and falsifications. In this “talk-talk community” there is a heavy dependence on “what is on everyone’s tongue.” Works that are difficult to talk about, for instance, run the risk of being neglected and disappearing. Sometimes an art practice escapes omission because of stories about the artist himself.

Whatever one may think of the oral circulation of art (often connected to the work story) – not least through chatting at bars and cafés – the narration could be recognized as a “place” for art distribution that is as important as the exhibition space and printed matter. A similar “place” has actually been recognized in literature and examined as an element in a hermeneutical analysis by Gérard Genette. A key function in his analysis is the term *paratext*. *Paratext* is informed by *peritext* – which consist of spatial and material aspects of a book as format, layout, title page, paper, cover design, etc. – together with *epitext* which consists of the author’s interviews, conversations, correspondence, diaries, seminars, presentations, and retrospective comments. *Paratext* is supposedly what Joseph Kosuth called an artist’s “total signifying activities.”

According to Genette, there is no clear border between the inner (text) and the outer (the world’s discourse surrounding the book). In analogy with paratext, he uses the expression of Philippe Lejeune: “/.../ a fringe of the printed text which in reality controls one’s whole reading of the text.”⁸³ This fringe, which always brings a comment of the author, “/.../ constitutes a zone between text and off-text, a zone not only of transition but also of *transaction*: a privileged place of pragmatics and a strategy, of an influence on the public, an influence that – whether well or poorly understood and achieved – is at the service of a better reception for the text and a more pertinent reading of it /.../.”⁸⁴

It is within different spaces of a similar “zone” in the art world that the oral tradition is happening and the stories that artists tell about their own work are delivered. It is under the pretext (or epitext) of collegial conversations, lectures, presentations (to curators), studio visits, and meetings with the press and audience that artists are constantly tel-

83. Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, Cambridge University Press 1997, p. 2. He refers to Phillippe Lejeune, *Le Pacte autobiographique*, Seul 1975, p.45.

84. Ibid. See also Jonas J. Magnusson’s objections to what he finds static and hierarchical of this concept: “(R)Ed. Est” in *OEI* nos. 37 & 38 2008, p. 194.

ling their stories.⁸⁵ The stories of the artist are always changing to fit the present situation and audience, as well as his professional and personal development. The oral text of the artist is also changed with the spirit and tendencies of the time, including and excluding elements, emphasizing some parts and adding comments absorbed and internalized from the surrounding discourses. It is a continuously changing story: contingent and re-examining. Already in the sixteenth century, Michel de Montaigne wanted to incorporate such a *slight narrative* (Paul Rotha)⁸⁶ in his writing process:

I must accommodate my history to the hour: I may presently change, not only by fortune, but also by intention. This is a counterpart of various and changeable accidents, and of irresolute imaginations, and, as it falls out, sometimes contrary: whether it be that I am then another self, or that I take subjects by other circumstances and considerations /.../⁸⁷

The term “paratext,” used by Genette, and my own term “work story” both point towards factors and circumstances that effect the reading of (or viewing or talking part of) a work, and become an integral part of it. My own term is grounded in methodology, in making. The “instructional” stories about the making of an artwork are strongly connected to the history of conceptualism and performance art. The story about the making of a piece is, as mentioned above, crucial to the understanding of works in the conceptual and neo-conceptual tradition (as in the given example of *Flaga* by Simon Sterling, later on in this text) as well as process-based art of all kind. As in Fluxus art, the series of actions and makings that constitute a piece could be told as an instruction, or as a score, which was the common term among Fluxus artists. Work story here seems to be identical with the score. But a work story is a

85. A number of artists have transformed public speaking about art into performance. Andrea Fraser made famous artists' talks as performances with different communicative strategies and different adopted roles. British artist Carey Young focuses in the filmed performance *Everything You've Heard is Wrong* (2008) on the very act of communication. Dressed in an impeccable business suit she gives an impassioned speech about successful corporate communication at Speaker's Corner in Hyde Park—the symbol for free speech, although today with an aura of anachronism.

86. Paul Rotha, “Some Principles of Documentary” in *A Paul Rotha Reader*, eds. Duncan Petrie & Robert Kruger, University of Exeter Press 1999, p. 149. The essay was originally published in 1935.

87. Michel de Montaigne's *Essays* in the beginning of chapter XIV (“Of Repentance”) <http://oregonstate.edu/instruct/phl302/texts/montaigne/montaigne-essays--4.html#XIV>, (15/3 2010).

meta-narrative, a commentary track, and includes elements of post-construction. Work story is not the orbit or trajectory of the making itself, it is a storytelling activity, something under construction and only partly controlled by the artist. Out of the hands of the artist, in circulation, it starts to live its own life.

Hence a score of Yoko Ono, for instance, is on the one hand a work story in the most “archaic” form (since it simply tells about the making of an artwork) and on the other hand an utterance that “out-writes” the work story and makes the meta-function redundant. The Yoko Ono scores have colonized language to the point that nothing else needs to be said and they occupy the temporal conditions: they are predict, offer, announce, inform at the same time as they have an aura of document. Paradoxically, the most humble and ethereal Fluxus piece becomes the most “total” art. Yoko Ono’s *Fly piece* (1963), consisting of one word consolidates this: “Fly” (followed by the words “Summer 1963”).

An institutional shift has opened up for a range of discourse-staging events within the public and private art institutions (often inspired by self-organized structures and artist group’s initiatives outside the institutions): workshops, seminars, screenings, discussions, think-tanks, debates, lectures, residency programs, etc. These activities sometimes function as side events, as main attractions of the exhibitions, or as “replacement” for exhibitions. They are most often public events, but not always.⁸⁸ This institutional turn is often placed somewhere in the 1960s. With the advent of minimalism and conceptual art institutions “/.../ had to take the double process of the dematerialization of the art object on the one hand *and* the so-called expanded field of art practices on the other hand, into account.”⁸⁹

In fact, many of the institutions have just recently started opening up for working processes that do not just want to pose the question “What am I doing?” but also: “When am I doing? Where am I doing? And for whom?” (after having closed the structure by the end of the 1970s). The movement of the institutional structure towards the platform-function has enabled those artists whose work is content-driven (roughly speaking) to bring in expertise, to become involved in an in-

88. Curator and editor Clémentine Deliss curated for instance *Tempolabor* for the Kunsthalle Basel in 1998. For one week 36 artists and art mediators gathered behind closed doors for discussions.

89. Simon Sheik in *On Knowledge Production*, p. 184

terdisciplinary practice and deepen or widen the discussion of their subject-matter.

Other artists have come to work exclusively on the institutional structure itself. Institutions are here simultaneously able to incorporate institutional critique (and thus paradoxically institutionalize institutional critique). Yet other artists – Tino Seghal is a paradigmatic example – create performative works that play exclusively with the institutional structure, however not primarily as a critique, but rather as a way of rethinking and reinventing the structures and the agents acting there. Tino Seghal's work is completely dependent on oral transmission in the art world since he doesn't allow any of his performative actions to be documented.

The discourse-staging activities have become something much larger than an epitext. They must, as Simon Sheik has pointed out, be considered a cluster that constitutes a genre in its own right. Being a panellist is consequently “/.../ almost a possible occupation, besides curatorial and academic work.”⁹⁰

Regarding this development we have to remember that the art world – or the art worlds – historically have been “talk-talk communities”. Many of the art historical and sociological studies of modernism, for instance of the surrealist and the dada movement, make it clear how these movements evolved around the social. What is seen as a contemporary dilemma: nepotism, male social bonding, elitism, is often viewed through a filter of romanticism when it lies in the past (“the circle around Breton,” “the circle around Picasso,” and so on). But the change of institutional policies in line with the expanded field of art practices, the increasing number of events for staging discourses⁹¹ (including artistic research) at institutions and at alternative spaces, the semiotisation of art, the increased level of theory and discussion in art education – together these factors have enhanced the social aspect of art (making) and art reception. Thus the basis for narration on art

90. Ibid.

91. Unfortunately many of these events function more like group shows in theory and discourse and therefore favor the gathering of a winning team for a certain discourse rather than answering to keywords such as “heterogeneity”, “criticality” and “conflictual positions.” Irit Rogoff writes in her essay “Turning” (*e-flux journal* no. 11 2008): “And so the art world became the site of extensive talking – talking emerged as a practice, as a mode of gathering, as a way of getting access to some knowledge and to some questions, as networking and organizing and articulating some necessary questions. But did we put any value on what was actually being said? Or, did we privilege the coming-together of people in space and trust that formats and substances would emerge from these?”

processes has become even more important. We encounter “/.../ the question of transmission and orality evoked to the reference to conversation” and also the question of “/.../ the nature of the human environment in which this transmission is produced.”⁹²

Except for sketching these historical structural changes, I have no intention of analyzing the “new sociality” in art. My main interest has been the act of talking and writing about processes of art-making. With some examples from the history of conceptual art, I want to show a certain history of talking and telling about art from the artist’s perspective over the last 50 years. The video essay (and the essayistic film), just like the lecture or the reading, here has the role of an event, certainly with an absent living body, but nevertheless with the imaginary, situated body of a narrator in a place.

Work story and life story

A story of *my art*, which consists of a line of *work stories*, has a lot in common with the story that you tell about your life. Both narrations share the same propagandistic and idealizing features. Disturbing/inconvenient elements are excluded: sidetracks, “unproductive” details, slips, episodes that are too odd, and the elements and events threatening one’s investments in an ideology or one’s principal identity.⁹³ Paul Ricœur uses the term *emplotment* for the process in which stories achieve and maintain intelligibility for an individual:

/.../ an event must be more than just a singular occurrence. It gets its definition from its contribution to the development of the plot. A story, too, must be more than just an enumeration of events in serial order; it must organize them into an intelligible whole, of a sort such that we can always ask what is the ‘thought’ of this story. In short, emplotment is the operation that draws a configuration out of a simple succession.⁹⁴

Work stories have various auras. Some seem to be mythological and other documentary, and both of them must have some verisimilitude

92. Clémentine Deliss, in *Knowledge Production*, p. 58.

93. This propagandistic feature also concerns the production of texts for monographs of artists, exhibition catalogues, and press releases. The texts that accompany exhibitions move from description to admiration and applause. Even though art, in its self-image, appears as self-critical, questioning, and open to what is complex, nothing that could be interpreted as negative or questioning towards the artist’s work and his intentions, would ever be included in these texts.

94. Paul Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol 1, p. 65.

to interest people. But work stories not only lay claim to representing reality, they also form the reality and the idea of the truth. And since work stories create imaginary works the moment they are told they have a possibility both to stage and reenact works of art into new shapes (works that even might be materialized or performed later on by the receiver of the story).

In the case of Joseph Beuys, it is evident how the life story or biography became a fundament for the understanding of all his diverse activities as an artist. The life story merges with the *work story*. In the often re-told mythology of his plane crash as a fighter pilot during World War II, one finds the key objects and themes reenacted in his performances and installations: felt, stretcher fat, milk, cold, death, survival, rescue, primitivism, and nomadism:

Had it not been for the Tartars I would not be alive today. They were the nomads of the Crimea, in what was then no man's land between the Russian and German fronts, and favoured neither side. I had already struck up a good relationship with them, and often wandered off to sit with them. "Du nix njemcky" they would say, "du Tartar," and try to persuade me to join their clan. Their nomadic ways attracted me of course, although by that time their movements had been restricted. Yet it was they who discovered me in the snow after the crash, when the German search parties had given up. I was still unconscious then and only came round completely after twelve days or so, and by then I was back in a German field hospital. So the memories I have of that time are images that penetrated my consciousness. The last thing I remember was that it was too late to jump, too late for the parachutes to open. That must have been a couple of seconds before hitting the ground. Luckily I was not strapped in – I always preferred free movement to safety belts /.../ My friend was strapped in and he was atomized on impact – there was almost nothing to be found of him afterwards. But I must have shot through the windscreen as it flew back at the same speed as the plane hit the ground and that saved me, though I had bad skull and jaw injuries. Then the tail flipped over and I was completely buried in the snow. That's how the Tartars found me days later. I remember voices saying "voda" (water), then the felt of their tents, and the dense pungent smell of cheese, fat and milk. They covered my body in fat to help it regenerate warmth, and wrapped it in felt as an insulator to keep warmth in.⁹⁵

95. Beuys quoted in Caroline Tisdall, *Joseph Beuys*, Guggenheim, 1979, pp.16-7.

Tris Vonna-Michel, a contemporary storyteller in art, uses elements in his life story as starting points for long-term research and mythologization. In his audiopoems certain narrative phrases, which seem to be autobiographical, are repeated and linked together. During performances an egg timer gives a temporal frame and his voice is hectic although the stories go in circles and after a while become objectified. As “materialized” entities these stories are given a modular character, they can be used over and over again in different combinations, and they come to exist in a peculiar state between the discursive and non-discursive.⁹⁶ The obscure sound poet, printmaker, painter, filmmaker, etc., Henri Chopin, was Vonna-Michel’s neighbor during a short period of his upbringing in Essex. When asking his father about the reason for being an Essex-boy the father’s response was: “Don’t ask me—ask Henri Chopin. All you need to know is that he loved quail eggs and lived in Paris...”⁹⁷ In slide shows and monologues on speakers, the audience in his installations are offered to take part in his “journey and evolution of Finding Chopin.”⁹⁸ In the work and life of Chopin, he comes to seek the clues for his own work and life. Tris Vonna-Michel finally meets Chopin, brings him quail eggs, but he doesn’t seem to get closer to the mystery.

Another similarity between the work story and the life story is that the possible meaningfulness of the narrative is based on the acknowledgement of the limitations of the continuation of the narrative as well as the infinite number of entry points. If the field or material for artistic interrogation is too wide or open, the artist is terrorized by all the possibilities. At the same time, the actual material has to be as open as it allows a work or adaptation to be.⁹⁹ Alasdair MacIntyre points out these limitations and the importance of a situated narrative in *After Virtue*:

I can only answer the question “What am I to do?” if I answer the prior question “Of what story or stories do I find myself a

96. Massimiliano Gioni connects Tris Vonna-Michel’s work (together with artists like Keren Cytter, Luke Fowler, Patricia Esquivias, and Ryan Trecartin) with what literary critic James Wood has called “hysterical realism” —“/.../ a form of narration peculiar to our time, based on an excess of storytelling and a hyperconnection between characters, stories and substories.” See Massimiliano Gioni, “We Are Too Many,” http://mediaspace.newmuseum.org/ytjpressmaterials/PDFS/WHAT_THE_CURATOR_ARE_SAYING/04_Gioni_Essay.pdf, (12/4 2010).

97. Taken from a leaflet for his exhibition at Tensta Konsthall (10/10 2009 –23/1 2010).

98. Ibid.

99. See Zagorka Živković, “Etik som reflektion och avgörande” in *Diwan* no. 3 1991.

part?” We enter human society, that is, with one or more imputed characters – roles into which we have been drafted – and we have to learn what they are in order to be able to understand how others respond to us and how our responses to them are apt to be construed.¹⁰⁰

Mika Hannula discusses in a similar mode the concept of narration-in-life in *Politics, Identity and Public Space—Critical Reflections In and Through the Practices of Contemporary Arts*. A life story is here treated as something that is becoming a place in itself –“/.../ a place made and shaped within the structures of the social and political space of a process of an identity.”¹⁰¹ Life story is, according to Hannula, a strongly situated and process-based concept, always involved in “/.../ negotiating and constructing its connectedness to where it comes from, where and how it is located now, and where it wants to move on.”¹⁰² Hannula speaks about the process of negotiating these hermeneutical questions of temporality (past, present, future) between individual and society. The interpretation of this negotiation profoundly affects the choices and routes we are able to picture and try to follow, choices that are activated in the social imagination.

But according to Hannula, something is missing in MacIntyre’s concept of (or aim for) narrative unity and Ricoeur’s idea of permanence in time, which “/.../ still remains attached to the hope and goal of unified life.”¹⁰³ “But why unity?” Hannula asks. Why not allow “the plurality, the messiness and the multiple stories to evolve and collide?”¹⁰⁴

The life story is not a linear story, Hannula says. Life stories do not make sense and guarantee no goodness. “We are emotional hooligans. We want more, and we are never satisfied. We are driven by our lack of balance and our inability to slow down.”¹⁰⁵ Our life story “/.../ is about navigating and negotiating through the mundane daily cruelty and stupidity, the ways to trying to learn how to lose, how to come to terms with one’s mistakes, shattered dreams and lack of energy /.../ it

100. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, University of Notre Dame Press 1984, p. 216.

101. Mika Hannula, *Politics, Identity and Public Space –Critical Reflections In and Through the Practices of Contemporary Arts*, Exprothesis, Utrecht Consortium 2009, p. 69.

102. *Ibid.*, p. 69.

103. *Ibid.*, p. 74.

104. *Ibid.*, p. 75.

105. *Ibid.*

is more defined by its collapses and failures rather than by its victories and pleasurable closures.”¹⁰⁶

The “propagandistic” is fundamental to the conjoining function of narration – for instance being tolerant of incongruence and interlacing of different time planes – but it is at the same time also its “neurotic element.” The life story (as well as the work story) struggles to keep the self (the body of work) together and make it meaningful; Montaigne, on the other hand, deconstructs the ego into a manifold of possibilities (“I am then another self”). But actually, as Mika Hannula says, the individual’s struggle to keep the egological narrative together most often takes place in a more disadvantageous position. The mythomaniac not only invents an impressive arsenal of armor, weapons, and divertive maneuvers to maintain the coherence¹⁰⁷ of a narration-in-life, for example to blame fictive versions of the self by claiming that they have acted independently (the use of the ventriloquist’s puppet, a character in a blog or in a novel). Some people who sense the approaching loss, change their strategy and split openly, i.e. become schizophrenics or constitute multiple personalities. MacIntyre says: “When someone complains – as do some of them who attempt or commit suicide – that his or her life is meaningless, he or she is often and perhaps characteristically complaining that the narrative of their life has become unintelligible to them, that it lacks any points, any moments towards a climax or a *telos*.”¹⁰⁸

On the other hand, for those who manage to keep the responsibility of the different egos, there are new structures of meaning to be developed from a polyphonic story of the self (and their body of work), a story in constant revision. American writer Lyn Hejinian wrote the first version of her autobiography *My Life* (1987) at thirty-seven. It consisted of thirty-seven texts, each of them with thirty-seven sentences. By the ages of forty-five and sixty-five she wrote new versions with chapters and sentences according to her age. Her biography and the

106. Ibid.

107. Mika Hannula speaks about the classical criteria for an utterance’s validity: 1) coherence and dissonance; 2) truthfulness; 3) ethical and existential commitment; 4) open and creative strategy; 5) authenticity. To these criteria one can add Maeve Cook’s metaphor of *self-authorship* as ethical activity: tentatively *responsible* and *accountable*, *independent*, *purposive-rational* and as a *strong evaluator*. “All this is enough to make any of us dizzy,” as Hannula says. “These are requirements that clearly nobody can fulfill, which any of us can only hope to have a slight chance to approach – and hope that something get transmitted and pushed forward.” Ibid. pp. 82–84.

108. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 217.

mediating of a self became an ongoing project, a work in progress.¹⁰⁹

For many others, the models of life stories seem magnificently demanding. But it doesn't mean that they are meaningless or impossible. Hannula proposes that we are cherishing the procedural character of the activity and thereby somehow realizing that the life story is performed in “/.../ the grey area of where things can become a place /.../” – the third space.¹¹⁰ It is important that we allow ourselves to see the incompleteness in the aim of achieving completeness. We can do so if we “/.../ find ways to stay closer and to stay put with the details of those small gestures within the daily life.”¹¹¹ We need to get closer to our practice and we need to “/.../ emphasize the necessity of defining the content of these aims and concepts in and through your daily experiences and the practice of what do you do when you do what you do.”¹¹²

The dissemination of a life story and a work story is a sharing process that is directed not only to different more or less defined audiences but also back to the one telling the story. Work stories in combination with life stories are active in the context of artistic research and practice-based research since the sharing of and aim to create a transparency with the work process involves our biographies at the same time that it forces us to undergo an act of self-alienation – to look at oneself as another.

109. Furthermore a reader created a blog where her text is fragmented and distributed as daily notes in a diary starting 31/8 2003 (<http://mylifebylynhejinian.blogspot.com>, 10/8 2009). Lyn Hejinian, *Mitt liv*, Modernista 2004.

110. Hannula, *Politics, Identity and Public Space – Critical Reflections In and Through the Practices of Contemporary Arts*, p. 89. This is in analogy with Edward W. Soja's discussion of the third space. According to Soja it is a space where all social relations: “... become real and concrete, a part of our lived social existence, only when they are spatially 'inscribed' –that is, concretely represented – in the social production of social space. Social reality is not just coincidentally spatial, existing 'in' space, it is presuppositionally and ontologically spatial. There is no unspatialised social reality. There are no aspatial social processes. Even in the realm of pure abstraction, ideology, and representation, there is a pervasive and pertinent, if often hidden, spatial dimension.” (*Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*, Wiley, John & Sons, Incorporated 1996, p. 46)

111. Hannula, *Politics, Identity and Public Space – Critical Reflections In and Through the Practices of Contemporary Arts*, p.88

112. *Ibid.* p. 89.

Work story and post-construction

In the ontology of narratives lies the retrospective character, even though we are always already part of stories, as McIntyre claims. The mediation of a story takes place afterwards, after the events that are retold. It is a reconstruction, or rather *post-construction*. In Swedish art school, the word *efterkonstruktion* (translated by me as post-construction) was previously used as an accusation of adding values and ideas to a finished artwork (“when it is already too late”). But post-construction is an artistic method and a natural part of artistic practice, from my point of view. In other words, post-construction is nothing to be ashamed of (as many artists are) but should be regarded as belonging to the domain of afterthought and as a fundamental part of the self-observation and reflection on one’s own practice. As mentioned above, it is a process that also includes self-alienation, a capacity to see oneself as someone else. In everyday life, such reconstructions are considered a form of prudence: an ability to draw conclusions from, and find a way in one’s own life, thus giving it an ethical dimension. This does not mean that post-construction is not a matter of manipulation. To tell work stories and life stories means to adjust, to remedy and “put right” – in other words to be involved in the process of post-construction. Paul Ricœur writes in *Oneself as Another*:

/.../ we never stop rectifying our initial choices. Sometimes we change them entirely, when the confrontation shifts from the level of the execution of practices that have already been chosen to the question of the adequation between the choices of practice and our life’s ideals, however vague these may be, and yet at times even overriding the rules of a profession we have considered up to that moment to be invariable.¹¹³

Within the procedural and relational nature of post-construction as a storytelling activity lies the narrative’s function to direct social actions and, as in the case of art making, activities are given certain directions. Margaret R. Somers and Gloria D. Gibson have, in a similar way to Ricœur, theorized the term “narrative identity.” Narrative is an ontological condition of social life, they say, and discuss how the narratives form our identity but also how this forming is made in line with existing narratives:

113. Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 178.

Stories guide action /.../people construct identities (however multiple and changing) by locating themselves or being located within a repertoire of emplotted stories: that “experience” is constituted through narratives; that people make sense of what has happened and is happening to them by attempting to assemble or in some way to integrate within one or more narratives; and that people are guided to act in certain ways, and not others, on the basis of the projections, expectations, and memories derived from a multiplicity but ultimately limited repertoire of available, social, public and cultural narratives.¹¹⁴

Ricœur’s text points to the collectiveness of post-construction. But the collective process is fully at work even with an absent subject. One example of this is how narratives are often formed into “idealistic” directions by the forces and needs of the art market or art-ideological investments. Jeffrey Kastner, Sina Najafi and Frances Richard show in *Odd Lots: Revisiting Gordon Matta-Clark’s Fake Estates*¹¹⁵ how rumors, hearsay, and wishful thinking retrospectively reconfigured intentions of Gordon Matta-Clark, and finally, most probably from the pressure of the market, created a series of work as sellable artefacts. Kastner, Najafi and Richard researched the work story of *Reality Properties: Fake Estates* (one of several circulating titles of the work) and realized that this work came to enter the canonical art history after a trajectory of “/.../numerous informational contingencies and gaps /.../scholarly and economic pressures /.../” as well as distortion “/.../by mythmaking and hearsay.”¹¹⁶

Gordon Matta-Clark purchased fourteen small bits of land in Queens and one on Staten Island in 1973 and then moved on to other projects. This was a period of decline of New York and the bankrupt city wanted to get rid of land, including inaccessible and unusable lots, and sold them on property auctions. The price range for the parcels Matta-Clark bought was 25–75 dollars. Some loose photographs, deeds, maps, and related material were, after his death in 1978, found in a cardboard box as a memory of his ownership (tax payments on the

114. Margaret R. Somers and Gloria D. Gibson, “Reclaiming the Epistemological ‘Other’: Narrative and the Social Constitution of Identity” in *Social Theory and the Politics of Identity*, ed. C. Calhoun Blackwell Publishers 1994, pp. 38–39.

115. Jeffrey Kastner, Sina Najafi & Frances Richard, *Odd Lots: Revisiting Gordon Matta-Clark’s “Fake Estates”*, Cabinet Books 2005.

116. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

lots had fallen into arrears long ago and ownership had reverted to the city). For a retrospective show in Valencia, Spain in 1992, his widow Jane Crawford was encouraged to make a series of collages of the found material. By the mid-nineties these entered the art market as “posthumously assembled works” by Gordon Matta-Clark.

When interviewing Crawford and friends about Matta-Clark’s reasons, intentions, and plans for the purchased lots, Kastner, Najafi and Richard realized the degree of post-construction of the series of works that now can be found in important museums and private collections. *Reality Properties: Fake Estates* was somehow the perfect Gordon Matta-Clark work that the artist never made, but with help of the machinery of the art world it came into existence.

The space for improvisation and creative history writing was established already in the fruitful chaos of the SoHo art scene in the early 1970s, where artists had two-hour exhibitions in their studios and constantly worked together and shared thoughts and ideas. I presume this was the sort of culture in which art is created in conversations, a place similar to that which Michel de Certeau speaks about, a place with “/.../ verbal productions in which the interlacing of speaking positions weaves an oral fabric without individual owners, creations of a communication that belong to no one.”¹¹⁷

Matta-Clark’s widow Jane Crawford recalls: “Well, people were always around and things circulated, usually with a new story and title each time.”¹¹⁸ And a friend, Jene Highstein, describes Matta-Clark’s mode of talking and acting in this environment: “If he couldn’t talk about it and play around with language in defining it, then it didn’t proceed very far.”¹¹⁹

He knew a lot more about art history than most of us. That was his upbringing. And not just art history, but the workings of the art world: how things get translated, how information moves around. His father was a great storyteller, and Gordon was a great storyteller. One of the things about being an artist is that you have to be a storyteller. He had mastered that at an early age. He knew, which is something that the rest of us didn’t know so well – although a lot of us were very good storytellers – he understood what that

117. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, University of California Press 1988, xxii.

118. Kastner, Najafi & Richard, p. 53.

119. *Ibid.*, p. 68.

function was for an artist. The mythmaking that an artist does is a very important part of the artist's career. What's left of an artist when he goes mostly is the myth.¹²⁰

Reality Properties: Fake Estates have ended up in private and public collections. Guggenheim Museum bought one version (*Reality Properties: Fake Estates – Little Alley Block 2479, Lot 42*) dated 1974. Already in the mid 1990s these works were sold in galleries for 20 000-30 000 dollars. But it is still unclear if Gordon Matta-Clark ever decided to make the work and he was definitely not responsible for the titles that have circulated. One may say that he created this work by talking about it (there are witnesses and records of that) and that the elements of the work so well fit within his body of work – dealing with site and non-site, left-over spaces as well as with ownership, use-values, and inaccessibility. But the ratification process of his diverse and hectic activities into the status of canonized art must be seen as an example of a transformation from an ontological narrative to a conceptual narrative, to use narratological terms. The work that now exists with the title *Reality Properties: Fake Estates* has been collectively produced, one could say, even though the classical notion of the single authorship of Gordon Matta-Clark still dominates the institutional and commercial frameworks.

Perhaps one may object to my narratological perspective on art processes and insist that a large part of the works presented in exhibitions don't contain narrative elements and that they are not born out of any storytelling tradition whatsoever (on none of the three levels I discussed earlier). Many works in museums, for instance from the minimalist tradition, look like physical statements, pure materiality, something unmediated existing in space, yet affecting our senses. One could perhaps claim that many works are alternatives or counter moves to narratives. And maybe an artist just "does his/her thing" and then refuses to comment on it. Not all artists are into language games as Gordon Matta-Clark was, some may even harbor a deep hatred towards any statement and narrative relating to the artwork. Such an attitude is not uncommon. But such artists seldom hesitate to offer their media description (although many media descriptions go much further than

120. Ibid., p. 40.

“oil on canvas”),¹²¹ they hardly ever complain about all the texts about their work of art which are written by others (critics, writers, colleagues), nor do they resist the *epitext*: titles, press releases, interviews, etc. Under normal circumstances, these artists do not object to passing over biographic accounts which connect the work to the artist’s life and oeuvre, inscribing it in a chronology where the parts are viewed as results in a course of evolution, nor do these artists object to the oral accounts and rumors that surround the work and become an extension of its physical or virtual existence. These artists have just passed on the narration to others. And also, from a more general view, if we follow Somers and Gibson: their activities and “experience” must be considered constituted through narratives.

When works of art, for different reasons, get media attention the work story often becomes a contested and sometimes crucial issue. The work story is sometimes scrutinized in ethical committees and courts, when a sequence of the making or performing infringes on the law or is ethically disputable. Depending on the agent of the story, it may have a totally different structure, accent, and tone which gives it different direction and destination, ethically and legally.¹²² The structuring of the narrative elements, the relation between the plot and the fabula, the inclusion and exclusion, becomes crucial and will determine its supposed purpose and thereby its ethics. Media stories of works of art that are seen as provocative often fall into preconceived patterns. They are often transmitted from media to media, taken over, and repeated by journalists, and, as hermetically self-referential, they begin to live lives of their own, losing the connections to the event that started the media discourse. These stories become the source on which debaters and analysts build their arguments, without at any instance questioning the validity of the story or the interests behind it (for instance the ideological and political investments). The same stories might be used by populist politicians who use the occasion to build alliances with “the people” in order to find scapegoats or to direct general hatred towards

121. Beside a sculptural work by Petah Coyne (at ARS-06, Kiasma) one can read the following text: “Untitled #1111 (Little Ed’s Daughter Margaret), 2003-2004, specially formulated wax, fiberglass cast statuary, velvet, satin, ribbon, thread, steel understructure, PVC pipe and fittings, tree branches, fabricated tree branches, chicken wire fencing, wire, silk flowers, pearl-headed hat pins, tassles, feathers, pumps, irrigation tubing, water, black spray paint, black acrylic paint.”

122. In the few Swedish court cases of artists prosecuted for their works of art the purpose behind their actions is considered to be of great importance.

culture in times of political and financial regression. No matter how vulgar, simplified, or false these work stories may appear from the perspective of the artist who “committed” the work, an established work story in the media (an “abducted” or “hijacked” work story) is almost impossible to adjust or correct.¹²³

Yet another artist would deliberately use media reactions to build the narrative of the work. Intentionally or not – every new reaction from the media becomes an added element in the plot of the work story. The major meaning of making is here displaced from the act of producing a representation or event, to the making in terms of collaborating with, acting in front, and informing the public media.

There will probably always be someone deducting or extracting the work story from an artwork. The questions of the work story remain (and most of them are not answered in this text): What are the means and purposes for the construction of this narrative? What words and

123. As professor at the art department of Konstfack (University College of Arts, Crafts & Design) in Stockholm I took part in the debate in media about one of our student's examination works during the spring of 2009. This debate became one of the most intensive and widespread debates on the role of visual art in Sweden ever. On the 21st of January that year the student Anna Odell simulated a mental breakdown on a bridge in Stockholm. The police were called by two passers-by and she was taken to the emergency psychiatric unit of St. Görans hospital in Stockholm, where she was admitted, put on medication, and placed in a restraining belt. The following day she told the staff at the clinic that she had simulated the event and that it was part of an on-going art project that she planned to present at the graduation show at Konstfack during the spring. Someone from the hospital contacted the media shortly thereafter and a debate of unique magnitude broke out. We teachers knew that the performance at the bridge was not meant as a performance in its own right, but rather a method of research, which she after serious consideration found to be the only way to enter the hospital from the position of a vulnerable patient. The performance was in fact a reenactment of an incident thirteen years prior when she was taken to the same clinic in a psychotic state. From the perspective of the work story, the media alarm 2009 was highly problematic. The work was not finished, she was in the middle of the process. She had filmed the event at the bridge with the help of two fellow students and she had tape-recorded the conversation at the hospital during the moment she revealed the nature of her behavior. Journalists from all media demanded an explanation of this “scandalous” incident. But neither Anna Odell, nor any of us in the teaching staff – who were well-informed about her plans – wanted to give the media any details. We said: “Wait until the work is exhibited.” The only work story in circulation was a story about an art student mimicking a suicide on the bridge, being taken care of by the police under violent kicking, and, when entering the hospital, spitting and swearing at the nurses. The tone of the media story indicated that the “spectacle” was driven by narcissism or for the sake of fun. Each of the contents in the story were sensitive: art, psychiatry and tax money (since this was an examination work at an art school), together they turned out to be explosive. A wave of hatred was directed towards the school. During this phase intellectuals, debaters and bloggers built their opinion solely on the story that originated from the hospital and most of them condemned the school and the student. During a frustrating process, we defended our student in the media, at the same time as we expressed our understanding for the reactions of the nurses involved at the hospital who felt fooled and ridiculed in their duty. >

what rhetoric are in use? To what extent is it the artist's story or some one else's? What are the reasons for inclusion and exclusion of elements in the work story? Can mythical elements be distinguished from truth? And how do these narratives relate, adjust to and integrate with the available, social, public and cultural narratives: the grand narratives, the meta-narratives and the dominating ideologies and forces of the art world and the society as a whole?

In the practical work of my artistic research, I focused on two questions: if it is possible to work with an extended, essayistic work story. And if the video essay as genre activates some of the reflexive and critical possibilities of a work story at the same time as it stages a storytelling situation.

> When the work was shown at Konstfack in May (with the title *Okänd kvinna* [Unnamed woman]) the media interest was at its peak. Anna Odell had to be accompanied by hired bodyguards 24 hours a day during the days of opening due to anonymous threats against her. Now she gave long interviews in all media. Her reasons and own version of the actions and events were revealed in the epitext as well as the pretext. The work was a three-part installation: the first room showing her research, i.e. interviews with a psychiatrist, a lawyer, and the head of a psychiatric clinic, the second room showing the video documentation of the quite brutal actions of the police taking her into custody, and the third room with the sound of the conversation at the hospital. The installation, together with her interviews radically changed the work story. The audience now understood that the acting out was a reenactment of her own history and a part of an investigation of the role of the patient in psychiatry. Several debates followed with different points of focus: a critique of psychiatry, the role of the artist ("is this art?"), and the legal aspects of her work. But still the first media story continued to be the ground story. Not until Anna Odell was prosecuted could the more fact-based work story be told and get full attention. In the courtroom, in front of the law and under oath, the policemen and the employees at the hospital had to correct the story about her violent behavior. She had not spat on anyone or hurt anyone. In front of the law she was allotted a generous amount of time and tremendous attention from everyone, including the media (the trial was broadcasted directly on national radio) when delivering the work story. Outside the courtroom, a group of relatives of mentally ill patients demonstrated in favor of her cause. Anna Odell was convicted on two of three points: violent resistance [våldsamt motstånd] and "fraudulent procedure" [oredligt förfarande] – a sentence that was considered historic and caused a lot of arguments in the media (gaining very little support in the established media). Several journalists declared openly in articles that they had changed their opinion after learning about the background and seeing the work. And the events in the courtroom became an integrated part of her work, represented in subsequent versions of her installation. (Two of my own articles during the debate are: Magnus Bårtås, "Laganda" in *Expressen*, 1/6 2009 and Magnus Bårtås, "Ur fas med folket" in *Expressen*, 10/3 2009 (<http://www.expressen.se/kultur/1.1590001/Laganda>, <http://www.expressen.se/kultur/1.1492869/ur-fas-med-folket>, 20/3 2010))

4. Artistic research – a new old practice

Reports that say that something hasn't happened are always interesting to me, because as we know, there are known knowns; there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns, that is to say we know there are some things we don't know. But there are also unknown unknowns – the ones we don't know we don't know.

Donald Rumsfeld (US Department of Defence news briefing February 12, 2002)

If a process of knowledge contains on the one hand familiarity and what Nelson Goodman calls *entrenchment*,¹²⁴ and on the other hand ransacking, questioning and even destruction, the first pole is rooted in institutions – like universities and academies – the other implies impetus and movement. Mobility of knowledge belongs to the latter pole but is, as is the University, dependent on different forms of representation, presentation, and degrees of transformation. In the art world this mobility is still, despite all web-communication, deeply connected with a culture of narration in the social (non virtual) spheres.

Narration also depends on curiosity – a word that has accrued a slightly sloppy aura in contemporary discussion. Sina Najafi, editor of *Cabinet Magazine* – a magazine that has engendered its own magazine genre and is an art project in its own right – wants to rehabilitate the word: “When we hear curiosity, we are bound to be in the presence of a browser-flâneur whose intellectual attention deficit disorder means any line of inquiry is abandoned before it can be shaped into any sort of proper foundation: ‘jack-of-all-trades, master of none,’ as the saying goes.”¹²⁵ But curiosity can actually evoke “/.../ the basis of an ethical relationship toward the world, a state of mind that allows the world-as-wonder not just to be seen but also to be cared for and about.”¹²⁶ Curiosity has to do with estrangement, a situation that Foucault talks about as “/.../ the knower’s straying afield of himself.” It is not a curiosity “/.../ that seeks to assimilate what is proper for one to know,

124. See, for instance, Nelson Goodman, *Fact, Fiction and Forecast*, Harvard University Press 1983.

125. Sina Najafi, “Cut the Bean: Curiosity and Research in the Pages of Cabinet Magazine” in *What is Research in the Visual Arts?: Obsession, Archive, Encounter*, eds. Michael Ann Holly & Marquard Smith.

126. *Ibid.*

but which enables oneself to get free of oneself.”¹²⁷ It is even, as Najafi indicates, possible to situate an ethics for artistic research in this form of “/.../ displacement of the self from itself.”¹²⁸

Sina Najafi tells a parable that is highly related to artistic research, as well as being a parable of two oppositional artistic mindsets.

On the evening of 26 December 1934, André Breton and Roger Caillois encountered a Mexican jumping bean for the very first time. Caillois, a precocious twenty-one-year-old member of the Surrealist movement, was as astonished as Breton at the antics of the little bean. There must be an insect or larva in it, he offered, and suggested that they cut the bean to find out its secret. Breton was offended by this suggestion, arguing that such a humdrum, empirical approach would dispel the little bean’s mystery and undermine its potential for conjuring various poetic, explanatory scenarios in the minds of the viewers. And so it was that the creature inside the bean survived. The friendship between Caillois and Breton did not.¹²⁹

The two artists had two opposing impulses, representing research and poetry. But this is not a real conflict, according to Caillois. To cut the bean open is not to disenchant the world. Caillois did not fear knowledge because the question of marvel, of wonders, is not a question of a lack of knowledge. If Breton believed that the marvelous is in the mind of the viewer, Caillois finds the marvelous in the world itself.

This radically de-anthropocentric understanding of wonder makes the world and all its phenomena into an invitation to research; knowledge will only increase engagement and wonder, not diminish it. Knowing the astonishing fact that a moth larva has managed to find a home in the bean signals neither the end of questions nor the end of marvel or poetry. It in fact invites other questions, at once fully scientific but also imbued with the same sense of inquisitive wonder that Breton and Caillois both wish to preserve and enhance: How did the larva come to have this relationship with the bean? What history of evolution caused these two different life forms to engage each other in such an extraordinary way?¹³⁰

127. Ibid.

128. Ibid.

129. Ibid.

130. Ibid.

Needless to say, Sina Najafi is on Caillois' side. And so am I, with the reservation that sometimes one is too lazy to cut the bean open. I also believe works of art never should be reduced to a mere production of knowledge and cannot fully be inscribed in established epistemology.¹³¹ Within art practice there has been a need for alternative models

131. Eva Mark and Mats Rosengren are two Swedish philosophers who have been occupied with "alternative" theories of knowledge. Eva Mark relates to an institutional idea of science where the scientific community itself is defining its problems, its domains and its limits. This is a socially constructed but blind power structure – in these systems the individual acts with its *habitus* (Bourdieu). With Aristotle Mark speaks of "practical wisdom" – *fronesis*, separate from science (or knowledge) – *episteme*. Aristotle stipulates a contradiction, or bipolarity that, according to Mark, is false. What might dissolve this kind of bipolarity is creativity, not least creativity as a social process. Eva Mark presents a thesis that implies that all knowledge is practical and that the thinking which is involved in practical actions is not separate from, but a significant part, of the act. Mark (like Bengt Molander) speaks here about "thinking-in-action." Mark's reasoning concerns linguistic and non-linguistic aspects of practical knowledge. Here, there is a resemblance to some problems, which are central to artistic research, but also to artistic practice as such – "to make a work of art." Mark puts forward a basic model for both thought and action. Here are three levels of epistemology of practice; a non-verbalisable ("common") one, concerning actions which cannot be reflected on; a praxis analysis; and a third systematically developed scientific theory and practice. See Eva Mark, "Praktiska teoretiker och teoretiska praktiker. Om kunskap som aspekter av kultur," in: *Kulturarvens gränser* ed. P. Aronsson, B. Skarin Frykman, B. Hodne, J. Ödemark, Arkipelag, 2006.

Mats Rosengren introduces his epistemological concept in *Doxologi* (Rethor Förlag 2006). By developing Protegra's thesis that man is the measure of all things, he wants to, via rhetoric amongst other things, form a conception of knowledge that is situated between *doxa* (popular opinion) and *episteme*. Rosengren connects *doxa* to knowledge, and emphasizes the former as a prerequisite and foundation for the latter. Thus, *doxology* would be "the human knowledge" – prejudiced, full of assumptions and preconditions, unlike the metaphysical sense of knowledge. Like Eva Mark, Rosengren speaks about the intertwining of knowledge and practice. But when Mark claims that all seeking of knowledge is practical, Rosengren claims that it is as practical as it is not. To "know everything" (theory) and to "know how" (practice) are indeed interconnected, but they are always depending on "when?" With Nietzsche, Rosengren asks: "From where does the will to know originate?" To answer that question one has to consider the knowledge process as situated – "when?" From Ludwik Fleck's theory of knowledge (*The Genesis and Development of a Scientific Fact*, 1935) he speaks of the concepts of *thought styles* and *thought collectives*, which are in a circular relation. Thought style, just like Foucault's *episteme* and Thomas Kuhn's *paradigm*, signifies the dominant way of thinking, a model for scientific practice and reasoning. Fleck's concept is, however, more related to a local context and does not include as much as those of Foucault and Khun. Thought collective could be compared to a discursive field. From the most hard-boiled of scientific traditions, Fleck could show that so-called facts are almost always based on interpretations and conceptual systems and that interpretation and description are basically inseparable. Rosengren also claims (with Pierre Bourdieu) that every more or less distinct social domain has its own *doxa*, which normally isn't put into question from within, by the group itself. The *doxa* constitutes the frame of reference. In this context the most common, or widespread *doxa* (the least subcultural) could be called common sense. Through Bourdieu (who Rosengren connects to the tradition of rhetoric) Fleck's ideas of scientific knowledge production are put in relation to an everyday, non-disciplinary, and political production of knowledge. To accomplish a successful rhetorical/*doxological* achievement or work the non-discursive *ethos* and *pathos* must interact with the discursive *logos*, if I understand Rosengren correctly.

that embrace a holistic idea of knowledge opposed to the Cartesian split between mind and body.¹³²

The trajectory of an artwork is meandering. A methodological question (specific for artistic research) would be: How is one to perform and describe a research/art process in a way that makes some sort of knowledge and understanding of the investigation accessible without thereby totally reducing the risky and heterogeneous process which lies behind a work of art? It's a process that staggers between conscious choice and chance, conceptual direction and wishful thinking, theoretical influence and imitation, entrenchment and alienation, epistemology and suspense, construction and post-construction, quick fancies and treated memories, vision and fantasies, conceptions and misconceptions, laziness and mania, miscalculations and pure luck, practical and physical limitations, cowardice and braveness...¹³³

The question above implies that I consider artistic research as being a part of an already established history, although until recently not formally introduced to an institutional framework. With productive anachronism many individual and collective works in the history of art –not least within the conceptual tradition –can be considered examples of artistic research. The same can be said of many works in the tradition of essayistic film, which is of primary interest in this study. The works of Chris Marker, for instance, have all the significant characteristics of

132. Artists and theorists have in recent years aestheticized and idealized the 1968 rebellion against the educational systems of Western European and American universities. Even though the criticism of the class structure and Eurocentric nature of the traditional university system paved the way for cultural studies (such as feminism, queer theory and post colonial criticism) and jointly organized forms of knowledge production, the history writing of this era suffers from being more romantic than radical and neglects many of the complex political forces and power struggles among the student groups of that period. (An example of an idealized history writing can be found in Marion von Osten's text "Such Views Miss the Decisive Point... The Dilemma of Knowledge-based Economy and its Opponents" in *On Knowledge Production*.) Even the power-seeking and dogmatic terminology of the fighting Maoist groups from the end of the sixties echoes (without irony) in the manifesto-like text "We Have Won" by Copenhagen Free University (an alternative self-institutionalization by artist duo Henriette Heise and Jacob Jacobsen). Copenhagen Free University is criticizing the social movements after the "/.../" victories of London, Seattle, Gothenburg and Genoa "/.../" for being "/.../" reformist and unclear" (*On Knowledge Production*, p. 41).

133. One also has to be reminded of the fact that this wobbly movement ahead is submitted to the art system with its agents that operate within and form institutional, political, social and economical frameworks. This discourse – in addition to the academic discourse – permeates the art/research project in different levels.

artistic research such as critical approach and self-reflexivity.¹³⁴ Gunnar D Hansson argues for the essay as an already existing form of artistic research. The essay is a form of self-education in the art of scrutinizing the foundations for the already accomplished; the forming of the formed, Hansson says with a reference to Adorno (*“Gestaltung des Gestalteten”*). “The self-ransacking and interrogating activity of the essay implies obvious resemblances with artistic knowledge production. Methods, critical standpoints and reflections can find points of support and inspiration from diverse directions.”¹³⁵

Despite this research tradition within art the establishment of the academic discipline involves a transformation. Apart from being connected to a specific system and a specific structure (the University) this transformation also involves a demand for artists to be more meticulous when it comes to the documentation, contextualization and clarification of their process. Even if the works produced within the framework of artistic research are quite similar to other works of art, this academization of art requires a transparent process. The reason for this is probably that it is this part that can be considered a new field of knowledge (within the University). This part is also what separates artistic research from the humanities, as mentioned before: for the first time the artistic process is investigated from within the artistic practice and not from “outside” (art history, art theory, etc.).

Talk talk – and write

The next question would then be: what sort of “report” will be delivered from inside the practice? In art history one finds outlines of narration that artists have written about their own practice, for example in artist’s writings, which can be considered a forerunner to artistic research. It would be worthwhile going forty or fifty years back in time and reading some texts in order to try to understand how artists have approached the issue.

To begin with, Allan Kaprow wrote quite a few texts and talked a lot about his art. Still, he seemed to be hesitant about this practice

134. See, for instance Mika Hannula, Juha Suoranta & Tere Vadén, *Artistic Research – Theories, Methods and Practices*, Art Monitor 2005.

135. “Essäns självvrannsakande och undersökande verksamhet visar påtagliga likheter med den konstnärliga kunskapsbildningen. Metoder, kritiska förhållningssätt och reflektioner kan finna stödjepunkter och inspiration från skilda håll.” Gunnar D Hansson, “Behövs poetik? Finns det regler? Är essäer konst?” in *Art Monitor* no. 1 2007.

(which he obviously considered a meta-practice), at least in the early part of his career. In a text from 1958 he claimed that artists have to invent an incentive to motivate them to write about their own art; writing has to be turned into an adventure in itself.

I think that when an artist writes about his art, he should write in the profoundest sense only for himself. He should amuse himself, question, cajole, invent roles for himself, saddle his image with great tasks, address with studied relish his towering ambitions, and above all, take himself as unseriously as possible. It is just at that moment when the words become most perfectly soliloquised that they take on something of the air of authenticity /.../ After all, who really wants to write on what he does? A whole career is devoted to imagining things and if the artist is to be at all interested in taking his pulse as though he were a patient to be examined, he must find some way to turn this procedure into an adventure, a form of life itself. He cannot be satisfied merely to translate in digest form what already has been completely expressed in his latest creative efforts.¹³⁶

Thinking of the oral tradition in America, of which Kaprow is a part, I am quite certain that he separates writing on art from his speaking about art. Nowhere else in the world are artists as well-prepared and skilful in telling the short and precise story of their art and artistic practice.¹³⁷ (The skill of storytelling is significant for the American culture as such; Americans are always prepared to tell their life story to whoever may listen. Without any strain the story flows in a traffic jam, in a bar or wherever.) But Kaprow's words from 1958 are still valid when it comes to artists writing their thesis – they remain critical to the decisions of how to write about one's own work of art and research.

Eleven years later, in 1969, Erik Beckman wonders why artists (in his case writers) in their “postulated ambitions” become “kind and tender as a bucket of water next to a lilac tree.”

136. Allan Kaprow, “Untitled Essay” in *Untitled Essay and other works*, ubuclassics 2004 (www.ubu.com), 5/4 2009), originally published as a Great Bear Pamphlet by Something Else Press 1967.

137. Kaprow speaks about writing on *my art*. But for most people writing has a close connection to the oral tradition, even if one has to be aware of the distinction between the two of them. In this text I move hasty between writing and talking without analyzing the difference. For example Paul Ricour discusses this problem in “Utterance and Speaking Subject: A Pragmatic Approach” in *Oneself as Another*.

Far too many of us writers are sleeping partners with pedagogues, long-term planners, intellectuals keen on honesty and rigid moralists, our super egos. Still, the writers' postulated ambitions sound like Goethe and bishops and the principal's speech at the graduate ceremony: self-realisation, responsibility, analysis, information, making of contacts, messages, God's eyes, searching and finding, know yourself, know your neighbor...¹³⁸

Eventually, artists had to answer for themselves and were forced to engage in public discussions and self-presentations. I know that many artists still feel uncomfortable with this, and it would be comforting to write that it doesn't make them any less of an artist but at that very moment the cynical banderol of Mladen Stilinovic comes to mind, informing us that "AN ARTIST WHO CANNOT SPEAK ENGLISH IS NO ARTIST." A work that puts its finger on a power regime and a globalized culture whose importance and significance have increased ever since the work was made in 1992.¹³⁹

In the sixties some American artists fully embraced this aforementioned "shift" to both speaking and writing.¹⁴⁰ The breakthrough of linguistic conceptual art coincides with the relocation of the center of the art world to America and the emerging dominance of the English language.

In 1969 Lawrence Weiner stated: "People, buying my stuff, can take it wherever they go and can rebuild it if they choose. If they keep it in their heads, that's fine too. They don't have to buy it to have it – they

138. "Alltför många av oss skrivare är sleeping partners till pedagoger, långtidsplanerare, intellektuella hederlighetsivrare och rigida moralister, våra överjag. Fortfarande låter författarens målsättningspostulat som Goethe och biskopar och rektorstal på avslutningar: självförverkligande, ansvar, analys, information, kontaktskapande, budskap, gudsögon, sökande och finnande, känn dig själv, känn dig nästa..." Erik Beckman, "Erik Beckman intervjuar Erik Beckman" in *Ingen ny värdighet, kortprosa 1960-1969*, Erik Beckman-sällskapet 2007 (originally published in *Dagens Nyheter* 3/8 1969).

139. A video work by Kurdish artist Fikret Atay from 2004 (*Lalo's story*) deals with a new era for oral storytelling in the troubadour tradition. The artist, who at the time lived and worked in Batman east of Mardin (southern Turkey or northern Kurdistan), arranges in the video a *dengbêj* – a traditional storytelling when a wandering storyteller sings about the recent, most often tragic, events – where a young man sings for an elderly man. But the *dengbêj* is performed in broken English. The old man smiles and nods without understanding a word.

140. On the other hand, in a wider historical perspective one could say that this was a return of narration, rather than a transition. There was a strong connection between image and text in the Christian art of the Middle Ages as well as in dada, futurism, and surrealism. Martin Jay speaks of modernity as a phase of "de-narrativisation and de-textualisation." See "Scopic Regimes of Modernity" in *Tidskriften Index*, no. 1, 1995, p. 96.

can have it just by knowing it.”¹⁴¹ Weiner went from making sculptures to writing texts describing the material and surface of imaginary sculptures. These texts became increasingly free and independent of materiality and spatial conditions. The spatial content was rather expressed by the placement and location of the texts on the façades of buildings, in streets and rooms.

Douglas Huebler didn't want to make any more objects either – the world was already full of things. His (utopian) idea was to exclusively document his artistic acts in a “non-aesthetic” way and to communicate them as information. His own proclamations formed the structure of the works.

What I say is part of the artwork. I don't look to critics to say things about my work. I tell them what it's about. People deny words have anything to do with art. I don't accept that. They do. Art is a source of information.¹⁴²

Ian Wilson, an artist from the same generation, found speech to be the only thing necessary. This insight appeared when he was looking at a sculpture by Robert Morris (probably in 1968). It was quite easy for Wilson to describe it, “to say it.”

I went away thinking that it was not necessary for me to see that sculpture again, I could just say it – not even say it – but think it /.../ when someone says to you: I am working with a cube, you know exactly what he is talking about. You hold the essence of the idea in your head. It's just like someone saying: I am thinking

141. Lawrence Weiner, *Statements* (October 12, 1969), www.ubu.com/papers/weinwr_statements.html, (5/3 2010).

142. Quoted in David L. Shirey, “Impossible Art: What It Is (‘Thinkworks’)” in *Art in America*, May-June 1969. Huebler didn't stick to his decision not to make any more objects. And the unaesthetic style he adapted was later to be the very expression of conceptual aesthetics. Mike Kelly comments on this in a text (a critical tribute to his teacher): “Conceptual art's primary visual source looks to be the academic textbook, where the poorly-printed photograph or diagram, accompanied by a caption, is standard fare. The fact that this mode of address is culturally omnipresent does not render it invisible /.../ It is only invisible in context. The art world pressures operating at the time to render the visual tropes of Conceptualism invisible are twofold. The first is political – artists of the time sought to make works which, in their seemingly invisible (‘dematerialized’ to use Lucy Lippard's term) state, could symbolically lie outside of commodity status. The second pressure was philosophical – to downplay the fetishised objectness of artworks was to play up the mind, the intelligence, of its maker. This is the Duchampian model. Nevertheless, the visual tropes of conceptualism were not invisible, which is obvious now that it has been rendered an academic and historically recognisable art movement.” (Mike Kelly, “Shall We Kill Daddy?” www.strikingdistance.com/c3inov/kelley.html, 8/8 2009).

of God—that's as close as you will ever get to it—you have the essence of the idea. My next step was simply to realize my interest in speech as a medium – first of all – of communication and secondly as the object of communication.¹⁴³

The statement was made in an interview (1969). The previous year he had drawn a chalk circle on the ground, and it was his last physical work. He had realized that it was more interesting to talk about the circle than to draw it.¹⁴⁴

Ian Wilson is the best example one can think of to illustrate the significance of oral tradition in the art world. He is, for instance, quoted six times in Lucy Lippard's *Six Years: the Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972...* Apart from a few notes on his activities like this, his works are nowhere to be found. Hardly any visual or aural documentation exists and few have ever seen or heard him perform. He has become a myth and his works exist all but exclusively in people's talk about them. Not even his speech and ideas have the definite form of statements, he comes to such a point that he claims that speech only performs its subject, and is equivalent to its subject.

Such a subject is "time". The work consists of Ian Wilson telling people he meets that he is interested in the word time:

I would be at a gallery opening and someone would ask me: "so what are you doing these days?" I would reply, "I am interested in the word 'time'." Later, someone would ask: "But how can time be your art?" And I might have replied, "as it is spoken: 'time'." Another day, someone might have asked, having heard I was using time as my art: "So what are you working with these days?" and I would reply: "'time'. I am interested in the idea /.../ I like the work when it is spoken: 'time'".¹⁴⁵

143. "Ian Wilson in Conversation with Ursula Meyer, November 12, 1969". *Whatspace*, <http://whatspace.nl/filosofies/ian-wilson.html>, 16/4 2010.

144. His only other manifest work *Circle on the wall* was, for some reason, "remade" – dated 1968 – in a group show at Galleri Nicolai Wallner, 2006 (*The Known and the Unknown*) curated by Claus Robenhagen and Jonathan Monk. In recent years Jonathan Monk has also invited Ian Wilson to speak in his exhibitions at specific points of time. On March 1, 2009, the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven presented the publication *Ian Wilsson's The Discussions* – identified as a *catalogue raisonné* – containing all discussions by Ian Wilson between 1968 and 2008. On the occasion of the release of this publication Ian Wilson hosted a new discussion.

145. Edward Allington, "About time" in *Frieze Magazine*, Issue 92, June-August 2005. Wilson's descriptions of his method also remind of the methods economists use tputting trademarks and other kinds of immaterial values in circulation, to increase the value.

In other words, the core of Ian Wilson's work is hearsay, rumors, and word of mouth stories. Besides, the issues he is dealing with are too complicated and too hard to grasp to fit into a distinct conceptual framework. This is usually an underlying idea in conceptual art: an idea has a form and expresses a notion of aesthetics, and is a figure of thought. In this respect Ian Wilson can be labeled as a post-conceptual artist.

Theories of course are things; they are what Edmund Husserl called noematic objects; that is, mental objects. Every thought or concept is an object, and every thought has a form or aesthetic presence (what does a centaur look like? an angel?). There is, in other words, an aesthetics of thought with its own styles and its own formalism.¹⁴⁶

In Wilson's works everything has collapsed into a unity: the subject, method and narration of his own practice. His work follows the development of linguistic theories of speech-acts, focusing on the performative, for example J. L. Austin's *How to Do Things With Words*¹⁴⁷ from 1962. The French translation of Austin's book has the suitable title *Quand dire, c'est faire*.

Sharing the work story

As I see it, these American conceptual artists emphasized – and drew the consequences of – something already existing in art: namely that there neither is, nor has there ever been, an art that is not surrounded by texts and narration. Nevertheless, art continued to be presented in the same way, more or less, as before. Almost all conceptual art was, in one way or the other, objectified and the works were often detached from their work story. What does this mean? Simply put: That the art market swallows everything, wraps it up and offers it as a specific product? Or maybe that the break with “wordless” modernism – where, as discussed earlier, the word “literary” was an insult to a work since it was considered a crutch – wasn't that radical after all? “Yes” should be the answer to both questions. The art world commodifies all art (which shouldn't surprise anyone anymore) and “the literary” was already there in art even if it was stubbornly denied.

146. Thomas McEvilley, “I Think Therefore I Art” in *Artforum*, Summer 1985, p. 46.

147. J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*, Harvard University Press 1962.

This was no reason, however, for conceptual works of art (and neo-conceptual art) to be presented in the same way as paintings or sculptures that deal mostly with problems of color and form. Why all this trickery? Why can't we have an open access to the work story? Why do we have to ask someone who knows the secret? What if we don't know any initiated people?

There are probably many complicated answers to these questions, answers that involve the mythic¹⁴⁸ and oral culture of the art world as well as the fetishistic aspect of art. Here one also stumbles upon elements from the esoteric and magic traditions.

To begin with one should note that work story is something more than the hermeneutical concept *fusion of horizons*. When considering, for example, Kara Walker's cut-paper silhouettes that play with stereotypes of racism and sexism, it is assumed that one knows that they are made by an afro-American woman. A rudimentary knowledge of her biography is a prerequisite, an expected fusion of horizons. The cut-paper technique holds the discourse of folk art and its methodological sceneries (where we sometimes visualize the artist at work and sometimes the imitations of historical characters as we imagine them). Besides that, we need not to know that much more about the actions that form a part of the work. Already in the technique combined with the motifs, one finds all the conflicts and contradictory voices that constitute a work of art, and which can never be reduced to a simple bipolarity.

However, when confronting the neo-conceptualist work *Flaga 1972-2000* by Simon Starling (2000) the viewer is completely lost if he doesn't have access to the work story. Inside the exhibition space one contemplates a red and white Fiat 126 from the mid seventies. It looks a bit funny, and seems to have run quite a few miles, but apart from that there is hardly any information to be obtained from its physical apparition in the room. Not until we hear the work story does the piece become meaningful.¹⁴⁹ Starling bought the car in Turin, where it is no

148. In this text I have only indicated the meaning of myth in work stories and biographies. Two classical studies are Arnold Hauser, *The Social History of Art, Vol I-IV*, Routledge 1999 (1952) and Ernst Kris & Otto Kurz, *Legend, Myth, and Magic in the Image of the Artist: A Historical Experiment*, Yale University Press 1979 (1934).

149. Nicholas Bourriaud calls Simon Starling's method of displacing objects in space "viatorisation" (from Latin *viator*, "traveler"), which is a way of illuminating the history of an object. For Simon Starling (and Darren Almond) "historical memory, like the topography of the contemporary world, exists only in the form of a network." Nicholas Bourriaud, "Altermodern," essay for the Tate Triennial 2009.

longer manufactured, and drove it to Warsaw, to where the manufacturing had been relocated (and has now closed down). There he bought the same car in white and replaced the red doors, the bonnet and some other details with the white Polish parts. He then drove this hybrid back to Italy. The work thus contains an account of a performance, the car is a document rather than a sculpture. It is all about its provenance. Still, one cannot expect to find the work story on a sign beside the car. The account of this story would probably take the power out of just that which is rewarded in exhibitions (because it creates a sense of belonging), the spreading of rumors. The problem is, of course, that this spreading of rumors is elitist.

Here, it would be appropriate to look at the original meaning of the Greek concept *theoria*. At first *theoria* had a very precise and concrete meaning: it was the report that someone (reporters) made on returning to a village after having witnessed important events (for example Olympiads). The meaning of *theoria* wasn't the actual witnessing of the event, but the witness sharing the reality manifested in the story. What was important here was the social aspect and the act of storytelling.¹⁵⁰ Now, the question is, with whom to share one's story. In commercial art, *theoria* is not shared with just anyone. To get a share of the story one must somehow gain a place in the audience.

The art market has been able to use this exclusive mechanism in its fetishizing of art. A fetish is basically an object of fear.¹⁵¹ The will to maintain exclusive or unreachable values is nourished by this fear of not knowing, of not doing what is appropriate, that is, of not owning.

150. Cöster describes this tradition in contrast to the Hellenic and Gnostic notion of text, which represent an allegorical tradition. Here text is an obstacle for meaning (inner, deeper or higher meaning). It's like a filter or code between the human and the higher reality. See Henry Cöster, "Tolkning av text och verklighet" in *Res Publica*, "Tema Paul Ricœur," 1987.

151. Allan McCollum explored and set the stage for the fetishizing process in art in his *Plaster Surrogates* in the mid-80s. He produced an enormous amount of basically identical works: all made of plastic, with the same dark rectangle in the middle, a simulated mounting board with a simple frame. It was as though they were logos or signs for paintings. In an interview with David Robbins he tells how as a child he went with his parents to a gigantic Christmas party for the employees of the airplane factory where they both worked. In the industrial complex where the party was held, there was a huge pile of Christmas presents. All of them were wrapped in the same way with the same contents. The children waited in a line for a long time to receive one identical copy of the same Santa Claus. "What is a corporation trying to communicate at a moment like that? Generosity? Power? Threat? I found the whole experience really frightening, as I recall, but naturally, I wanted the gift. This is the kind of nightmarishly ambiguous atmosphere I want to create with my installations /.../' (David Robbins, *The Camera Believes Everything*, Edition Patricia Schwartz 1988, p. 26.)

Above all, it is the ambitious middle class that is haunted by this fear. But if earlier fear of not owning was about precious objects, the fetishism now concerns information and knowledge. Seen from this angle artistic research, with its aim to share processes, becomes something disturbing or even improper confronted with a consumer culture (and an art market) nourished by fear.

What kind of *theoria* the experiences of artistic research will involve and offer still remains an open question. And the question of what kind of *theoria* artistic research will use when offering its experiences, remains to be answered. In an essay on narration in relation to the three time modes (the past, the present, and the future), philosopher Peter Kemp comments on the limits of scientific language:

A purely descriptive language can only express how things in nature, society or mental life are connected. Despite the degree of elaboration of its concepts and despite the number of well-founded experiments it relies on it cannot capture a person's course of life. This means that no entirely scientific discourse will ever grasp what human action is. /.../ Thus, narrative language is essential to the expression of our experiences and actions. Our life is meaningful only if we have a life story.¹⁵²

5. The video essay

The cinematic revolution now in progress is based on what is essentially a very simple idea: that a subject can engender form and that to choose a subject is to make an aesthetic choice.

Noël Burch in *The Theory of Film Practice*.

Talking to and listening to images

Harun Farocki speaks in *Schnittstelle* [Interface] from 1995 about the practical and theoretical working conditions when editing video essays. To a greater extent than the language-based conceptual (American) art tradition, Farocki is also open to the logic that is developed by the material itself. Someone who is making a film might realize at the editing table that the images he or she is looking at are not at all the images he or she thought they had filmed.

He dwells on the physical relationship between the editing process

152. Peter Kemp, "Urberättelse, livshistoria, grundberättelse" in *Divan* no. 3, November 1992.

and the hand (while cutting film), and the mechanical production of copying frames of film for video. The very process of editing establishes the basic filmic language where “images comment on images.” He says:

Later I learned how to reclaim from the images the text that would accompany them. I spoke to the images and heard things from them.¹⁵³

It seems that to Farocki, a video essay is simultaneously a text extracted from images and images that are commented on both by other surrounding images and by the text talking back to the footage. In certain parts of *Schnittstelle*, he elaborates on this conversation between image and text by reusing footage from his older film essays – he provides them with a new context and repeats their narrative voices as an echo.

The theorist Thomas Elsaesser acknowledges that Harun Farocki – who is “/.../ a close reader of images and an exegete-exorcist of their ghostly ‘afterimages’”¹⁵⁴ – considers a subject worth taking up if it fulfils at least three requirements:

/.../ he must be able to picture the phenomenon in its details as well as show how it partakes of a larger process, he must be able to establish, however obliquely, a level of reflexive self-reference, and finally, he must be able to hint at a hidden centre, an Archimedean point, more often sensed than seen.¹⁵⁵

In a text about the video essay, Jan Verwoert discusses its technique of creating a “disjunctive synthesis” – the establishment of simultaneous fascination and skepticism through the use of both traditional narrative means, e.g. where a forward movement carries the story, and distancing elements such as surprising combinations of heterogeneous image sources, sudden breaks and a mixture of staged scenes and documentary material. The result allows a form of double viewing.¹⁵⁶

Edward Small holds that the video essay is a form where theory is realized in a film, he calls it “direct theory,”¹⁵⁷ whereas Michael Renov

153. Harun Farocki, *Schnittstelle*, 1995.

154. Thomas Elsaesser, “Harun Farocki: Filmmaker, Artist, Media Theorist” in *Harun Farocki. Working on the Sight-Lines*, p. 13.

155. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

156. Jan Verwoert, “Double Viewing: The Significance of the ‘Pictorial Turn’ to the Critical Use of Visual Media in Video Art” in *Stuff it: The Video Essay in the Digital Age*.

157. Edward S. Small, *Direct Theory: Experimental Film/Video as Major Genre*, Southern Illinois University Press 1994.

in two essays in *The Subject of Documentary* discusses how a number of aspects or characteristics of the literary essay also apply to the essayistic film or video essay. Firstly it confounds the laws of genre and classification, challenging the very notion of text and textual economy. Secondly it has a tendency toward complication (digression, fragmentation, repetition and dispersion) rather than composition. Thirdly it is provisional rather than systematic.¹⁵⁸ Furthermore, Renov says that the video essay as a genre (if it is a genre) combines, or is moving between, three traditions: documentary, feature film, and experimental film (one can add that this genre institutionally bridges the gap between the social and economic systems of art and film as well).

It can be worthwhile to follow Renov's way of connecting the video essay with the literary genre, a tradition he traces to Montaigne's essays in three volumes from the late sixteenth century and which he has since pursued in a long line of theoretical studies and comments. When consulting the *Oxford English Dictionary* one realizes that the nature of the essay is related to an experimental text practice:

1. (a) direct relationship to **experience**
2. (b) **testing**, i.e. trying to find out something by **manipulating**, let us say, a piece of material;
3. (c) therefore, **materiality** of the testing (experiencing) body figure and the object of testing (as distinct from theoretical speculation); essay does not rely on a conceptual model to be proved (as distinct from a scientific treatise)
4. (d) sketchiness, unfinishedness, "**a rough draft**", a preparatory study given up for some reason, inconclusiveness (as distinct from, for example, a novel where the author creates a finished world)¹⁵⁹

Renov speaks about the specificity of the corporeal aspects in the history of video art which Rosalind Krauss pointed out in 1976 in "Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism" (".../most of the work produced over the very short span of video art's existence has used the human body as its central instrument").¹⁶⁰ But the experiencing body figure,

158. Michael Renov, "Lost, Lost, Lost: Mekas as Essayist" in *The Subject of Documentary*, p. 70.

159. <http://dictionary.oed.com>, (6/4 2010)

160. Rosalind Krauss, "Video: The Art of Narcissism" in *Video Culture: A Critical Investigation*, ed. John G. Hanhardt, Peregrine Smith Books/Visual Studies Workshop Press 1986, pp. 180–181.

the testing activity, the manipulation of a material – these aspects apply to several classic documentaries that can be seen as cinematic essays: Orson Wells’s *F For Fake*, a witty, humorous film with a mixture of staged and archival material about the charming artist and forger Elmyr de Hory and the not-so-charming writer and forger Clifford Irving, Werner Herzog’s *Fata Morgana* with its idiosyncratic combinations of postcolonial, apocalyptic sceneries and strange text material and Erik M Nilsson’s experimental, introspective studies are just three of many significant examples.

In essays, documents are the source of stories, maps evoke fantasies and memories incubate theories. We can experience the “/.../ coexistence of fact and desire in human mind,” as Alexander Kluge articulates the interplay between fiction and non-fiction in his essayistic film *Deutschland im Herbst* (1978).¹⁶¹ But in place of the plot of a fiction film, we find the mediation on a theme in the essay. The essay does not strive for conclusions but prefers open-ended speculation – one could speak of the suspension of belief as opposed to the documentary’s tendency towards suspension of disbelief. “The interminability of the essay follows from the process orientation of its activity, the mediation of the real through a cascade of language, memory, and imagination” (Renov).¹⁶² In a similar analysis, Paul Rotha calls the indeterminate of the cinematic essay’s modus the *slight narrative*.¹⁶³

Despite the interminable structure and the slight narrative, it is a mistake to believe that video essays do not have exact references. Regarding, for instance, Chris Marker’s *Sans soleil* one could make a long list, an enumeration of all rhizomatic threads of motifs and stories that interweave and unlace: the theory and practice of staring, the peasants’ protest against the construction of Narita Airport, the heroic heritage of the kamikaze pilots, the revolutionary history of the Cape Verde Islands with the rise and fall of Amilcar Cabral and his brother Luis de Almeida Cabral, Alfred Hitchcock’s *Vertigo*, a Japanese documentary about Gérard de Nerval, the writings of the lady-in-waiting Sei Shonagon, the positions of the *burakumin* people and the Korean minority

161. Quoted in Nora M. Alter, “Memory Essays” in *Stuff it: The Video Essay in the Digital Age*.

162. Michael Renov, “Lost, Lost, Lost: Mekas as Essayist” in *The Subject of Documentary*, p. 71.

163. Paul Rotha, “Some Principles of Documentary” in *A Paul Rotha Reader*, eds. Duncan Petrie and Robert Kruger, p. 149.

in Japan, the fatal incidents at Okinawa by the end of World War II, human rituals as an alternative to the fear of death and as a way to “/.../ repair the web of time where it had been broken.” Traveling between all these geographical places, meta-places (television) and places in history creates an uncertainty and disunity in the concept of time. The voice-over gives an indication of the meaning of the structure of the film: if “/.../ in the nineteenth century, mankind had come to terms with space /.../ the great question of the twentieth century was the coexistence of different concepts of time.”¹⁶⁴

The density of the text in the essayistic video may sometimes appear in conflict with the stream of images in the film. Chris Marker clearly separates text and images but denies that the tension between them (as displaced or out of sync) has any value in itself.

The text is no more a commentary for the images than images are illustrations of the text. They are two different series of sequences that inevitably cross each other and interact now and then. But it would be pointless and tiring to have one confront the other.¹⁶⁵

It is often pointed out that essayistic film and the video essay are historically grounded in the legacy of Bertolt Brecht.¹⁶⁶ Brecht’s ideas about theater have explicitly been transposed to filmic terms by Jean Luc Godard through “/.../ rethinking the questions of pleasure and spectacle, developing filmic modes of spectatorial distancing, and exploring the politics of representation in and through the cinema” (Elsaesser).¹⁶⁷

The Brechtian heritage with the *Verfremdung*-idea is related to the self-reflexive character of the video essay. Here lies the major link between the work story and the structure of the video essay. The video essay is able to slow down, or stop, to reflect on, and to give an account of its own development and the history of its own making (*Gestaltung des Gestalteten*). As mentioned before the work story here is embedded or one of several narratives.

164. Chris Marker, *Sans soleil*.

165. Introduction in *Le dépays* (1982), a photo essay discussing the relation between images and words, quoted in Nora M. Alter, *Chris Marker*, University of Illinois Press 2006, p. 10.

166. See for instance Volker Siebel, “Painting Pavements” in *Stuff it.: The Video Essay in the Digital Age*, p. 14.

167. Thomas Elsaesser, “Political Filmmaking after Brecht: Harun Farocki, for Example” in *Harun Farocki. Working on the Sight-Lines*, p. 133.

If one follows Harun Farocki's idea of the video essay in *Schnittstelle* as a way to talk and listen to images one also has to ask: "Who is listening and talking?", "From where?" and "Why does the person see what he sees?" In *Schnittstelle*, Farocki talks from his position in the editing room (as Orson Wells does in *F for Fake*). This situation points to the act of modeling the material, of manipulation (or forgery as Orson Wells says in *F for Fake*) and the very act of letting "images comment on images." The voice-over here belongs to the artist himself. In *Madame & Little Boy* I made the choice to let the narrator be visible and act as a mediator separated from the authorship – which is a general strategy in documentary film. But in common documentary practices no conflicts are allowed between the mediator and the text. His voice (almost always a male voice) is serving the narrative like an efficient typeface in the sort of graphic design where the quality marks are "un-visibility" and readability. I would rather work with a voice that oscillates between distance and absorption with the story and the images, and that is defined as belonging to a separate instance. Absorption is created when the voice superimposes itself over the images, "serving" the image and guiding the viewer/listener. "Disturbance," or "artifice," to borrow a term by Charles Bernstein (for a discussion on poetry), occurs when there is a separation or discrepancy between the instances working in a video essay, as discussed below. Such discrepancy can, for instance, occur if the text reflects on events or ideas outside the plot of the narrative. Bernstein says that "artifice" "/.../ is a measure of a poem's intractability to being read as the sum of its devices and subject matters. In this sense, "artifice" is the contradiction of "realism," with its insistence on presenting an unmediated (immediate) experience of facts, either of the "external" world of nature, or the "internal" world of the mind /.../."¹⁶⁸ From my point of view, in the film/video context the word "realism" here can be exchanged with "documentarism."

The discrepancy between image and sound also reveal the temporality of the documentary. *Sans soleil* has, as indicated, many passages when we experience "/.../ the opposition between the camera capturing the image and the relays and gaps between filming the image and broadcasting it, while establishing the distinction between sound and image. /.../ recalling for the viewer the representational limits of both

sound and image, specifically in the context of ethical documentary filmmaking.”¹⁶⁹

Working with my video essays, I separated five elements or instances of the video essay: the subject matter, the images (the representation), the artist/author, the narrative (the text) and the narrator. While conducting practical and theoretical experiments with these instances, with transference and negotiation between the positions, I wanted to examine the meaning of a mediator situated in a way that deviates from the prevailing models in documentary film. As in “realism” documentary practice most often strives to eliminate the conflicts and even obscure the existence of a separation between the five instances. The narrative is presented as streaming directly from the object (the subject matter), served by transparent images, delivered by the author and performed by a voice either identical with the author or as a disembodied agent for the narrative. I wanted to be explicit with the fact that no natural links exist between these elements and that the moments of transference between object, author, text, and narrator can be exposed in different ways, for instance by temporal disunity in form, mediation, agent, and content. In the chapter “*Kumiko, Johnnie Walker & the Cute* (an extended work story),” I describe how I worked with the transference between narrator, the object (especially Kumiko), the text and my own subject as a writer. Here, I wanted to examine if there is a productive place in between the lecturer, the essayist, the storyteller (telling his/her “own” story) and the actor and/or anonymous reader (mediator) of a text.

A similar “place” can actually be found in the history of Japanese film – it is represented by the *benshi*. A *benshi* was a film narrator who performed live during Japan’s era of silent film (1896–1939).¹⁷⁰ He would situate himself in the shadow next to the screen and supply a vo-

169. Chuck Tryon, “Letters from an Unknown Filmmaker: Chris Marker’s *Sans Soleil* and the Politics of Memory” in *rhizomes.08* spring 2004 (<http://rhizomes.net/issue8/tryon.htm>, 27/3 2010).

170. The Korean equivalent (adopted from Japan) was called *pyonsa*. According to Frances Gateward the *pyonsa* narration was linked to the Korean storytelling tradition *pansori* – a musical drama in which a solo singer, holding a fan in one hand, delivers a long story by the means of *sori* [song], *aniri* [narration], and *ballim* [mimetic gestures]. The *pyonsa* narrators were often placing subversive messages in their narration, facilitating the nationalistic sentiments in opposition to the Japanese colonial power. See Frances Gateward, “Youth in Crises: National and Cultural Identity in New South Korean Cinema” in *Multiple Modernities, Cinemas and Popular Media in Transcultural East Asia*, ed. Jenny Kwok Wah Lau, Temple University Press 2003.

cal narration called *setsumei*. His primary job was to guide the audience through a film by explaining the events on the screen. But he was not only explaining and conveying narrative meaning, of equal importance was to impart emotions to the movie. A good benshi guided the spectators through the narrative plot as well as all the shifting emotions of the film, he made the audience laugh and cry. To accomplish this he created vocal sound effects, invented individual voices for the characters in the film and indicated the undercurrent meaning in intertitles by dramatic or sensible reading. The benshi performed without microphone. He had to be able to bring forth a piercing voice that could be heard all over the huge movie theater of that time, regardless if he was “/.../crying, laughing, shouting, whimpering, cajoling, assailing voices from a wide spectrum of characters, ranging from high-pitch maidens to deep-toned, husky brutes, all with their unamplified voice.”¹⁷¹

A series of codes were established between the benshi and the projectionist. Until 1921, when the projectors were hand driven, the benshi could, for instance, control the speed of the film, most often by pressing a button that was connected to a signal in the projection room. A benshi was weaving comments into the story. These could be poetic or political comments, often attached to contemporary events. A common method was to fill in the time with lengthy explanations, and time-consuming rhetoric, as well as drawn-out, often moralizing conclusions. When he wanted to demonstrate his oratorical skills – most often during love scenes and tragic episode – he would press the button to slow down the speed and thus be given time to show off his talent. During “uninteresting” sequences he would signal to the projectionist to speed up the tempo.¹⁷²

Furthermore, a benshi could obscure or dramatically change the meaning of a narrative, He could turn non-fiction into fiction and fiction into non-fiction, and also, if he was in the right mood, perform

171. Jeffrey A. Dym, *Benshi, Japanese Silent Film Narrators, and Their Forgotten Narrative Art of Setsumei*, The Edwin Mellen Press 2003, p. 60. (Most of my description of the history of benshi follows Dym's book.)

172. Jeffrey A. Dym writes: “Perhaps for the only time in film history, the visual element was no longer dominant, instead, the aural element was the controlling force. This control of the image is testament to *setsumei*'s strength as a narrative art. Although *setsumei* was never able to subjugate the image, in terms of drawing power, it did become a powerful attraction capable of diminishing or enhancing a film's allure.” *Ibid.*, p. 56.

a totally nonsensical *setsumeï*.¹⁷³ Hence filmmakers were often irritated with the *benshis*. They complained about how they were usurping interpretive control of their films, even though the *benshis* sometimes saved their films from being banned or censored due to immoral or sensitive political content. In 1908 a banned film about the French revolution was shown with a new title: *Gankutsu o* [The Cave King]. The *benshi* spontaneously transformed it into a film about American mountain bandits.¹⁷⁴

Comparable to assemblage art, the *benshi* treats the completed film as found footage to attach their own cultural terminology to the images. The *benshi* is known to focus their attention on the background scenery, such as the weather, location, architecture, and clothes. In essence, they are reediting the film for the audience as they sit there. Not by cutting the actual movie, but by having their audience's watchfulness drawn away from the actual events in the film.¹⁷⁵

Benshi literary means “orator” or “speaker” and a lot of alternative names were employed depending on the time and region (names that denoted for example “impersonator,” “explainer” or “narrator of statements”). The *benshi* belongs to a tradition in Japan where two or more separate but equal forms of narrative, usually one visual, the other aural, are combined and form one unit which is considered greater than

173. Musei Tokugawa (1894–1971), perhaps the most famous of all *benshis*, was known to undermine conventions of fiction by supplementing the narratives with contradictory information and improvisations which often resulted in a nonsensical story. He wrote close to 100 books and is considered as one of the best sources on the knowledge and history in *benshi*, which he called “the art of deception.” He was also known for his heavy consumption of whiskey and was hospitalized a number of times because of his alcoholism. Jeffrey A. Dym tells how he during a *setsumeï* of *Dr. Mabuse* was drunker than usual. Members of the audience were provoked by his slurred talk and screamed out “*Benshi*, speak clearly!” But Tokugawa was unable to articulate the words, he was simply too drunk. As the *setsumeï* went on, the audience got even more agitated and someone screamed that he was a *baka* [fool]. When an intertitle from *Dr. Mabuse* appeared on the screen with the words: “You ignorant people, I am a god, you cannot resist me. In the end all you can do is obey my words,” Tokugawa took the opportunity to address the complaining audience. “You are all fools, I am great like a god. You ignorant people, no matter what you do, compared with my greatness, you are all trivial. Oh, you ignorant fools,” he shouted. *Ibid.*, pp. 101–102. See also Kyoko Omori, “Narrating the Detective: *Nansensu*, Silent Film *Benshi* Performances and Tokugawa Musei’s Absurdist Detective Fiction” in *Japan Forum*, Volume 21, Issue 1 March 2009.

174. *Ibid.*, p. 49.

175. Tosh Berman, “*Benshi* Tradition: Cinema = Performance,” <http://altx.com/interzones/kino2/benshi.html> (8/4 2010).

the sum of the parts. *Kabuki*, *no* and *bunraku* are theatrical examples from this tradition. In *Madame & Little Boy*, I refer to the *kamishibai*, a form of Japanese storytelling for children dating back to the 1920s.¹⁷⁶ The *kamishibai* carried a miniature theater where he showed narrative picture cards which he commented on.

Even today voice-over narration in Japanese TV comments and explains the events in soap operas as well as documentary in a didactic fashion that is said to come from the tradition of the dual relation between the visual and the aural, and predominately, the *benshi* tradition.¹⁷⁷

The *benshis* established a central position in the cinematic experience and audiences became so accustomed and attached to them that they found it difficult to watch films without them. Their presence in the movie theaters also allowed for more fragmentary storylines and less “efficient” narratives in Japanese film compared to Western film.

Many *benshis* were highly admired and some became incredibly popular. When a *benshi* star entered the stage, and even in the middle of a performance, the audience members would scream out the *benshi*’s nickname or words of praise, as in *kabuki* performances. Most *benshis* were male, known for their hedonistic and flamboyant lifestyles and were followed by female fans. They spend much of their days in their dressing rooms in the movie theaters, they were “/.../ talking, smoking, playing games, chasing after woman, and drinking. Most *benshis* drank in moderation during working hours and heavily after work.”¹⁷⁸

During the Russo-Japanese war some *benshis* devoted themselves to patriotic “translations” of the film – sometimes dressed in pseudo-militarily uniforms – where the footage was filtered through nationalistic rhetoric. Motion pictures were of course not just mass entertainment, but also means of propaganda and powerful tools for social education. During certain periods, the authorities tried to control them (for instance with frequent police inspections in the theaters and a testing and licensing system), knowing that they as interpreters of images had

176. *Kamishibai* tradition can also been seen as the root of manga and anime, the origin of the same culture that brought forward and developed the *Gojira* (*Godzilla*) character.

177. See, for instance, Donald Richie, *A Hundred Years of Japanese Film*, Kodansha International 2001, p. 22 and Jeffrey A. Dym, *Benshi, Japanese Silent Film Narrators, and Their Forgotten Narrative Art of Setsumeï*, p. 234.

178. Jeffrey A. Dym, *Benshi, Japanese Silent Film Narrators, and Their Forgotten Narrative Art of Setsumeï*, p. 99.

a great impact on people's minds. But benshis were not always easy to control. Their own personal ideologies would often dominate their *setsumeis*.

A benshi with socialist leanings could turn a Chaplin comedy into a socialist diatribe by emphasizing that the occupants of the large houses that appeared in the movie were the victimized proletariat. /.../ From their subversive readings of films, to being a haven for progressive and discordant elements of society, through their backgrounds and outlooks as socialists, labor radicals, hedonists, people with disabilities, and others, these were people who often trapped into some of the darker and shadowy elements of Japanese culture.¹⁷⁹

A good benshi was able to perform the *setsumeis* in several clearly discernible voices, but in the later phase of the Japanese silent film era collective narration, *kowairo setsumeis*, became the dominating form. In *kowairo setsumeis* a number of benshis, placed with a distance to each other in the movie theater, would mimic the voices of the different characters in the film. Each of them would be in command of a number of voices, whereas the leading benshi would take care of main plot and the general commenting on the events. The voices employed became highly stylized and sounded nothing like a natural voice in a film dialogue. This was a way for the benshis to express their interpretation of the personalities of the characters. Earlier male benshis most often performed *setsumeis* in falsetto tone when there was a child or woman involved in the dialogue on the screen, but when the collective *kowairo setsumeis* came to dominate the scene most theaters employed children and women to give voices to the female and child parts.

On the countryside, recordings of *setsumeis* often served as surrogates for films. By listening to the narrator's voice, the audience visualized the films in their minds. The advent of the sound film in Japan was delayed by almost ten years both due to the popularity of the benshis and to the strong unions they had organized in the 1930s. The sound from the talkies that was installed in the theaters in the 1930s was insufficient for most people in the beginning: something was lacking: not only the superior sound quality of the live narrators, but also the personal comments, the explanations, the adjunctions and digressions – the meta-perspective.

179. *Ibid.*, pp. 227–228.

6. Biographies, names, reading, and storytelling

*others sung your life
and now it's the time to shine
and have the pleasure of singing what you mean
have the pleasure of meaning what you sing
oh, make no mistake my friend
all of this relates
so sing it now
all the things you love*

Morrisey

The (naïve) emblems of a life story

What can one say about a person? What should be allowed to represent that person: the face, the hands, the elbows? What is the most faithful portrait: a photograph taken clandestinely, a painting where the artist has brought out the most revealing expressions, the telephone bill? Is that a kind of portrait too? The interest in indexical relationships is tied to how they connect with this emanation. We think we are experiencing a true and direct relationship with the object (as in the case of the telephone bill). Such a relationship – exemplified by the camera obscura – is a physical phenomenon that can be observed everywhere in cities or in forests. The dream looming large here is to establish an individual indexical relationship not just with an object, like the camera obscura does with a person, but with an entire structure or a whole system, in the same way that every city lights the night sky above in its own particular way.¹⁸⁰ The same dream is strong in documentary film: the will to believe that the presence of the objects emanates directly through the camera to the audience. One has to be reminded: this is a mediated and manipulated situation.

Samuel Johnson, author of two famous essays on biography (1750 and 1759) answered to the question of who deserves to have a biography written on them: “I have often thought that there has rarely passed a life of which a judicious and faithful narrative would not be useful.”¹⁸¹ Every person could have his or her biography told, which also means that every person could have his or her life story “stolen”.

180. See also Magnus Bårtås, “A life without secrets,” text for “Populated,” IASPIS, Konstakademien, Stockholm 2002.

181. Quoted in Ray Monk, “Life Without Theory: Biography as an Exemplar of Philosophical Understanding”, *Poetics Today* 2007.

One could say that every encounter with another person contains the potential for giving away the story that each person thinks of as his own – “my story” – and having it distorted. In the drive toward being social and the desire to communicate, there is a standing invitation to take control of each other’s stories. Whoever has spent a lot of time mingling with people will “be” among these people.

This social gain contains an element of ego loss which is enhanced in the filming situation. In the case of the *Who is...?* films, the participants are threatened with a double ego loss since they both mime themselves and give away their life stories. None of this would be possible to carry out without one of the following: 1) a feeling of mutual understanding; 2) a belief that the loss is not threatening; 3) negligence; 4) the desire to be seen; 5) a carefree attitude; 6) friendship.

Along with the main character of each film in the *Who is...?* series, I performed a memory act where we researched the possibilities of staging – which turned out to be about illustrative, emblematic, associative, and social maneuvers. By focusing on these “meaningless” details (“little stories”), I noticed that new spaces in my consciousness arose, where these “meaningless” things are mythologized, becoming even more abundant with references and potential meanings. We believe ourselves to know that the famous and often “biographized” person Isaac Newton came up with the principle behind the law of gravity when an apple fell on his head. When we think about Newton, we imagine the apple in front of us, even its color and shine. Newton has, through this mythologized story, been given a three-dimensional emblem.¹⁸²

182. On a trip to Armenia in 2002 I saw a similar emblematic use of objects on the gravestones. We visited the villages of the Kurdish Yezidian minority close to Mount Aragat. In each village, the graveyards had a central and almost dominating place. On the black granite gravestones the dead had been portrayed using a blasting technique that creates high tones in white. Using this technique, a “realistic” image of sorts was made. The dead emerged as in gigantic salon photographs. Against the backdrop of idyllic landscapes, green fields, brooks and waterfalls, they stood solemnly erect in their best clothes. Preferably suits for men and traditional clothes for women but it could also be leather jackets and a t-shirt saying Gucci. The dead were dressed up but there was something quotidian and relaxed in their appearance. A man sat at a table with a cigarette in one hand and a coffee cup in front of him: probably a sensualist. Another had the table littered with bottles, even the brand of vodka had been painstakingly blasted in. On many gravestones the profession of the dead was emphasized. The school teacher writing in his book, a woman with a headscarf sitting at her sewing machine, the soldier wearing his camouflage uniform and carrying his AK-47 ready for action, the motor mechanic shown with a Lada, a shifting spanner, and a to me unidentifiable tool rendered in great detail. See Magnus Bärtås and Fredrik Ekman, *Innanför cirkeln*.

In the negotiations with the main characters for my video essays and video biographies about the staging of the story, I often end up dealing with the same questions: about the rights to a life story, about how hard it is to accept the author/artist's (distorted) view of the person's life and story, about whether the choice of emblem suits the narrative, and whether it is important or unimportant to search for certain people and places named in the text. In this, at times, painful process that I invite people into, and which includes the self-reflective glare and act of mimicking yourself, there is a confusion concerning many issues. But most often, I have noticed that there is clarity on one of the issues, This issue is the will to situate oneself in relation to certain "things" and places. These "things" can be viewed as emblems of the life story: for instance the bunraku-hood of Johnnie Walker, the city of Harbin for Kumiko Muraoka, the toy collection for Dimitris Houliarakis.

In *Sans soleil* Chris Marker, who is a political filmmaker, declares his interest in "banalities." He searches for banalities in their own right, but it is obvious that he takes into consideration the *potentiality* of the small events of everyday life, their hidden meaning and quality; these small moments and unforeseen passages can be connected with the grand history of our world. "Banalities," he seems to claim, can have a greater impact on history than officially recognized history and they can sometimes, when looking into the future, have the meaning of signs or omens, or, when looking into the past, be regarded as the small overlooked cause of disasters.

Life story and biography (which is just one of the mediations of life stories) begin with the fact that we are all political beings. The fact that it isn't just the *homo sovjeticus* or a North Korean – a person who grows up in a controlled society with a strong and clear state imperative who becomes characterized by their system – and that in fact, each individual will live and breathe the social system that he or she grew up in. That each person, more or less undetectably, will learn how the political system – or the society – is at once reproduced, filtered, and transcribed through religion, family, architecture, and even nature. It is only in rare cases that the *social sphere* emanates from the central power with its monolithic ideology—as in North Korea. It tends rather to be made up of a fragmented and labyrinthine system of connections and reconstructions, with takeovers, counter-moves, imitations, and transgressions. Being political beings, the power of our society is revealed in

our preferences and aesthetics. Everyday actions can be seen as rational, materialistic, and intended to provide for productivity, survival and comfort, but even everyday activities contain promises of the irrational: the desire-driven lust for excesses which causes waste and combustion, and the symbolic elements of rite, manifestation and invocation.

A specialty of totalitarian regimes is the grip on memory, including establishing an instructed, imposed, or forced memory. Paul Ricœur, refers in *Memory, History, Forgetting* to Tzvetan Todorov's *Les Abus de la mémoire*. Todorov warns against an "unconditional praise of memory" and points out that the grip on memory is not only significant for the totalitarian regime, it is "the apanage of all those honored of glory."¹⁸³ During my travels in North Korea, I experienced the different modes of instructed, celebrated, official memory that form the myth of the nation and the heroic deeds of the one god-like leader. Over and over again, the myths were delivered in different forms but always with the same melodramatic voice.

In the chapter "*Who is Zdenko Bužek? (an extended work story)*" I discuss how the new Croatian rulers, as a result of the last Yugoslavian civil war, erased the Yugoslav past – in other words, a recent past. People were suddenly deprived of something that was their everyday life. In this essay, I refer to Dubravka Ugrešić's novel *The Ministry of Pain*¹⁸⁴ where storytelling and the re-ordering of private memory archives temporarily function in a restorative way in the aftermath of this period of violent political turbulence. The focusing on details in the past – objects and phenomena, for instance a certain bag or the trains of Yugoslavia – which are given an emblematic quality, becomes the means to cure a political phantom pain.

In the beginning of this dissertation project, I want to question biographies as a genre of grand narratives, preferring to experiment with an alternative function which can be called "Little Big Stories", to use the phrase (and title of an exhibition) coined by the Macedonian theorist and curator Suzana Milevska. These are biographies and stories that take the form of suppressed stories, random stories and biographies based on observation of details from everyday life. These are metonym-based stories, used as postponement, as self-definition and as trickery,

183. Paul Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, pp. 83–86. The quotation of Tzvetan Todorov's *Les Abus de la mémoire*, Arléa 1995, p. 85.

184. Dubravka Ugrešić, *The Ministry of Pain*, HarperCollins 2006.

and they are based on *civilité* – the art of living together.

As an experiment in the video essay *Kumiko, Johnnie Walker & the Cute* I brought two biographies together. By cross-editing quotations (footage and quoted text) from Chris Marker's *The Koumiko Mystery* with my own filmed sequences of the second character in my film – Johnnie Walker – the existence of two biographies or stories came to create a bridge or common denominator. A common question arose: how did Kumiko and Johnnie Walker manage, each of them in their own fashion, to create an alternative voice, an alternative language, and an alternative ideology for themselves in relation to their society?

In *Madame & Little Boy*, I encountered a story with political implications on a large scale. Here I wanted to point out, and play with, the biography as a singularity in the streams of “big” history. Little Boy was the code name of the Hiroshima bomb. In the title “Madame” seems to be superior, or take care of Little Boy. The title places one individual side by side by with History, but with a reversed power balance. In fact Madame with her life story seems not only to be a witness, a testifier, but also someone who impersonates and embodies history. “As an actress I have lived the life of others,” as she says in Shin Sang-ok's film *Red Muffler*.

Nomen est omen

Compressed forms of narratives create a pressurized environment where whatever is left unsaid can have an awesome effect. The simpler and more pared down the story, the greater but simultaneously emptier its authority. At a certain point, one can, instead of submitting to the authority of the narrator, listen to the pronouncements of the narrative either as a series of clumsily placed demarcations of the narrative boundary, or as a desperate desire to create order.

Names are guarded as if they were precious treasures. A name can be dragged through the mud and a name can be rehabilitated. And the shortest biography would be the proper noun. The first scene in *Kumiko, Johnnie Walker & the Cute* is a close-up of Johnnie Walker's sweaty face. He is in his kitchen, eating chocolate. He reads out a series of names: Takashi Murakami, Nara, Gilbert & George, Tracey Emin... His namedropping in this scene may appear like an invocation, but actually it is a situation where Johnnie Walker is giving instructions to a curator about all the important people that are able to tell stories about and have memories of their encounters with him. The curator was planning

a documentary about the life of Johnnie Walker and Johnnie Walker immediately proposed a big, epic drama.

As an introduction to the person Johnnie Walker, the scene, for me, pointed to his obsession with proper nouns; his ongoing play with his own name, involved in a game with both a fictitious character and a trademark. Johnnie Walker is a transcription of his Japanese name Joni Waka which means “the one who serves” (*jo-ni*). He refers to the Jewish myth that says that fate is inscribed in a proper noun.¹⁸⁵ Thus he is, and has always been, a servant, he says. In Haruki Murakami’s novel *Kafka on the Shore* from 2006, “Johnnie Walker” is one of the main characters. Johnnie Walker is very pleased with this coincidence and claims that Murakami has modeled the character in the book on him, with the difference that the fictional character dresses like the figure on the whisky bottle and uses his large dog to help catch cats that he kills in a very brutal way. The real Johnnie Walker only uses his dog to scare people in the streets of Tokyo and to fight the cuteness culture. In Murakami’s novel he says: “A person’s got to have an appearance and a name, don’t you think?”¹⁸⁶ For my video, Johnnie Walker saw some of the lines of the novel as the best introduction to his person, the fiction had become part of his autobiography and he was extremely offended when someone said that Murakami’s Johnnie Walker didn’t have anything to do with him. Johnnie Walker had simply absorbed the fiction. His name has become a playground for a game with identities reflecting both his obsession with the status of name (in connection with fame) and his lack of belonging in the Japanese society where he cannot escape the position of being a “person from the outside,” a *gaijin*.

185. In Korea, naming is a very important task. Names have layers and resonances added by the different ways of writing them: the version in the Korean alphabet, the version with Chinese characters, and the romanized version, which even rarely can be a Western version of the name (which is very common in China and Taiwan). Traditionally when using Chinese characters for the name, the meaning of the name is declared, a meaning that is not always exposed by the sound of the pronouncement of the name. Most Korean first names consist of two syllabuses and it is by writing the name in Chinese characters that the meaning of the combination is defined. While the Korean family name has an important heritage, that ought to be protected and cultivated, the first name, in a similar way as the Jewish myth of the fate of a name, is a task of highest importance and is traditionally contested with superstition and fatalism. When a child is born in Korea most parents would spend a considerable amount of time and money on the naming process. It is very common to contact either a specialist in naming – a *jakmyoungga*, or, if you are Buddhist – a monk. When allotting a name to the child: one considers the date and hour of birth in relation to astrology and the heritage of the family name.

186. Haruki Murakami, *Kafka on the Shore*, Vintage 2005, p. 164.

The importance of names made a stronger impression on me as this research progressed, not only Johnnie Walker's name, but the significance of naming itself, and the ontology of proper nouns. Proper nouns obviously have a completely different connection to our world and the people in it, compared to other words. The name transmits and establishes ties between spheres of reality: between the text and the physical world, between the text and the laws, between the text and the individual.¹⁸⁷

I had actually started a "name-research" already at the beginning of the 1990s, when I collaborated with the artist Peter Andersson. We used Plutarch's biographical model, where the lives and accomplishments of prominent Romans and Greeks were compared in pairs. Based on this idea of parallel lives, we wrote two so-called "surface biographies" (biographies which were written using public documentation, registered excerpts, and archive material). Following Plutarch's model, we arranged two names in a pair: Olle Granath and Bosse Dynamit, and called the work *Parallel life*.¹⁸⁸ Olle Granath (the family name is identical with the Swedish word for "grenade" or "shell") was, at that time, the head curator for the Swedish state art museums and Bosse Dynamit [dynamite] was the nickname of a safecracker [dynamitard] and escape artist who had his heyday in the 1970s. By the time our work was made he had disappeared from the limelight.¹⁸⁹

Peter Andersson saw the nickname as the shortest of all possible biographies; the nickname was, for him, a micro-biography. He referred to the American writer Harry Long who said that a nickname "/.../

187. In Greek the word "name" has the same etymological root as "law". See Lars Brückner, "O-nomader. Namnets gest hos Walter Benjamin och Franz Kafka" in *Aiolos* No. 11, October 1999, p. 38.

188. The work resulted in an insert for *Tidskriften 90TAL*, no. 9, September 1993.

189. It was the names that connected these individuals with each other, but on closer examination, we also found that they were around the same age (born in 1940 and 1942, respectively), as well as being strikingly similar in appearance. Apart from that, they had made their careers in different fields. Olle Granath had attained one of the highest museum positions after a career as an art critic in the daily press. Bosse Dynamit, after juvenile delinquency had become an expert at breaking in and busting out. He led the famous Kumla escape of 1972. The information on Olle Granath was easily accessible whereas a lot of research in the archive of a court in Stockholm (Södra Roslags tingsrätt) was demanded to be able to write the biography of Bosse Dynamit. When I once, during this period of work, bumped into an ex-criminal in a bar who turned out to be one of Bosse Dynamit's pals who had taken part in the escape from Kumla, he immediately threatened to crush my knee caps if I didn't treat Bosse Dynamit's heritage with the greatest respect.

is a biography condensed to one single word.”¹⁹⁰

For Walter Benjamin, proper nouns make up their own, special class of words. In language, Benjamin says, a proper noun is like a stone. It says nothing, and has no meaning, it merely denotes. For Benjamin, proper nouns are the remainder of the original language, the “adamitic language.” This language, the naming language, does nothing but name (and simultaneously create), it never refers to anything beyond itself. The formation of language, where structures of meaning are made possible, is a version of the Fall of Man, according to Benjamin’s perspective, and after the Fall, objects no longer appear as the result of creative naming, but through a system of meaning, layering, and connotations.¹⁹¹

Chris Marker is one of many pseudonyms for the filmmaker and it is said to be taken from the magic marker pen.¹⁹² Here the pseudonyms seem to function as a protection or obscuration of the biography, as opposed to the nickname that can be viewed as a condensed biography. A similar strategy is used by the narrator in *Madame & Little Boy* – the musician Will Oldham. During our collaboration, he told me that there are many aspects of the music industry that he has difficulty with. For instance, he finds it unreasonable that, because one had chosen music, one is expected to get up on stage and please an audience by the presence of your person. This is an overwhelming and exhausting demand, he said, when actually there should be no natural links between expressing your self with music and being an entertainer. His solution is to split of himself into a number of pseudonyms of which Bonnie ‘Prince’ Billy is the most prominent one. He told me that this name has

190. See Harry Andersson, “Harry & Harry: The Pussy and the Frogman” in *Tidskriften 90TAL* No 13 1993. Peter’s article on the issue was written under a pseudonym. And I don’t believe that anybody named Harry Long exists either. Peter Andersson also gave me a list of the nicknames of Swedish criminals. Names like Bildsköne Bengtsson, Tumba-Tarzan, Aspuddens President, Lasse Pang Pang, Kenta Kofot, Lasse Bohag, Bult-Bengan, Porr-Bosse, and Dick Flames (a criminal who was notorious for making himself sexually aroused by setting fire to his own pubic hair). Nowadays, criminals have much less interesting nicknames (Lasermannen, HIV-mannen, Haga-mannen, etc.).

191. See Lars Brückner, “O-nomader. Namnets gest hos Walter Benjamin och Franz Kafka” in *Aiolos* no 11 1999. A similar idea (but lacking Benjamin’s messianic tone) was put forth by John Stuart Mill in *A System of Logic* (1843), where he claims that names bear denotation but not connotation. Allen S. Weiss discusses the two positions of naming theory: “the sense theory” and the “no sense theory” in “The Onomastic Gold Mine” in *Cabinet Magazine*, Summer 2009, Issue 34.

192. See for instance: <http://www.imbd.com/name/nm0003408/bio> (22/3 2010).

developed a life of its own, it has relieved him and made his personal life easier. In an interview he explains how he came up with the name:

Yeah, the name has so many different references that it could almost have a life of its own. Bonnie Prince Billy has such a beautiful ring to it, and I was very conscious of appropriating that mellifluous sound. And I was also thinking about the name Nat King Cole. But it wasn't until later, and this may have been subconscious, that I remembered that Billy the Kid was William Bonney or Billy Bonney.¹⁹³

In the last two essays in this book, I discuss Takashi Murakami's theory of how the naming of the Hiroshima bomb was a curse on the Japanese society. This theory is contesting Murakami's oeuvre and with a strong political meaning, as I argue. Here *nomen ist omen*, in line with the Jewish myth Johnnie Walker is referring to, but also with the Asian naming tradition.

As discussed in the chapter "*Who is Zdenko Bužek?* (an extended work story)," naming became a highly politically charged activity in the aftermath of the civil war. Zdenko Bužek took part in the exhibition *The Renaming Machine* with a work about his aunt Blaga Fidanoska Popovska and her repeated changes of name according to the political and ethnical climate. Zdenko exhibited her party book where the surname is: "Popova" during Bulgarian rule, "Popović," a Serbian variation during the Yugoslavian era, and in the latter phase, "Popovska," which is something in between the Bulgarian and Macedonian spelling and finally the Macedonian spelling "Poposka." The Renaming Machine could not be more efficient in rendering the political forces in an individual.

Reenactement

In my work with *Kumiko, Johnnie Walker & the Cute* the discussions of the role of the reader as a reenactor take one of their starting points in Jesper Svenbro's book *Myrstigar /Ant Paths/*, a philological study of the act of reading in ancient Greece. A key figure and symbol examined in *Ant Paths* is "wheel tracks," that is, the meaning of a reenactment of a text by traveling in the wheel tracks of a text. In my practice, this figure

193. Matt Ashare , "Mystery Man: Palace Brother Will Oldham Becomes Bonnie 'Prince' Billy" in *The Phoenix* 20/1 2003.

is connected with the French filmmaker Chris Marker's interest in the representation of the past in the present and the future. Interviewed by Samuel Douhaire and Annick Rivoire in *Film Comment*, Chris Marker says: "What interests me is history, and politics interests me only to the degree that it represents the mark history makes on the present."¹⁹⁴ One might compare to Freud's view of the link between illness and memories of the past, where one is forced to move history to the present to focus on "working through" [Durcharbeitung]. Healing cannot take place unless one stops considering "illness as a historical phenomenon but rather as a force in the present."¹⁹⁵

The questions about memory and history are elaborated in *Sans soleil*, his canonized video essay from 1982. *Sans soleil* was one of the two films by Marker I carried with me during my stay in Tokyo during the autumn of 2006. My idea was to make a close study of *Sans soleil*, to examine the text and research the aesthetical, political, and historical implications of the events, motifs and geographical places that were depicted in the film, but not only by seeing it and reading the text of the film, but also by visiting the places in the film and thereby experiencing the film through traveling, or pilgrimage, to use Marker's term in the film. In *Sans soleil*, Marker's pseudonym has seen Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* nineteen times and has been hunted down all the places in the film – a film that is "I.../the only film that had been capable of portraying impossible memory, insane memory."¹⁹⁶

The second film I carried with me was *The Koumiko Mystery* from 1964. This film, which was more an experimental documentary than a video essay,¹⁹⁷ was made during Chris Marker's first encounter with Japan when he was supposed to film the Olympics. After initially marking the political importance of the Olympics as the symbolic opening of Japan towards the outer world, and treating the events at the stadium in a rather absent-minded way, Marker focuses on a young woman called Kumiko Muraoka, who was "found" in the audience of the stadium. Together, they stroll along the streets of Tokyo, having an enigmatic conversation.

194. Samuel Douhaire and Annick Rivoire, "Marker Direct" in *Film Comment*, May/June 2003.

195. Sigmund Freud "Erinring, upprepning, genomarbetning" in *Samlade skrifter VIII*, Natur och Kultur 2002 p. 177.

196. *Sans soleil*.

197. The film marked a change in Marker's production being the first of a series of filmic portraits.

Sans soleil is, in many ways, intertextually related to *The Koumiko Mystery*. They share, for instance, a game with gazes, the hunting of gazes (which is explicitly discussed in *Sans Soleil*). I came to use *The Koumiko Mystery* in a direct way by appropriating footage in my own video essay and by quoting parts of the text. However, the major task I gave myself – following the logics of pilgrimage – was to find Kumiko Muraoka and to repeat one of Chris Marker’s questions from the film. The critical question concerns violence: Kumiko actually claims that she is more or less indifferent to violence. “It’s a force of nature,” she says. “I’m never afraid./.../ Confronted with violence, I’m never offended. I’m simply dying, or living.”

This particular answer was totally at odds with what Marker later on declared in *Sans soleil* (and in many of his works), that is, the importance of reacting to injustices with indignation, that indignation is primarily a political force.

I managed to establish contact with Kumiko by corresponding with her, and after explaining my interest in the film she once gave a name, I was invited to her home. She had moved from Tokyo by the end of the 1960s and had lived in an apartment next to the Montmartre cemetery in Paris for the past 35 years. She was now 77 years old. I spent four days with her, taking walks in the Montmartre cemetery looking for semi-wild cats, and sitting in her apartment having conversations about the reenactment of Chris Marker’s film, her life story, and her memories from Manchuria. In her letters to me, she had already declared her strong conviction of not letting her face be filmed, a decision she had made many years earlier, but she was willing to let me film her apartment and to record our conversation. On the fourth day, I re-actualized her response to the question of violence in *The Koumiko Mystery*. Kumiko said that she regretted the answer, she was in fact ashamed of it. She decided to write a new text and record it for my video essay.

In *Madame & Little Boy* I want to point at and examine some circles of repetitions in the life story of Choi Eun-hee and the remakes of *Godzilla* that traveled through three geographical and political realms. Choi Eun-hee told me, during our conversation in Seoul 2007, how the South Korean dictator Park Chung-hee in 1961, he had fallen in love with Shin Sang-ok’s melodrama *Sangnoksu* [The Evergreen Tree], a film that he came to regard as the cinematic national anthem of South

Korea. Choi Eun-hee played the main role of the young self-sacrificing teacher at a village school. As abducted prisoner in North Korea Choi Eun-hee was obliged to learn Marxist theory and watch “revolutionary” film, she said. One of the films was *The Evergreen Tree*.

This is just one of the many strange repetitive moments of the biography. Another is found in the making of *Pulgasari* (1985) – the monster movie inspired by *Godzilla*, which Kim Jong Il ordered when Choi and Shin had been working in the North Korean film industry a couple of years. That *Godzilla* is the forerunner to *Pulgasari* is exemplified by the fact that Choi and Shin hired Toho Studios, the special effects team from Tokyo, to work on the film. It was Kenpachiro Satsuma, a longtime portrayer of *Godzilla*, who was given the task of giving life to the *Pulgasari* rubber costume. As discussed in my essay and video, in addition to the nuclear weapons motif, something else binds *Gojira* and *Pulgasari*: ambiguity in the face of horror. In both films, the monsters are expected to be terrifying. They come bearing destruction, they run amok, and they have the power to wipe out the entire human race. But at the same time, these monsters have a quality that mitigates their turpitude. In *Pulgasari*, this equivocation becomes clear in certain scenes that show the monster as a playful, even cute character.¹⁹⁸

In other spheres of Japanese popular culture, this movement back and forth between the beastly and the cuddly has always been very clear. During the last decades, the realm of cute has expanded enormously, supplanting terror. The concept of *kawaii* has become pedestrian in popular culture, and manifests itself everywhere in a city such as Tokyo: in advertising, apparel, costumes, trinkets, posters, cars, and even the architecture itself. *Kawaii* has become the most important source for soft power.

That Shin Sang-ok, who received asylum in the United States along with Choi Eun-hee, should then go on to make *Galgameth*, a new, über-cute version of *Pulgasari*, follows this trajectory of power appropriating cuteness as camouflage.¹⁹⁹ Under the pseudonym Simon

198. The same ambivalence toward *Godzilla* was only very weakly suggested in the original film. But in later films in the *Gojira* (*Godzilla*) series, the tone towards the monster becomes more conciliatory. In the 1968 film *Kaiju shoshingeki* [*In Charge of the Monsters*] *Godzilla* is even represented as the overindulgent parent of the cuddly Minilla.

199. China is rapidly adopting this same course: prohibitive street signs now include pictures of doll-like, large-eyed policemen, who smile as they raise a warning finger. They have even given a name to this shift in China: panda-politics.

Sheen, Shin Sang-ok took Kim Jong Il's idea to Hollywood, or rather, to a castle in Romania, where *Galgameth* was filmed. Many scenes – for example, the initial introduction of the monster – are borrowed directly from *Pulgasari*. From a psychological perspective, it is incomprehensible that the director, after years of working in a labor camp and being forced to make films in North Korea, would choose to do a remake of his captor's artistic vision when he finally escaped to the United States. Was it a case of traumatic repetition-compulsion, exorcism, or a simple hunger for money? Perhaps Shin had a vision: the same actor in three different monster costumes, representing three different political systems.

Voices and experience

In “What's in a Voice,” Mladen Dolar uses a scene in William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* to discuss the relation between voices and names, and by extension, voices and identities. Juliet is standing on the balcony and talking into the night: “What's in a name? ... It is nor hand, nor foot, / Nor arm, nor face, nor any other part / Belonging to a man.” Juliet doesn't see Romeo, hidden in the darkness of the garden, she speaks into the dark, and Romeo listens to her voice addressing the night. This is, according to Dolar, “/.../ emblematically a scene of names: precisely the drama of the disparity between voices and names.”²⁰⁰ A moment later she will recognize Romeo by his voice, and they will commune with their voices in the dark. They will swear love without quite seeing each other. Here is a discrepancy, an opposition between the name and voice, Dolar argues. The name inscribes us in the social sphere, into hierarchies and obligations, the voice, on the other hand, escapes the social networks, it seems to speak from the heart and soul, “/.../ it is of such stuff that love is made of.”²⁰¹ The voice cannot be linguistically classified. The voice is unique, singular, and it is evanescent, it disappears the moment it appears. There is a powerful notion of one's presence in a voice, as Dolar says, “/.../ although the voice is but a mere undulation of the air, fleeting, passing the moment it is emitting, and therefore evoking presence at its more elusive, yet so

200. Mladen Dolar, “What's in a Voice” in *Resonant Bodies, Voices, Memories*, eds. Anke Bangma, Deirdre M. Donoghue, Lina Issa & Katarina Zdjelar, Piet Zwart Institute 2008.

201. *Ibid.*, p. 198.

tenacious in being tenuous.”²⁰² But, taken to the extreme, the staged opposition between the voice and the name in *Romeo and Juliet* means a voice without a name, a nameless voice, as in Samuel Beckett’s *The Unnamable*. Beckett’s text is about losing one’s voice, to be deprived of the personal voice, the mother tongue, and that is a situation that disrupts the illusion of one’s self-presence in the voice, Dolar says. The voice is both intimate and external, Dolar argues, and points to Jacques Lacan’s invented word for this: an *extimate*.

/.../ the voice is an intruder, a foreign body, a prosthesis, a bodily extension, an artificial limb – it is never “authentic”, it is never just an expression. The voice has something like a spectral autonomy, it never quite belongs to the body we see, the voice never sounds like the person emitting it, there is always a gap, a *Verfremdung*, a mismatch. There always seems to be ventriloquism at work, as if ventriloquism was the standard use of the voice that we overlook by mere habit (and overhear when the habit drops its guard a bit).²⁰³

One of the major lines of research in this project concerns the dual relation between words and action on the one hand, and words and mythologies on the other. The word and action-relation and the performative aspect of words – the founding, institutional and cursing acts—are discussed through the game of naming and the use of proper nouns. Even the questions concerning propaganda and soft power are connected with language here.

In the performative spectrum of uses, there is a strong relation to the speaking subject. Thus the speech act is related to experience and biography. These questions have a dialectical relation to the use of voice-over in my video essays. One part of my work has involved different experiments with the position of the mediator of a text in relation to the text and the author (artist). I wanted, for instance, to see if I could stage a situation where a voice is situated in a place but at the same time reaches out to and comments on an expanded space, both spatially and temporally (which the voice-over traditionally is able to). I also wanted to interrogate and cross the different roles and uses of the voice-over in the video essay. The voice here, I realized, can belong to a subject in many domains: declaiming, reciting, commenting, reading, singing,

202. *Ibid.*, p. 201.

203. *Ibid.*, p. 203.

acting, informing, nominating, testifying, affirming... In voice-over, the voice becomes an artefact that emphasizes Dolars description of the voice as “foreign body,” “intruder,” or “prosthesis.” In *Kumiko, Johnnie Walker & the Cute* I let the narrator read:

I admit that this is my voice.
Or rather – I’m inventing this voice right now in front of you.
Voices are nothing natural, you know, every day we have to invent them.
Every morning we have to sing up for ourselves.

It’s a miracle it works every day.
That we are able to call forth possible, acceptable voices every day.

In *Myrstigar*, Jesper Svenbro speaks of how reading in antique Greece became instantly problematic as soon as a (free) man was to read another (free) man’s text.²⁰⁴ A free citizen was a person who was not seen as standing under any form of coercion, only such a person was capable of telling the truth and had the right to speak publicly (slaves, women, children and youths were thus disqualified). Svenbro points out that “to read” in Greek has developed from a verb that is at the heart of a whole family of verbs all with the same meaning but different nuances, namely “to distribute.” There were certain differences in dialect—in Sparta the verb was used in its active form, “I distribute,” while in Eubea what is known in Greek grammar as “the middle voice” was applied: “I distribute for myself.”²⁰⁵ In both cases the reader acts instrumentally, with the difference that in Eubea he also “distributes’ to his own ears as well as to those of a possible audience.”²⁰⁶ A parallel verb group has the word “say” at its core. When a party in a court case wanted to know the exact wording of the law he could express himself as follows: “Say the law!” meaning “Read the law!”

In this view, the written word is seen as lacking; only in the act of reading aloud does it attain function and meaning. “That the written text could bear meaning *in and of itself* is an illusion that quite simply

204. Jesper Svenbro, *Myrstigar. Figurer för skrift och läsning i antikens Grekland* (translations for this text: Bettina Schultz). The essay is based on the book *Phrasikleia. An anthropology of reading in ancient Greece*, Ithava, N.Y., Cornell University Press, 1993.

205. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

206. *Ibid.* When the slave in Plato’s dialogue *Theaitetos* is to read his master’s manuscript he is told to: “Take the book, slave, and say it!” Svenbro, pp. 14-15.

was not thought possible at this stage in the history of alphabetical writing when the written word as yet did not represent the spoken word but rather acted as a special form of production for it.”²⁰⁷

The written word must hence find a voice to give it form, an acoustic form. The text must find a person “/.../ who is willing to give up his own identity and lend his voice to a linguistic message, which the person concerned may not even agree with. /.../ Under these circumstances to read means to surrender oneself to the written word, which in the end can be equated with surrendering oneself to the author.”²⁰⁸ This would be impossible for a free man who wanted to keep his position. Hence reading became a task for slaves and the ability to read was not ranked very highly. To speak was “high” but to read was “low.”

It was in fact so “low” that it was seen on a par with pederasty. For the citizens of Greece, physical love relationships between men were always grounded on a hierarchy. The Athenian youth who entered into a relationship with an older man was automatically considered to be dominated and subordinate. Even if it was likely that he one day would become a (free) citizen with the right to speak, he was at present “/.../ an instrument for the grown man’s sexual enjoyment”.²⁰⁹ For the Greeks this relationship is expressly a metaphor for the relationship between writer and reader. Svenbro writes that this relationship is “/.../ one of the oldest definitions of the nature of written communication since we find it in an archaic Doric inscription from Sicily: ‘He who writes these words buggers him who reads them.’”²¹⁰

Considering inscriptions such as these, it is easy to understand why Socrates and Pythagoras did not leave behind a single written line. In addition to the aspect of degradation, Svenbro believes that it also reflects their ideas of the spoken language as being alive and animated. The written word is by contrast lifeless and soulless. To write down a living word is “to deprive it of its life force, downright kill it.”²¹¹

Michel de Certeau states in *The Practice of Everyday Life* that a reader of a text written by another becomes a tenant in the home of the text. The reader strives to make the text inhabitable. They furnish it

207. Ibid., p. 16.

208. Ibid., p. 17.

209. Ibid., p. 18.

210. Ibid., p. 19.

211. Ibid., p. 23.

as well as they can with their own acts and memories. “He insinuates into another person’s text the ruses of pleasure and appropriation: he poaches on it, is transported into, pluralises himself in it like the internal rumblings of one’s body.”²¹² Such an interlaced situation (“/.../ that belongs to no one”²¹³) de Certeau compares with certain other everyday activities that take place in public structures (in “commonplaces”), in “the societal text,” as in conversations and walking in the streets.

They furnish with their acts and memories; as do speakers, in the language into which they insert both the messages of their native tongue and, through their accent, through their own “turns of phrase,” etc., their own history; as do pedestrians, in the streets they fill with their forests of desires and goals. In the same way the users of social codes turn them into metaphors and ellipses of their own quests.²¹⁴

First hand experience is often said to be rare in today’s society. Already in 1936 Walter Benjamin laments the death of experience and thereby the storytelling tradition: “Experience has fallen in value. /.../ It is as if something that seemed inalienable to us, the securest among our possessions, was taken from us: the ability to exchange experience.”²¹⁵ Benjamin blames the newspapers for fragmentizing experience and considers information as clearly distinguished from epic storytelling. In 1988, Frederic Jameson described a postmodern condition where the “/.../ truth of experience no longer coincides with the place in which it takes place, but is spread-eagled across the world’s spaces /.../ a situation arises in which he can say that if an individual experience is authentic, then it cannot be true; and that if a scientific or cognitive mode of the same content is true, then it escapes individual experience.”²¹⁶ But experience still obviously exists, and for an individual. As earlier discussed, it means being linked to the ability to be connected to narratives; experience as related to the process of clustering memories in terms of stories. According to Georgi Stojanov in “Texts, Minds, and Other

212. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, xxi.

213. *Ibid.*, xxii

214. *Ibid.*, xxi-xxii

215. Walter Benjamin, “The Storyteller’ Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov”, in *Narrative Theory: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies*, ed. Mieke Bal, Routledge 2004, p. 88.

216. Frederic Jameson, “Cognitive mapping” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. C. Nelson & L. Grossberg, University of Illinois Press 1988, p. 349.

Stories”²¹⁷ making sense of or understanding a story means to project it onto a *mental space*, the space of remembered stories. In this sense, experience is still related to *locality* as opposed to “the universal.”

In *Acoustic Mirror*, film theoretician Kaja Silverman describes voice-over in cinema as a disembodied authority, “a voice from on high.” The (male) voice speaks from a position of superior knowledge and superimposes itself over the image narrative.²¹⁸ In fiction film, Sarah Kozloff calls this narrator a third person frame narrator.²¹⁹ This voice is not visualized, it is superior to the characters and the plot of the film, it is free-floating, omniscient, and bodiless. This is a rare voice in fiction film, but has dominated documentary film where it has a history in newsreels. Low budgets and convenience were not the only reasons for using voice-over in newsreels, it turned out to be a perfect means for conveying the diverse material and sources in use, such as location footage, graphics, and archival material.

In my own work, I wanted to undermine this superior voice in order to create an uncertain and more open situation with time and space for reflection and interpretation. I asked myself: With what means can the voice of the narrator be “disturbed”, detached or idiosyncratic?

In the *Who is...?* films, I used the voice of a 10-year old girl who naturally has relatively little experience of life. She lacks experience, not least of the subject of these films – to present condensed biographies. She spells her way through certain sentences with some measure of doubt, to others she gives voice in her own way, sometimes based on a sudden, inspired involvement with some passage in the text. She becomes the medium, the one that both distributes and transforms the text. When listening to her voice, I realize the text has an unfamiliar ring even for me.

A narrator’s voice is often regarded as identical “/.../ with the implied author, i.e. with the real author in fictional disguise. A voice speaks and tells us what happened *to it*.”²²⁰ For a reader who is not an actor

217. In the catalogue *Little Big Stories*, 1998. The term *mental space* is from Gilles Fauconnier; *Mental Spaces*, MIT Press 1985. See also: <http://terpconnect.umd.edu/~israel/Fauconnier-MentalSpaces.pdf>, 14/3 2010.

218. Kaja Silverman, *Acoustic Mirror. The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema*, Indiana University Press 1988.

219. Sarah Kozloff, *Invisible Storytellers: Voice-Over Narration in American Fiction Film*, The University of California Press 1988.

220. Paul Ricoeur, “Den berättande tiden” in *Från text till handling*, p. 233.

(and so is not trained to interpret and create a small performance in the reading of the text), the effort involved in creating a narrative voice is substantial. There is a pressure involved here. The struggle to make the text inhabitable becomes even more difficult if the text happens to address the reader as subject, if it turns against the reader to imply that this person is speaking for himself, and is not at all the author in fictional disguise. This tension and its historical roots is discussed in the chapter “*Kumiko, Johnnie Walker & the Cute* (an extended work story)” in this dissertation, and I am not convinced that it is actually easy, even for a contemporary reader, to move in and out of the subjects (the egos) in this way. I believe that these tensions between the ego and this kind of text make it significantly harder to read out loud than it is to converse or walk down the street (de Certeau).²²¹

In voice recordings, the question of the degree of “locality” and “situation” of the voice is an audio-physical issue. A voice-over for documentary is normally recorded as existing in an abstract, “spaceless” room, whereas a voice for a radio theatre is recorded with a degree of echo. These factors are monitored by the use of absorbing and reflecting materials in the sound studio (where the more absorbing the materials are the more abstract the room appears). In my video essays, I recorded the voices in the rooms for reading (and acting) and not in sounds studios and thereby the environmental sounds leaked in.

In *Kumiko, Johnnie Walker & the Cute* this came out of necessity: I didn't have access to any sound studio in Tokyo and therefore made the recording/shooting in the office building of AIT (Arts Initiative Tokyo). This became my first experiment with a situated, and not disclosed, reader (even though the narrator's face is never revealed). The narrator is a woman approximately in Kumiko's age. She sits in front of a desk in a room, and her turning of the pages of the manuscript is meant to function as a driving force in the film. She provides the possibility of both reflecting on and making transformations in between the narrator, the author (artist), and the text. The whiteboard, which acts as the background to the narrator, and which is used in the film for writing words and questions, enables me not just to be a the writer of a story but also to be involved in didactic activities.

In *Madame & Little Boy* the narrator is fully exposed and the place of narration has, instead of a whiteboard, a centrally positioned film

221. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, xxi.

screen in the background. The rhythm of the text and mode of writing is created for Will Oldham, based on my interpretation of his work as a musician and actor. In this context, he represents a contemporary carrier of the tradition of *Americana* – a tradition I trace to the poetry of Walt Whitman (to which a line in the text also refers). Thus the story is distanced from my own subjectivity, and filtered and dislocated through Will Oldham's presence and intonation. His voice has its own life, it is a discourse of its own. This was a part of the relocation of the story.

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Essays

Who is Zdenko Bužek?

(text for voice-over)

He is an artist.

He belongs to the first group of graduates from the Art Academy in Skopje.

He lives in Zagreb. He's 41 years old.

He says he knows someone who can put his entire hand in his mouth.

He lives with his parents. He says that his mom always says what she feels, and that she talks whether anyone is listening or not.

He says that Croatia is a fertile country, that anything you put in the ground grows. He says Croatia could be the richest country in the world.

He says he sometimes sits by himself and laughs.

His fingertips and toes are unusually large and flat. You would think that they've been flattened out one by one in a vice.

He was at the front in the war against the Serbs in 1994. He belonged to a reserve patrol that would maintain the army's position when the regular

troops were away on leave.

He has a green baseball cap that says International Challenge Day.

He used to be married. The marriage lasted six months.

He says that no one in his family has the same unusual, large flat fingertips.

He has a friend who runs a chinchilla farm. He says that his friend is someone who is enormously talented but utterly incapable of following his ideas through. They meet sometimes to discuss things that irritate them. He says that they're thinking of writing a book, an account of all these moments of irritation in everyday life. His friend is irritated by the way his father eats honey; by the fact that his father uses a spoon to take honey out of the jar and a few drops always drop on the way to his mouth, so that now there are small sticky stains all over the house.

When he was at the front, they used to swim in the Kupa river which was the border to the Serbian-occupied territories. They would put away their weapons and lie down to sunbathe. The Serb soldiers would be sunbathing on the other side of the river.

The person he knows who can put his entire hand in his mouth is a lawyer. They live in the same apartment building. In 1987 he filmed his friend doing his hand trick.

A doctor told him that his strange fingers might indicate some kind of heart disease, but he's never had any heart problems.

He says that once after he'd smoked pot he was completely convinced that he did not exist.

When the regular troops returned, his group was given leave. In Zagreb he boarded a plane for Skopje. He says that one of the happiest moments of his life was realizing that the plane really had lifted from the ground, that he really had mana-

Who is Zdenko Bužek?

ged to escape from the war. He celebrated by ordering a whiskey.

He says that he is happy but he does not understand why.

He says that he wants to do an exhibition called “What the Fuck Is Going On?”

Despite the strange shape of his fingers, he has well-developed motor abilities. He says his mother always calls for him when she needs a needle threaded.

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Who is Zdenko Bužek?

(an extended work story)

After a short, dark tunnel, still traveling slowly through town, the train begins an imperceptible ascent, giving the illusion that it's levitating. You see the town from new angles that you'd never reach going by foot or car. On the west side is the unnaturally marine water of the Adriatic; facing east, as though on a camera winch, you go through the part of town called Suzak.

This is Rijeka, Croatia, a town that has had many names. For a long time, Rijeka was two towns: Suzak was the Serbian side and, on the other side of the canal, the Italian territory, Fiume, began. This division is curiously maintained by the local buses that head either north towards “Italy” or south towards “the Slavic.” Such pig-headedness remains, despite Rijeka's being *one* town since the formation of Yugoslavia.

I spent two months in Rijeka, Croatia, in the autumn of 2005, on a NIFCA scholarship. During those two months, I traveled back and forth to Zagreb, usually by train, though it took longer than by bus. Since 1998, I have more or less regularly

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Who is Zdenko Bužek?

(en utvidgad verkberättelse)

Efter en kort mörk tunnel börjar tåget som sakta rör sig genom staden helt omärkligt stiga, som om det började sväva. Man ser staden från nya vinklar som man aldrig skulle komma åt till fots eller med bil. På västra sidan: Adriatiska havets onaturligt marinblå vatten, med blicken mot östra sidan åker man som i en kameravinsch genom den del av staden som kallas Suzak.

Jag befinner mig i Rijeka i Kroatien, en stad som haft många namn. Rijeka var länge två städer: Suzak, som låg i Serbien och på andra sidan kanalen, på italienskt territorium, låg Fiume. Fortfarande upprätthålls märkligt nog tudelningen av lokalbussarna som antingen färdas enbart norrut mot ”Italien” eller enbart söderut mot ”det slaviska”; denna halsstarrighet trots att Rijeka sedan Jugoslaviens bildande är *en* stad.

Hösten 2005 tillbringade jag två månader i Rijeka i Kroatien som NIFCA-stipendiat och åkte fram och tillbaka till Zagreb, allra helst med tåg trots att det tar längre tid än med buss. Sedan 1998 har jag mer eller mindre regelbundet besökt detta land

visited the country that is no longer a country – the country you don't know what to call. “Former Yugoslavia” you can't say here; “western Balkans” or “southeast Europe” are used, but they seem like vain attempts to introduce new collective terms. “The Balkans” is a term from which people in Croatia want to distance themselves, as it's considered to have a bad taste, a taste of brutality and primitivism. The whole thing is very infected.

Rijeka has a pleasant smell that is a mix of freshly-baked bread and ocean. The town has so many architectural styles, partitions, layers, and niches that I didn't fully grasp and that go with all the states, confederations and individual madmen that have claimed it during the past century. There are inhabitants here who have lived in seven nations without ever moving.¹

From 1919 to 1920, the most peculiar experiment took place, probably the world's only anarcho-fascist state. The Italian poet and fighter pilot Gabriele d'Annunzio, along with 200 men in black, invaded the town. He proclaimed Fiume a republic dedicated to music. He printed stamps and collected taxes, and, together with an anarchist, wrote a constitution where he corporativistically divided the population into ten groups. D'Annunzio himself designed the emblem of each guild. The navy, which came to engage in piracy on the Adriatic Sea, was given a childish, Jolly Roger-like emblem. The highest group, the tenth corporation, was reserved for “geniuses, prophets, and chosen supermen.” D'Annunzio himself was, of course, the most prominent representative of this group. Of d'Annunzio you could say what Bruce Chatwin said about André Malraux: “He deliberately confuses the event with the archetypal situation.”²

In biographies, d'Annunzio comes across as a short, self-important dandy dressed in a captain's uniform. Every morning he made hour-long, meandering speeches from his balcony, in which he had a dialogue with himself. The Swedish author Agneta Pleijel has described the character: “The contents of the speech could vary from tirades on Italy's historic greatness and colonial future to the problems of minorities around the world; from militaristic outpourings to questions about basic income and

1. During the 20th century alone, the town was in submission to the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenians, Italy, Gabriele d'Annunzio, Germany, Yugoslavia, and now Croatia.

2. Bruce Chatwin, *What am I doing here?*, Picador 1990, p. 118.

som inte längre är ett land och som man inte vet hur man ska benämna. Här fungerar det inte att säga Ex-Jugoslavien; västra Balkan eller sydöstra Europa används också, men det tycks bara vara fåfänga försök att lansera nya sammanhållande begrepp. Balkan är ett ord man vill fjärma sig från i Kroatien, man tycker att det ger en dålig smak av brutalitet och primitivism. Man kan överhuvud taget inte längre benämna detta område som en region. Det hela är mycket infekterat.

Rijeka har en behaglig doft med en blandning av nybakat bröd och hav. Staden har så många arkitektoniska stilar, klyvnader, lager och nischer som jag inte helt begriper och som hör ihop med alla de statsbildningar, förbund och enskilda galningar som under det senaste århundradet har gjort anspråk på staden. Det finns innevånare som levt här i sju nationer utan att flytta.¹

Mellan 1919 och 1920 ägde det märkligaste experimentet rum: världens förmodligen enda anarkofascistiska stat. Den italienske poeten och stridsflygaren Gabrielle d'Annunzio invaderade staden med tvåhundra svartklädda män. Han utropade Fiume till republik, tillägnad musiken. Han lät trycka upp frimärken, drev in skatter och skrev en konstitution tillsammans med en anarkist där han enligt en korporativistisk modell delade in befolkningen i tio grupper. d'Annunzio formgav personligen emblem åt varje skrå. Flottan, som kom att ägna sig åt sjöröveri på Adriatiska havet, försågs med ett barnsligt Jolly Roger-liknande emblem. Den högsta gruppen, den tionde korporationen, var förbehållen ”genier, profeter och utvalda övermänniskor”. d'Annunzio var förstås själv den förnämsta representanten för denna grupp. Om d'Annunzio kan man säga samma sak som Bruce Chatwin sa om André Malraux: ”Han förväxlar medvetet händelsen med den arketypiska situationen.”²

I biografierna framstår d'Annunzio som en kortväxt, självhögtidlig dandy iklädd kaptensuniform. Varje förmiddag höll han timslånga slingrande tal från sin balkong, där han förde en dialog med sig själv. Agneta Pleijel har beskrivet karaktären: ”Talets innehåll kunde variera från tirader om Italiens historiska storhet och koloniala framtid till problemen för minoritetsfolk världen över. Från militaristiska utjutelser till

1. Enbart under 1900-talet har staden varit underställd Österrike-Ungern, Serbernas, kroaternas och slovenernas kungarike, Italien, Gabriele d'Annunzio, Tyskland, Jugoslavien och nu Kroatien.

2. Bruce Chatwin, *Vad gör jag här?*, Brombergs Bokförlag 2002, s 101.

women's emancipation. The speeches weren't necessarily an expression of his own opinions, but an opinion – a view – that had flown around the community for a while and now set down to polish its feathers in the mind of the speaker.”³

Every afternoon, the festivities commenced. Escaped prisoners, anarchists, Buddhists, theosophists, and homosexuals found sanctuary in Fiume. In the streets the men marched past in homemade uniforms of all sorts, medals on their breast for victories unknown. Every night fireworks lit up Quarnero Bay, and parties in bars became orgies. Fiume only lasted a year. The Italian government got tired with the operetta ways of d'Annunzio and sent the battleship *Andria Doria*. After a couple of gunshots from the harbor, d'Annunzio fled his palace.⁴

The Italian government didn't care for d'Annunzio's ways, but Mussolini had found his precursor. He came to copy the balcony speeches and black shirts of the fighter pilot poet, but removed the self-dialogic and added the gestures that would become well-known through newsreels. Mussolini blew himself up like a ruff, aired his aggressions, and then smugly nodded approval at his own outburst. He gave d'Annunzio a beautiful house by Lake Garda and an official appointment: Prince of Monte Nevoso [the Snowy Mountain].

3. Agneta Pleijel, "En bakåttsträvares framtidsvision," speech in Halmstad, Sweden, March 22, 2002.

4. For example Anthony Rhodes, *The poet as a Superman*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson 1959. The Japanese writer Yukio Mishima was obsessed with d'Annunzio. Mishima had translated d'Annunzio's play *The Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian*, and staged the drama himself in 1965. Possibly, it was the scene with d'Annunzio on his balcony that Mishima leaned on when, on the morning of November 25, 1970, he, together with four members of his private army – the so-called Shield Society – headed for Tokyo's Ichigaya base. Officially, this was to visit General Mashita in the Eastern Army's headquarters. But the courteous visit with General Mashita turned into a tumultuous assault. Mishima and his sworn men took the general hostage and occupied his office. The troops gathered outside the building and Mishima made a speech about the superficiality of modern Japan. But the soldiers weren't listening; they began to mock him and drowned his speech in taunts. After thrice shouting his salute to the Emperor, "Tenno Heika Banzai" [long live the Emperor] – Mishima returned inside. Together with one man from the Shield Society, Mishima then committed *seppuku* in the office; he drove a knife into his belly in a special pattern. But his second, who was selected to behead Mishima – all in accordance with tradition – failed and struck him in the shoulder with the sword. It took several strokes before another man from the group was able to separate the head from the body. In November of 2006, I attended Yasuri Morimura's performance at Shugoarts in Tokyo, where he imitated Mishima's gestures, clothing, and speech at the army headquarters. Morimura reused Mishima's attack on Japan but replaced parts of the speech so that its edge pointed instead at the Japanese art scene. In this, he clearly addressed Takashi Murakami, who Morimura seems to think adapts to Western tastes and just without thought repeats Japanese popular culture. On Mishima, see for example Henry Scott Stoke's biography *The Life and Death of Yukio Mishima*, Cooper Square Press 1975 and John Nathan, *Mishima: a Biography*, First Da Capo Press 2000.

frågor om medborgarlön och kvinnoemancipation. Talen uttryckte inte nödvändigtvis hans egna åsikter – utan en åsikt, en ståndpunkt som flugit omkring i gemenskapen ett tag och nu slog sig ner för att putsa fjädrarna i talarens sinne.”³

Förrymda fångar, anarkister, buddister, teosofer och homosexuella fann en fristad i Fiume. Varje eftermiddag drog festligheterna igång. På gatorna defilerade männen i hemmagjorda uniformer av alla slag. På bröstet bar de medaljer över okända segrar. Varje kväll lyste fyrverkerier upp Kvarnerbukten, och festerna på barerna övergick i orgier. Republiken Fiume höll bara ett år. Den italienska regeringen tröttnade på d’Annunzios operettfasoner och skickade pansarkryssaren Andrea Doria. Efter ett par skott från hamnen flydde d’Annunzio sitt palats.⁴

Mussolini hade funnit sin föregångsman. Han kom att kopiera balkongtal och svartskjortorna men tog bort det självdialogiska och lade till den gestik som sedermera blev känd genom journalfilmerna. Han blåste upp sig som en brushane, gav luft åt sina aggressioner och nickade sedan självgott åt sina utfall. Mussolini gav d’Annunzio ett vackert hus vid Gardasjön och en officiell utnämning: ”Furste över Monte Nevoso” [Den snöiga höjden].

3. Agneta Pleijel, ”En bakåtsträvares framtidsvision”, föredrag i Halmstad 22/3 2002.

4. Se tex Anthony Rhodes, *The Poet as Superman: A Life of Gabriele d’Annunzio*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson 1959. Den japanske författaren Yukio Mishima var besatt av d’Annunzio. Mishima översatte d’Annunzios pjäs *Den helige Sebastians martyrium* och satte själv upp dramat 1965. Möjligen var det scenen med d’Annunzio på balkongen som Mishima förlitade sig till när han på morgonen den 25 november 1970, tillsammans med fyra medlemmar ur sin privata armé, den så kallade Sköldstyrkan, begav sig till Ichigaya-basen i Tokyo. Officiellt var avsikten att besöka general Mashita i Östra arméns högkvarter. Men artighetsvisiten utvecklades till ett tumultartat överfall. Mishima och hans edsvurna tog generalen som gisslan och ockuperade hans kontor. Trupperna samlades utanför byggnaden och Mishima höll ett tal om det moderna Japans förfäckning. Men soldaterna lyssnade inte: de började håna honom och överröstade honom med glåpord. Efter att ha ropat ut sin hyllning till kejsaren: ”Tenno Heika Banzai” – ”Länge leve Kejsaren” tre gånger återvände Mishima in i byggnaden. Tillsammans med en man i Sköldstyrkan, begick sedan Mishima *seppuku* inne på kontoret, vilket innebär att Mishima körde en kniv i magen under en speciell rörelsemanöver. Emellertid misslyckades den sekund som – allt enligt traditionen – var utsedd att hugga huvudet av Mishima och högg honom i axeln. Det krävdes flera hugg innan en annan man ur styrkan lyckades skilja huvudet från kroppen. I november 2006 såg jag Yasuri Morimuras performance på ShugoArts i Tokyo där han imiterade Mishimas gester, kläder och tal vid arméhögkvarteret. Morimura återanvände Mishimas angrepp på Japan men ersatte delar av talet så att udden istället riktades mot den japanska konstscenen. Här fanns en tydlig adress till Takashi Murakami, som Morimura tycks mena anpassar sig till västvärldens smak och bara tanklöst repeterar den japanska populärkulturen. Om Mishima, se t. ex. Henry Scott Stokes biografi *The Life and Death of Yukio Mishima*, Cooper Square Press 1975 och John Nathans *Mishima: A Biography*, First Da Capo Press 2000.

I was a lodger on the upper floor of a house in Kostrena, just south of Rijeka. The daughter of the house and I would sometimes have a coffee by the boardwalk. She confided to me things like being nervous, wanting to study in London, having hurt herself skiing and – like a dark secret – that her family was Serbian and had therefore had their summer home confiscated during the war. Her father, a retired engineer who had himself forged the ceiling lamps and installed sensors that lit lamps in the garden and on the stairs when you came home at night, worked at the big oil refinery that had now been bought up by a Russian company. Everything at the coast was being bought by the Russians and the Germans, she said.

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The train rumbles diagonally past houses and backyards. Laundry dries on balconies and beyond it you can see straight into apartments until you're even higher and houses are farther apart and vegetation takes over, cacti, ivy, and climbing plants with little white flowers dotting the mountainside.

You still have an ocean view in one direction but the train veers inland and starts an increasingly steeper climb. Here are little houses with vegetable patches and chicken runs; still no fancy villas, which you'd find at any place in Europe with such a magnificent ocean view just outside of town. Soon the vegetation changes dramatically. A few thorny bushes rise from the bog. The train now moves very slowly, the mountain crest itself the transit area that takes the passengers into another climate zone. From here forests take over, first evergreens then deciduous forests turned autumn yellow. Here the temperature is five to ten degrees colder. Rivers wind along the tracks. You pass the light yellow station houses of the Habsburg Empire and at every such station house awaits a conductor with a cap and uniform with stripes, saluting the train – the remnant of an old-fashioned train culture that no longer exists in northern Europe.

Long before my travels to the Balkans I associated Zagreb with autumn. The name Zagreb for some reason conjured up an image of a man with large sideburns and a big cap who looked happy. He wore a brown, knitted turtleneck sweater and a long, brown scarf and a beige wool trench coat with big epaulets. Autumn colors in the background, everything was brown, yellow, and beige. The man with the sideburns

Jag var inneboende på övervåningen i ett hus i Kostrena strax söder om Rijeka och det hände ibland att jag tog en kaffe på strandpromenaden tillsammans med dottern i huset. Hon anförtrodde mig saker som att hon var nervös, ville studera i London, hade gjort sig illa vid skidåkning och – som en mörk hemlighet – att familjen var serber och under kriget därför fått sitt sommarhus beslagttaget. Hennes far, som var pensionerad ingenjör och som med egna händer hade smitt taklamporna och installerat sensorer som tändar och släcker lampor i trädgård och trappor när man kommer hem om kvällarna, hade arbetat på det stora oljeraffinaderiet som nu var uppköpt av ett ryskt företag. Allt vid kusten köps upp av ryssarna och tyskarna, sa hon.

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Diagonalt passerar tåget huskroppar och bakgårdar, genom den tvätt som hänger på tork på balkongerna ser man rakt in i lägenheterna. Ju högre man kommer desto glesare blir det mellan husen och växtligheten tar vid med kaktusar, murgröna och klängväxter med små vita blommor.

Man har fortfarande havsutsikt åt ena hållet men tåget svänger inåt landet och börjar klättra allt brantare. Här finns små hus med grönsakstäppa och hönsgård, men ännu inga flotta villor som man skulle finna på varje motsvarande plats i Europa med en sådan magnifik havsutsikt alldeles utanför staden. Snart förändras växtligheten dramatiskt. Några få taggiga buskar reser sig ur morasen. Tåget rör sig nu mycket sakta, bergskammen är det transitområde som förflyttar passagera till en annan klimatzon. Därefter tar skogarna tar vid, först barrskogarna sedan lövskogarna som är helt höstgula. Här är det fem till tio grader kallare. Floderna ringlar sig utmed spåret. Man passerar de ljusgula stationshus som en gång hörde till det habsburgska imperiet och vid varje sådant stationshus står en konduktör med skärmössa och uniform med revärer och gör honnör till tåget och på så vis, närmast övertydligt, upprätthåller en gammaldags tågkultur som inte finns kvar i norra Europa.

Långt innan jag började resa till Balkan associerade jag Zagreb med hösten. Namnet Zagreb framkallade av någon anledning en bild av en man med stora polisonger och stor keps som såg glad ut. Han bar en brun stickad tröja med polokrage, en lång brun halsduk och en beige ylletrenchcoat med stora axelklaffar. I bakgrunden höst-

wasn't even in a city, so why I connected him to the word Zagreb, I do not understand. It was probably a picture I'd seen in some magazine as a child. But even when I started to travel to Zagreb I thought this image somehow was accurate. Zagreb moves inside the yellow-brown-beige register in a myriad of shades. Not least, the city most often seems that way when you watch it from the "historic part" – Gornji Grad [the upper city] – that confirms its distinguished position by topographically being on a higher level, looking down on the rest of the city.

The historic part wanted at this time (2005) to expand and become even more historic. Also in the eastern quarters bordering Gornji Grad, cobblestone was laid out and the old wooden houses with galleries facing the street were refurbished. It is in these central parts that street names have been changed so that Yugoslavians in exile returning to Zagreb get lost in the alleys and feel hopeless and cut off from their memories and references. The renaming is a part of an ongoing and far-reaching political strategy that involves differential dictionaries and different linguistic redefinitions.⁵ Sanja Iveković has created several works that deal with these name changes of stores and streets in Croatia. "Freedom," "Knowledge," "Unity," and "Victory" were company names of Socialist Yugoslavia. During the transition period they were given new names such as "X Nation," "Eldi International" and "Terranova." Iveković's 2004 work *Ponos* [Pride] is very much a documentary and a laconic work consisting of a reconstruction of the neon sign that belonged to a fabrics store from the Yugoslavian era.

A Renaming Machine, in the designation of Macedonian theorist and curator Suzana Milevska, is stalking through all of Eastern Europe and, above all, through the Balkans.

As a region that has been overburdened with many changes in its state borders, the Balkans possess a history that abounds with the politics of renaming. With the break-up of Yugoslavia, the renaming "apparatus" erased and overwrote most

5. Since independence in 1991 this differentiating in relation to neighboring countries have taken on strong nationalist manifestations. When Croatia in the mid-1990s started subtitled Serbian films in cinemas it looked, even to those of nationalist inclination, like a bad joke, or as if the shows were made for the deaf. The difference between the Serbian and the Croatian that were spoken in Yugoslavia was less significant than that between many Swedish dialects.

färger: allt gick i brunt, gult och beige. Mannen med polisongerna befann sig inte ens i en stad så varför jag kopplade honom till ordet Zagreb förstår jag inte riktigt. Förmodligen var det en bild som jag hade sett i någon tidning som barn. Men även sedan jag började vistas i Zagreb tyckte jag att denna bild på något sätt stämde. Zagreb rör sig innanför det gul-brun-beiga registret i en mängd schatteringar. Inte minst ter sig oftast staden sådan när man betraktar den från den ”historiska delen” – Gornji Grad [övre staden] – som befäster sin förnäma position genom att topografiskt befinna sig på en högre nivå och titta ner på resten av staden.

Den historiska delen ville vid denna tid (2005) expandera och bli ännu mer historisk. I de östra angränsande kvarteren till Gornji Grad anlade man kullersten och rustade upp de gamla trähusen med loftgångar ut mot gatan. Det är i dessa centrala delar man döpt om namnen på gatorna så att exiljugoslaverna som återvänder till Zagreb förirrar sig i gränderna och känner sig hopplösa och avskurna från sina minnen och referenser. OmdöpanDET är en del av en pågående, omfattande politisk strategi som involverar skillnadsordböcker och olika språkliga omdefinieringar.⁵ Sanja Iveković har gjort flera verk som behandlar dessa namnbyten på affärer och gator i Kroatien. ”Frihet”, ”Kunskap”, ”Enighet” och ”Sejer” var namn på företag under den socialistiska Jugoslavientiden. Under transittiden fick de nya namn som ”X Nation”, ”Eldi International” och ”Terranova”. Ivekovićs verk *Ponos* [Stolthet] från 2004 är ett i högsta grad ”dokumentärt” och lakoniskt verk som består av en rekonstruktion av en neonskylt som tillhörde en tygaffär som fanns under Jugoslavieneran.

En *Renaming Machine*, för att använda den makedonske teoretikern och curatorn Suzana Milevska's benämning, går fram över hela östra Europa och framför allt Balkan.

Som en region fullklottrad med omritade statsgränser är Balkans historia övervämmad av omdöpanDEts politik. I och med Jugoslaviens upplösning kom omdöpanDEts apparat att suddas ut och skrivas över de flesta spåren från Tito-eran,

5. Sedan självständigheten 1991 har detta särskiljande i förhållande till sina grannar tagit sig starka nationalistiska uttryck. När man i mitten av 1990-talet i Kroatien började texta serbiska filmer på biograferna framstod det även för de nationellt sinnade som ett dåligt skämt, eller som om föreställningarna var gjorda för döva. Skillnaden mellan den serbiska och den kroatiska som talades i Jugoslavien är mindre än mellan många dialekter i svenskan.

traces from the Tito era, including the Yugoslav leader's own name, which had been attached to many places in the former country. /.../ Changes in the names of institutions, people, ethnicities, languages, toponyms, and even states are usually viewed as the first step in the process of appropriation, or erasure, of national, cultural, and personal identities, as well as a way to protect long-term political interests and ensure the domination over a territory.⁶

To the yellow-brown of Zagreb is added a blue somewhat brighter and paler than the Croatian flag; even the squeaking trams carry that blue all over town. It was during the shooting of *Who is Zdenko Bužek?* that I came across this blue. Or rather, it was when I went through the footage that I saw how the blue kept recurring in the images. Even in a close-up shot of a drop of golden honey slowly dripping from a spoon, that intense blue was there as a background.

The shooting took place during April of 2002. I was in the kitchen of the video's protagonist. He lives in a long eight-story building in a suburb. My small crew, consisting of two restless Croatian filmmakers, and I had mounted the camera on a tripod. One person held the in-focus spoon, the background was not discernible. How this kitchen could emit such a clear blue as the background of the honey drop is unbelievable and I've been astonished several times by this, returning to the kitchen after the film.

The kitchen was very worn down and has at its short end a door to a narrow concrete balcony facing the yard, a balcony that in practice functioned as a pantry. Everything in the kitchen was tinted amber, the result of cigarette smoking uninterrupted since 1969, when the family swapped a Belgrade apartment for this one. The whole apartment was otherwise dark and gave a somewhat brooding impression. From the dilapidated kitchen you could back out into the hallway, which was dimly lit by a yellowish lamp. Here was a salon hung with drawings, paintings, and collages from the hand of Zdenko Bužek, made over several decades. If you didn't know it, you'd never guess that these works were all by the same person. Here were meticulous pointillist drawings depicting organic forms, constructivist assemblages of machine parts, pornographic collages, little paintings in clear colors in horizontal bands, a

6. <http://www.g-mk.hr/programme/The-Renaming-Machine/325/> (14/3 2010), from the text for *The Renaming Machine*, which was a series of seminars and exhibitions curated by Suzana Milevska.

deribland den jugoslaviska ledarens eget namn som hade knutits till en mängd platser i Jugoslavien. /.../ Byten av namn på institutioner, människor, etniciteter, språk, toponymer och till och med stater betraktas vanligtvis som det första steget i approprieringen, eller utsuddandet, av nationella, kulturella och personliga identiteter, men även som ett sätt att skydda långsiktiga politiska intressen och säkra dominansen över ett territorium.⁶

Till den gulbruna färgen i Zagreb tillkommer en blå färg, något ljusare och blekare än den kroatiska flaggan, inte minst genom nyansen på de gnisslande spårvagnarna.. Det var under inspelningen av *Vem är Zdenko Bužek?* som jag upptäckte den blå färgen, eller snarare, det var när jag gick igenom det filmade materialet som jag såg hur den blå färgen löpte som en tråd genom bilderna. Till och med när jag i närbild lät filma hur en droppe guldglänsande honung sakta droppar ur en sked fanns den intensiva blå färgen som fond.

Inspelningen gjordes i april 2002. Jag befann mig i huvudpersonens kök. Han bor i ett långsträckt åttavåningshus i en förort. Tillsammans med mitt lilla filmteam, som bestod av två rastlösa kroatiska filmare, hade jag riggat upp kameran på ett stativ. En person höll i skeden där skärpan låg, bakgrunden kunde inte urskiljas. Hur detta kök kunde ge ifrån sig en sådan klarblå färg som bakgrund till honungsdroppen är obegripligt och jag har flera gånger förundrats över det när jag har återvänt till köket.

Köket var mycket slitet och hade i ena kortsidan en dörr till en trång betongbalkong som vette mot gården, en balkong som i praktiken fungerar som skafferier. Allt i köket hade de bärnstensnyanser som var resultatet av oavbruten cigarrettrökning sedan 1969 då familjen bytte till sig lägenheten mot en våning i Belgrad. Lägenheten var i övrigt mörk och gav ett lite tungt intryck. Från det slitna köket kunde man backa ut i hallen som var svagt upplyst av en gulaktig lampa. Här fanns en salongshängning av teckningar, målningar och collage från Zdenko Bužek hand utförda under flera årtionden. Om man inte visste det skulle man aldrig gissa att dessa verk var utförda av samma person. Här fanns minutiösa punktteckningar i tusch som framställde organiska former, konstruktivistiska assemblage av maskindelar, pornografiska collage, små målningar i klara färger i horisontella band, en barnboksliknande målning med

6. [http://www.g-mk.hr/programme/The-Renaming-Machine/325/\(14/3 2010\)](http://www.g-mk.hr/programme/The-Renaming-Machine/325/(14/3%2010)), från texten för *The Renaming Machine*, en serie seminarier och utställningar av curator Suzana Milevska (min övers. M.B.).

painting of a house against a blue sky that seemed to belong in a children's book...

In the living room, where the mother Radmila was smoking, reading the paper, and watching television, were a few sturdy pieces of tropical wood furniture that traced their origin to the years the family spent in Burma. On one of the end tables was a photo of the grandmother and grandfather taken by the Manakis brothers, the Balkans' first photographers.⁷

Zdenko's father Vilim, a Second World War partisan, was appointed embassy counselor as a reward for his accomplishments against the Fascists. Zdenko says that this trade did not suit his father. It happened that the family had to move on before the contract time had reached its end because the father argued with the ambassadors.

Everything in this apartment seemed long since stuck and was now at a halt. The Burma furniture had joined the brown-yellow register, even though a blood red nuance made itself known in a deeper layer. The Oriental wood could not give an air of the outside world.

Layer upon layer, the apartment had been covered in a nicotine varnish that shone dimly in the warm glow of a few lamps with yellowish glass cupolas. When they were lit at night they gave a certain bar or bistro feeling, breaking the isolation. In my eyes, they connected the room with all the aged European establishments that were characterized by the amber glow of the nicotine varnish. Still I had a hard time seeing that the family hadn't always lived here, but had for a time lead a wandering life on several continents. Zdenko went to kindergarten in Rangoon, where the father caught a tropical disease, and spent his first school years in Belgrade. They had spent time in Helsinki and Stuttgart before Vilim Bužek had finally been called home.

The father's regular coughing created an aural backdrop in the apartment, but fell silent in the spring of 2005. Vilim Bužek can be seen in a short sequence of my film, coming out of the bathroom in the yellow light. He was dying then but I still found him an imposing man, a man of style. He was tall, with his thick gray hair slicked back, smoking his cigarettes with an elegant fingering. He would have severe coughing fits that gripped his body and made him look less imposing, but he would

7. In Theo Angelopoulos's film *Ulysses' Gaze* (1995) an American director of Greek descent (played by Harvey Keitel) travels to the Balkans in search of three lost Manakis brothers reels.

ett hus mot en blå himmel...

I vardagsrummet där modern Radmila, rökte, läste tidningen och tittade på TV fanns några bastanta möbler i tropiska träslag som härstammade från den period då familjen bodde i Burma. På ett av soffborden fanns ett fotografi av mormodern och morfadern taget av bröderna Manakis, Balkans första fotografer.⁷

Zdenkos far Vilim, partisan från andra världskriget, blev utnämnd som ambassadråd för sina insatser mot fascisterna. Zdenko säger att det var ett yrke som passade honom illa. Det hände att familjen fick flytta vidare innan den avtalade perioden var till ända, eftersom dadern bråkade med ambassadörerna.

Allt i lägenheten verkade sedan länge ha fastnat och stod nu orörligt. Burma-möblerna hade inordnats i det brungula registret, även om en blodröd nyans gav sig tillkänna i ett djupliggande skikt. De orientaliska träslagen förmådde inte ge en fläkt av världen utanför.

Lager på lager hade lägenheten höljts i nikotinfernissa som glänste svagt i det varma skenet från några få lampor med gulaktiga glaskupoler. När de tändes på kvällen gav de en viss känsla av bar eller bistro och bröt slutenheten. I mina ögon förband de rummet med alla de ålderdomliga etablissemang i Europa som präglas av nikotinfernissans bärnstensglans. Ändå hade jag svårt att se att familjen inte alltid hade bott här utan en tid levt ett kringflackande liv på flera kontinenter. Zdenko gick på daghem i Rangoon, där fadern drog på sig en tropisk sjukdom, och spenderade sina första skolår i Belgrad. De bodde en tid i Helsingfors och i Stuttgart innan Vilim Bužek slutligen kallades hem.

Faderns regelbundna hostningar skapade en ljudkuliss i lägenheten, en ljudkuliss som upphörde våren 2005. Vilim Bužek förekommer i en kort sekvens i min film då han i det gula ljuset kommer ut ur badrummet. Han var då döende men jag tyckte att han fortfarande var en ståtlig man, en man med stil. Han var lång, med bakåtkammat tjockt grått hår, han rökte sina cigaretter med elegant fingerställning, fick svåra hostattacker som slet tag i hans kropp och fick honom att se mindre ståtlig ut, men han rätade sedan lugnt på kroppen och rökte vidare med blicken i fjärran. Vilim var aldrig intresserad av politik på något djupare plan, han hade hamnat i diplomatin mot sin

7. I Theo Angelopoulos film *Odysseus blick* (1995) reser en amerikansk regissör med grekiskt ursprung (spelad av Harvey Keitel) för att leta efter tre försvunna filmrullar av bröderna Manakis.

just calmly straightened his body and keep on smoking with a thousand mile stare. Vilim was never deeply interested in politics; he had ended up in the diplomatic trade against his will. His memories gravitated towards the war, not the latest but the one before – his generation's war. In my experience, this elucidation is often made here, since every generation has had its war.

On one occasion, after a violent coughing fit and a while of looking into the distance, Vilim said that I looked like a Dutch soldier he had once captured. I actually think that I didn't really remind him of anyone, not as a reminiscence. But he dwelled in memories. He returned briefly from memory to the living room, noticed my presence, but despite his knowing very well who I was – indeed, the diplomat in him had courteously acknowledged my presence in the room – I still reflected a scene from his partisan life.

Zdenko said his father guardedly considered his sister-in-law, the fanatic Blaga Fidanoska Popovska. For Aunt Blaga, who lived far from Zagreb, in Skopje, communism was a religion. I had seen in a black and white photo of her dinner with Tito how her eyes glowed. Another photo showed her husband Elisije Popovski handing over to the great leader a monograph on Macedonian monasteries.

As a communist, Blaga was in prison after the Bulgarian invasion of Macedonia in 1941. Her husband was seen as a freedom hero in Macedonia after the war. A street has been named after him. Blaga silently advanced within the party. She became a Member of Parliament, secretary of OZNA (Department of National Security), a member of the UBDA Committee (Management of National Security), chair of AFZ (Antifascist Women's Front), president of the Red Cross, a member of the Skopje City Council, and even head of the Macedonian National Bank. All this has been described by Zdenko in a series of installations (*4 Autopsychoanalysis. Supplement to the Biography of Blaga Fidanoska Popovska*).

After her husband's death, Aunt Blaga became a recluse in her home. She kept records of her movements, though every day was a repetition of the one before. She collected her party books where the spelling of her surname reflected the dominant power in Macedonia in each period: "Popova" during Bulgarian rule; "Popović," a Serbian variation during the Yugoslavian era; and in the latter phase, "Popovska," which is something in between Bulgarian and Macedonian spelling, and finally the

vilja. Hans minnen graviterade mot kriget, inte det senaste utan det näst senaste, hans generations krig. Det är ett förtydligande som ofta görs här, har jag erfarit, eftersom varje generation haft sitt krig.

Vid ett tillfälle, efter en våldsamt hostattack och en stunds fjärrskådande så Vilim att jag liknade en holländsk soldat som han en gång hade tagit till fånga. Jag tror egentligen inte att jag verkligen påminde honom om någon, inte som en erinran. Men han vistades bland minnena. Från minnet återvände han kort till vardagsrummet, upptäckte min närvaro, men trots att han mycket väl visste vem jag var – diplomaten i honom hade artigt erkänt min närvaro i rummet – så speglade jag ändå en scen från partisanlivet.

Zdenko så att fadern med avmätthet betraktade sin svägerska, den fanatiska Blaga Fidasoska Popovska. För moster Blaga, som bodde långt från Zagreb, i Skopje, var kommunismen religion. Jag hade sett ett svartvitt fotografi av hennes middag med Tito, hur det lyser i hennes ögon. Dessutom en bild av hur hennes make Elisijev Popovski överränner en monografi om makedonska kloster till den store ledaren.

Som kommunist satt Blaga fängslad efter den bulgariska invasionen av Makedonien 1941. Efter kriget sågs maken som frihetshjälte i Makedonien. Man har döpt en gata efter honom. Parallellt gjorde Blaga en tyst karriär inom partiet. Hon blev medlem av parlamentet, sekreterare för OZNA (Avdelningen för Nationell Säkerhet), medlem av UDBA-kommittén (Styrelsen för Nationell Säkerhet i Makedonien), ordförande i AFZ (Antifascistisk Kvinnofront), ordförande för Röda Korset, medlem av Skopjes stadsfullmäktige och till och med chef för den makedonska nationalbanken. Allt detta har Zdenko redogjort för i en serie installationer (*4 Autopsychanalysis. Supplement to the Biography of Blaga Fidasoska Popovska*).

När maken dog stängde moster Blaga in sig i hemmet. Hon förde bok över sina förflyttningar där varje dag var en upprepning av den föregående. Hon samlade sina partiböcker där stavningen av hennes efternamn speglade den dominerande makten i Makedonien under varje period: "Popova" under det bulgariska styret, "Popović" – en serbisk variant under Jugoslavientiden och i den senare fasen: "Popovska", som är något mittemellan bulgarisk och makedonsk stavning samt slutligen den make-

Macedonian spelling “Poposka.”⁸

When Aunt Blaga died in the mid-1990s – without ever openly expressing any doubt about the magnificence of her life’s work – Zdenko went through her belongings in the house in Skopje. There was an enormous amount of stuff; Blaga had been a collector. He exhibited a selection of the objects in the exhibition *Little Big Stories* at the National Library in Skopje.

On a table Zdenko had placed her giant key ring, holding close to a hundred keys. Either his aunt had collected keys of all sorts, or she had actually had access to all these locks and doors, which was an even more chilling thought. Zdenko had mounted on cardboard Blaga’s hopeless mathematical calculations, running page upon page. Inserted among indecipherable calculations were tickets of different kinds as well as little sketches of a house she planned to build or dreamed of building, a house where her focus was the doors. In little awkward drawings she carefully calculated the measurements of doors leading to new rooms with new doors.

Since Blaga’s death, the line from Macedonia to Zagreb is maintained primarily through the exquisite dishes mother Radmila cooks, among others bell peppers filled with minced meat and tomatoes and *Gravče na tavče*, which roughly translates as “overcooked beans.” These dishes give daily nourishment to the middle-aged Zdenko, who has chosen to live his adult life in the amber apartment with his parents. Zdenko still has a comfortable life with Macedonian dishes, of which he is content to eat minimal portions. Zdenko was married once but it only lasted six months. Life as a husband did not go well with the life of an artist, he thought.

Zdenko’s brother, If, is a bachelor too, but he has his own apartment and mostly comes over for Sunday dinner. If is a croupier, which is less fancy than it sounds. His work is watching the slot machines in the arcade above Zagreb’s central bus terminal. It is uneventful work, I gathered when we visited him there, leaving him an abundance of time to smoke cigarettes and solve crossword puzzles. If he could have watched the stream of travelers from the buses, time would have passed more quickly, but he

8. The work with Blaga’s party books was included in the part of *The Renaming Machine* that was shown at Galerija Miroslav Kraljević, Zagreb (May 20–June 26, 2009).

donska stavningen ”Poposka”.⁸

När moster Blaga dog i mitten av 1990-talet – utan att någonsin ha öppet gett uttryck för tvivel över förträffligheten i sin livsgärning – gick Zdenko igenom hennes tillhörigheter i huset i Skopje. Där fanns en ofantlig mängd ting, Blaga hade varit en samlare. Han ställde ut ett urval av objekten i utställningen *Little Big Stories* på Nationalbiblioteket i Skopje.

På ett bord hade Zdenko placerat hennes gigantiska nyckelknippa med närmare etthundra nycklar. Antingen hade mostern samlat på alla sorters nycklar, eller också hade hon verkligen haft tillgång till alla dessa lås och dörrar vilket var en än mer skrämmande tanke. På kartonger hade Zdenko klistrat upp Blagas tröstlösa matematiska uträkningar som löpte sida uppoch sidaner. Infogade bland obegripliga kalkyler fanns biljetter av olika slag samt små skisser av ett hus som hon planerade eller fantiserade om att bygga, ett hus där hon koncentrerade sig på dörrarna. I små valhänta teckningar beräknade hon noggrant måtten på dörrar som ledde till nya rum med nya dörrar.

Efter Blagas död upprätthålls linjen från Makedonien till Zagreb främst genom de utmärkta maträtter som mamma Radmila lagar, bland annat paprikor fyllda med köttfärs och tomat och *Gravče na tavče*, vilket ungefär betyder överkokta bönor. Dessa rätter när dagligen den medelålders Zdenko, som har valt att leva sitt vuxna liv tillsammans med sina föräldrar i bärnstenslägenheten. Han lever här fortfarande ett bekvämt liv med makedonska maträtter som han nöjer sig med att äta minimala portioner av. Zdenko var en gång gift men äktenskapet varade bara i sex månader. Livet som make passade inte med livet som konstnär, tyckte han.

Även Zdenkos bror If är ungar, men han hade en egen lägenhet och kom mest dit på söndagsmiddag. If är croupier, vilket är mindre flott än det låter. Hans arbete består i att övervaka spelautomaterna i spelhallen som ligger ovanpå den centrala bussterminalen i Zagreb. Det är ett händelsefattigt arbete, förstod jag när vi hälsade på honom, som gav honom ett överflöd av tid för cigarettökning och korsordslösning. Om han kunnat betrakta strömmen av resenärer från bussarna skulle tiden ha gått fortare, men inte ens det kunde han göra eftersom spelhallen saknade fönster

8. Verket med Blagas partiböcker ingick i den del av *The Renaming Machine* som visades på Galerija Miroslav Kraljević, Zagreb (20/5–26/6 2009).

didn't even have that, as the arcade had no windows, making it feel like a bunker with red wallpaper and a sort of heavy curtain along one wall.

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The entrance of the market economy in the Balkans is sometimes described as a sudden awakening from a communist sleep. It's a false image, I guess, but the very memory of the old system can, in Zdenko's opinion, sometimes appear as in a dream. Like dreams, the earlier system can leave behind a phantom pain in waking life. Gradually, during the day, events evaporate, but a vague indefinable memory lingers as a taste in your mouth. Sometimes you pause for a moment, feeling that something's been lost.

Zdenko's bedroom was dark and had seen even more smoke than the other rooms. Here the nicotine shades formed fanciful veils. He rarely got up before eleven, as he could hardly be spoken to before completing his yoga exercises called "The Five Tibetans," and imbibed the ingredients he mixed in a cup: coffee with milk, brown sugar, and soggy corn flakes. There were days when he acted like a depressed person and wouldn't get up at all. But Zdenko had never been depressed, as far as I understood.

To me it seems obvious to shoot him lying in bed, as an introduction to the question *Who is Zdenko Bužek?* In this scene, he "sleeps" entirely emblematically and symmetrically, arms straight at his sides. This is his physical introduction in the video. I thought about how people are examined during transitional stages. You want to see what they are carrying, what they hide in their luggage. They are subjected to the inspecting gaze, which is usually the gaze of customs officers and the police.⁹

When I visited, I always slept in the room in the same apartment that Zdenko

9. During this time I was reading Emanuel Swedenborg, above all *Heaven and Hell*, where, he describes in detail the construction of the organization of angels and of the different transitional stages of the spirit world. During the first stage, before the destination of the deceased has been decided – said deceased being a spirit and not understanding that he is dead – the deceased man is subjected to the inspecting gaze of special scrutinizing angels that are meticulous about all details and nuances. They make sure that the deceased opens his *memorandum books*, where every deed and every thought is recorded. It is a slow process, as the angels first examine shifts in the face and ".../ their search extends through the whole body, beginning with the fingers of each hand, and thus proceeding through the whole." Emanuel Swedenborg, *Heaven and its Wonders and Hell, From Things Heard and Seen*, Swedenborg Society (<http://swedenborg.newearth.org/orghh/hh48.html>, 24/2 2010).

vilket fick den att framstå som en bunker med röda tapeter och ett slags tung gardin-drapering längs ena kortsidan.

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Marknadsekonomins inträde på Balkan framställs ibland som ett uppvaknande efter en kommunistisk sömn. Det är en falsk bild, antar jag, men själva minnet av det tidigare systemet kan, som Zdenko menade, ibland framstå som i en dröm. Liksom drömmarna kan det tidigare systemet lämna efter sig en fantomsmärta i det vakna livet. Efterhand, under dagen, dunstar skeendena bort, men ett vagt obestämt minne finns kvar som en smak i munnen. Ibland hejdar man sig ett ögonblick med känslan att man tappat något.

Zdenkos sovrum var mörkt och till och med ännu mer inrökt än de övriga rummen. Här bildade nikotinfärgen fantasifulle slöjor. Han steg sällan upp före elva och gick inte att tilltala innan han hade gjort sina yogaövningar ”de fem tibetanerna” och med sked ätit de ingredienser som han blandat i en kopp: kaffe med mjölk, brunt socker och uppblötta cornflakes. Det fanns dagar då han betedde sig som en deprimerad människa och vägrade stiga upp överhuvudtaget. Men Zdenko hade aldrig varit deprimerad, vad jag förstod.

För mig var det en självklarhet att filma honom liggande i sängen, som en introduktion till frågan *Vem är Zdenko Bužek?* Han ”sover” i denna scen helt emblematiskt och symmetriskt, med raka armar utmed sidorna. Detta är hans fysiska introduktion i videon. Jag tänkte på hur människor granskas i övergångsstadier. Man vill se var de bär med sig, vad de gömmer i sitt bagage. De drabbas av de inspekterande blickarna, vilket brukar vara tulltjänstemännens och polisernas blickar.⁹

När jag var på besök sov jag alltid i Zdenkos ateljérum som låg i samma lägenhet

9. Under denna tid läste jag Emanuel Swedenborg, framför allt *Himlen och helvetet* där det i detalj beskrivs hur änglarnas organisation och anderikets olika övergångsfaser är konstruerade. I det första skedet, innan den avlidnes destination är avgjord – man är då en ande och begriper inte ens att man är död – synas man av speciella granskande änglar som är noga med alla detaljer och nyanser. De ser till att de avlidna öppnar sina *minnesböcker* där varje handling och varje tanke finns lagrad. Det är en långsam process då de granskande änglarna först studerar skiftningar i ansiktet och sedan ”/.../ från och med fingrarna, först på den ena handen och sedan på den andra, och fortsätter därefter över resten av kroppen”. (Emanuel Swedenborg, *Om Himlen och dess under och om helvetet enligt vad jag hört och sett*, översättning från latinet av Björn A.H. Boyesen, Proprius förlag 1986, s. 382.)

used as his studio, and I share his morning paralysis, the feeling of lacking power. You are the unresisting prisoner in another world, a parallel world, more important and more interesting than the waking world. It is as though the body won't submit to will, as though reality is a much too brutal place to enter. Morning dreams have an admirable ability to explain away, encapsulate, or develop that which might wake you: the alarm clock or the potato salesman calling "*Krumpira! Krumpira! Krumpira!*" [Potatoes! Potatoes! Potatoes!]¹⁰

I had seen in a catalogue a work by Mladen Stilinović, a drawing with the words *krumpira, krumpira, krumpira...* but the picture didn't emit any meaning before I heard the *krumpira* calls that are shouted in the morning through a bullhorn from a pick-up truck making its rounds through the yards. Most tenants in this house used their basement storage spaces as food cellars and many stocked up in anticipation of winter. In the autumn, the potato chanting was at its most intense and Zdenko complained about the salesman's repetitive, metallic voice hacking a hole in his morning slumber.

Many of my conceptions about Zagreb have been colored afterwards by the works of Mladen Stilinović, even though I know them mostly from catalogues. But it is also Stilinović's physical appearance that plays tricks on me; his furrowed face and staring, melancholy gaze, his large ears and strangely flattened head. And then the moustache that must be called an "old man's" moustache. That is for me the city of Zagreb transcribed to a look, at least the male look.

I can, for example, no longer think of the banks along the river Sava, not far from Zdenko's apartment, where we took walks, without seeing in front of me both Stilinović's face and his photographs. He calls the pictures *Bag People* (2001). You see the backs of men and women wandering the bank, "as if they were going on into infinity."¹¹ Plastic bags in hand, weighed down by something much heavier than their contents, the people are on their way from Jakuševac, the flea market.

10. Or is it the other way around, that I wake in order to be able to keep on "sleeping" and thereby avoid having to confront "the reality of my desire"—a possibility put forth by Slavoj Žižek in his 1989 reading of Lacan in *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Verso 1989 (cf. G.I. Gurdjieff's ideas of how man awakes to a mechanical sleep, e.g. in Colin Wilson's *G.I. Gurdjieff: The War Against Sleep, The Philosophy of Gurdjieff*, Karnack Books 2005).

11. "Timeless Poverty," Tihomir Milovac in conversation with Mladen Stilinović, in the catalogue for *The Cynicism of the Poor*, MCA, Zagreb 2001–02, p. 16.

och jag delade hans förflamning på morgnarna, känslan av kraftlöshet. Man är en motståndslös fånge i en annan värld, en parallellvärld som är viktigare och intressantare än vakenvärlden. Det är som om kroppen inte lyder viljan, som om verkligheten är en alltför brutal plats att stiga in i. Morgondrömmarna har en beundransvärd förmåga att bortförklara, kapsla in eller utveckla sådant som man riskerar att vakna upp av: väckarklockan eller potatisförsäljaren som gastar *krumpira, krumpira, krumpira!* [potatis, potatis, potatis!].¹⁰

Jag hade i en katalog sett ett verk av Mladen Stilinović, en teckning med orden *krumpira, krumpira, krumpira...* men bilden gav inte ifrån sig någon mening innan jag hörde *krumpira*-ropen som om förmiddagarna skanderas med megafon från en bil med lastflak som cirkulerar mellan gårdarna. De flesta hyresgästerna i detta hus använde källarförråden som matkällare och många bunkrade upp inför vintern. På hösten var potatisropandet som intensivast och Zdenko beklagade sig över försäljarens tjatiga, metalliska röst som hackade hål på hans morgonsömn.

Många av mina föreställningar om Zagreb har i själva verket infärgats i efterhand av Mladen Stilinovićs verk, trots att jag mest känner dem från kataloger. Men det är även Stilinovićs fysiska gestalt som spökar, hans färade ansikte och stirrande melanholiska blick, hans stora öron och märkligt tillplattade huvud. Och så mustaschen, förstås, som man måste kalla en gammelmansmustasch. Detta är för mig staden Zagreb transkriberad till ett utseende, åtminstone i dess manliga gestalt.

Jag kan till exempel inte längre tänka på vallarna utmed floden Sava, inte långt från Zdenkos lägenhet, där vi brukade promenera, utan att se både Stilinovićs ansikte och hans fotografier framför mig. Han kallar bilderna *Bag People* (2001). Man ser ryggtavlorna av män och kvinnor som vandrar på vallen, ”som om vandringen är oändlig”.¹¹ De har plastpåsar i händerna, nedtyngda av något mycket tyngre än innehållet i plastpåsar, de är på väg från Jakuševac, loppmarknaden.

10. Eller om det tvärtom är så att jag vaknar för att kunna fortsätta att ”sova” och därmed slippa konfronteras med ”det reala i mitt begär” – en möjlighet som Slavoj Žižek lägger fram i sin Lacan-läsning i *Ideologins sublima objekt*, Glänta Produktion 2001, s 54 (jämför också med G. I. Gurdjieffs idéer om hur människan vaknar till en mekanisk sömn (se t.ex. Colin Wilson, *Kampen mot sömnen*, Mimer förlag 1984)).

11. ”Timeless Poverty”, Tihomir Milovac i konversation med Mladen Stilinović i katalogen för *The Cynicism of the Poor*, MCA, Zagreb 2001/2, s. 16 (min övers. M.B.).

Stilinović's photographs were part of an installation where he imitated the way of the flea market to display goods on old newspapers. It was a sight at Jakusevac that that made Mladen Stilinović create these works: a man with only one thing to offer for sale: his own empty wallet.¹²

Potatoes, bread, fried eggs, coffee drinking, and pastries – such basic things are found in Stilinović's work, often by way of word play and acts that are ostensibly humble or even nonchalant. In addition to *krumpira*, there is another word in his repertoire that is repeated, written into and attached to so many objects and situations that it has turned into an artifact or a *word figurant* – *bol* [pain]. It's been written on mattresses, made into a dice game, and written over every word in a dictionary. The word has been deprogrammed. You could say the repetition of the word works as an invocation, were it not that the word clashes so strongly with Stilinović's jaded, everyday style. *Bol* belongs to the color white, and is the opposite of power in Stilinović's system; *bol* is powerlessness.

With Stilinović at the back of my mind I filmed a feeder stream of Sava in my Zdenko biography. The water figures in a sequence where the naïve narrating voice (belonging to an eleven-year-old girl) explains that Zdenko has said that once, after smoking marijuana, he got it in his head that he didn't exist. But I also thought about what Zdenko had said of the run of Sava: that Zagreb is undermined by underground rivers that affect people's psyches and thoughts; that the water of Sava – which really consists of dark undercurrents – in its quiet and fawning way sees the light of day in something that here, most of all, looks like a manmade canal surrounded by banks but that, in reality, is the psychic secretion of Zagreb. In my video there is no expressive manifestation of such suggestions. I chose the opposite – the emblematic and dry, together with the naïve narrating voice.

Zagreb has a history of black magic, curses, and occultism, Zdenko later told me. There are streets where demonic figures grimace from the front walls of the houses. They are not there to scare away evil forces, but to flirt with them.

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12. *Ibid.*, p. 15

Stilinovićs fotografier ingick i en installation där han imiterade loppmarknadens sätt att exponera varor på tidningspapper. Det var en syn på Jakusevac som fick Mladen Stilinović att göra dessa arbeten, en man som bara hade en enda sak att bjuda ut till försäljning, sin egen tomma plånbok.¹²

Potatis, bröd, stekta ägg, kaffedrickande och bakelser – sådana grundläggande saker tar plats i Stilinovićs arbeten, ofta utifrån språklekar och till synes anspråklösa eller rent av nonchalanta handlingar. Jämte *krumpira* finns ett annat ord i hans repertoar som upprepats, inskrivits i och fästs vid så många objekt och situationer att det har förvandlats till en artefakt eller en *ordfigurant* – *bol* [smärta]. Det har skrivits på madrasser, gjorts till tärningsspel och skrivits in över varje ord i en ordlista. Ordet har avprogrammerats. Man skulle kunna säga att upprepningen fungerar som en *besvärjelse* om ordet inte skar sig så mot Stilinovićs luttrade och vardagliga stil. *Bol* hör ihop med färgen vitt och är motsatsen till makt i Stilinovićs system, *bol* är maktlöshet.

Med Stilinović i bakhuvudet filmade jag ett tillflöde till Sava i min Zdenko-biografi. Vattnet förekommer i en sekvens där den naiva berättarrösten (som tillhör en då elvaårig flicka) förklarar att Zdenko sagt att han en gång efter att ha rökt marijuana fick för sig att han inte existerade. Men jag tänkte också på vad Zdenko berättat om Savas lopp: att Zagreb undermineras av underjordiska floder som påverkar människors psyke och tankar. Att vattnet i Sava, som egentligen består av mörka underströmmar som på sitt stilla och ögontjänande sätt kommer i dagen i något som här mest liknar en anlagd kanal omgiven av vallar, är Zagrebs psykiska utsöndring. I min video finns ingen expressiv gestaltning av sådana suggestioner. Jag valde det motsatta – det emblematiske och torra tillsammans med den naiva berättarrösten.

Senare har senare Zdenko sagt mig att Zagreb har en historia av svart magi, förbannelser och ockultism. Det finns gator med demoniska figurer på husfasaderna som grimaserar. Det är inte för att skrämja bort onda krafter utan för att flirta med dem.

*

12. Ibid. s. 15.

When I first met Zdenko Bužek, in connection with the 1998 exhibition *Little Big Stories* in Skopje, I had already begun a work which I imagined would work both as a counterbalance to involuntary oblivion and as a means of connecting with reality. I could feel how memory and the realities were constantly dissolving or giving in and that it often took a great effort to maintain contact with my surroundings. I sometimes got the feeling that the ability to adhere to the social body wasn't automatically working, but that there was a work to be done.¹³ At the same time I was looking for a form, or a method, to depict certain people I had met. I started thinking in terms of biography, even if that genre doesn't usually deal with people that aren't famous. These people were neither famous nor unknown. Could biography be used in a low-key manner, without heroic undertones?

The stories wouldn't depend on poignancies or important things. I sought for a strategy where the story was *under construction*. At the same time I asked myself, "How can I create a place for such stories in the visual arts, in the tradition that has disparaged 'the literary' and still rejected the particular?"

I started making notes on certain people I met and tried to relate to my visual impressions and my memory. I wrote down some twenty simple sentences about the person. A few themes about each person was enough and these themes could be shuffled and repeated in something akin to a chorus. Objects, names, and details were to be central in the repetitions and form something like an enumeration or a list. To write such a text is to hope for something, to hope for a sustaining of the words. "Go closer, make yourself nearsighted, go straight for the stuff and the details of the stuff!" as Erik Beckman wrote in his poem *Kyss er!* [Kiss you!].¹⁴ You hope for the naming of the objects and people and for the aura of objects and people, as if all lived reality and political reality stemmed from them.

I thought that such a text with such a view on a single person would be able to both situate and unfold questions on politics, love, and aesthetics, but that the business of unfolding the questions was not mine, but that of the beholder/reader. A biography inevitably describes some sort of parable, but these would be incomprehensible parables, parables you wouldn't know how to use. I would then have to

13. See also the catalogue *Konspirationen/The Conspiracy*, Magnus Bårtås (ed.), Uppsala Konstmuseum 1997.

14. Erik Beckman, *Kyss er!*, Bonniers Förlag 1969, p. 86.

När jag första gången träffade Zdenko Bužek, i samband med utställningen *Little Big Stories* i Skopje 1998, hade jag redan påbörjat ett arbete som jag föreställde mig skulle fungera både som en motivikt till ofrivillig glömska och som ett medel för att få kontakt med verkligheten. Jag kunde uppleva hur minnet och realiteterna ideligen upplöstes eller gav vika och att det ofta krävdes en kraftansträngning för att uppehålla en kontakt med omgivningen. Jag fick ibland för mig att vidhäftningsförmågan till den sociala kroppen inte automatiskt fungerade, utan att man hade ett arbete att utföra.¹³ Samtidigt sökte jag efter en form, eller en metod, för att berätta om vissa personer som jag mött. Jag kom att tänka i termer av biografi, även om biografi-genren sällan tar sig an människor som inte är ”kända”. Dessa personer var varken ”kända” eller ”okända”: kunde biografien användas på ett nedtonat sätt, utan heroiska undertoner?

Berättelserna skulle inte vara beroende av poänger eller viktigheter. Jag sökte efter en strategi där berättelsen var ”under organisation”. Samtidigt frågade jag mig: hur kan jag skapa en plats för sådana berättelser i bildkonsten, i en tradition som baktalat ”det litterära” och som fortfarande skydde det partikulära?

Jag började föra anteckningar om vissa personer jag mötte och försökte förhålla mig till mina sinnesintryck och mitt minne. Jag skrev ner ungefär tjugo enkla meningar om varje person. Några få teman räckte om varje person och dessa teman kunde varvas och repeteras i vad som liknade ett omkväde. Ting, namn och detaljer skulle vara det centrala i dessa upprepningar och bilda något slags uppräkningslista eller lista. Att skriva en sådan text innebär att hoppas på något, att hoppas på ordens efterklang. ”Gå närmare, gör dig närsynt, gå rakt på prylarna och detaljerna på prylarna!” som Erik Beckman skrev i diktsamlingen *Kyss er!*¹⁴ Man hoppas på namngivningen av tingen och människorna och på tingens och människornas aura, som om all levd verklighet och politisk realitet utgick från dem.

Jag tänkte att en sådan text med en sådan blick på en enda person skulle kunna såväl situera som veckla ut frågor om politik, kärlek och estetik, men att det inte var min sak att veckla ut frågorna utan betraktarens/läsarens. En biografi framställer oundvikligen någon form av parabel men detta skulle bli parabler som man inte visste hur man skulle använda. Jag var därför tvungen att framställa ett sentiment

13. Se också katalogen *Konspirationen! The Conspiracy*, red. Magnus Bårtås, Uppsala Konstmuseum 1997.

14. Erik Beckman, *Kyss er!*, Bonniers förlag 1969, s. 86.

render a sentiment that was all but transparent, that avoided the sentimental and melancholy that threatened to sneak into every singular statement about a person's life. A certain dullness. After a while I realized that the texts were as much about me as about the people they depicted.

Having in various ways presented the texts in differing installations in galleries, museums, reading rooms, and libraries between 1998 and 2002, I decided to return to some of the people. I wanted to ask them to play the role of themselves according to the "plots" at hand in the texts.¹⁵ The first was Zdenko. The converting of the text, or the transferring of the text to a new medium, would be based on a simple and manageable working process. I and possibly one or two others would handle the cameras; a shooting period of two weeks would be feasible.¹⁶

The work should function as an attack on reality. Or as a spot check. A parallel could be drawn to the military doctors who, in the 19th century, used surprising blows and pressures on certain points of their patients' bodies in an attempt to separate pretenders from the ill.

But on another level, the work was a negotiation. I told Zdenko that I wanted to do a "follow-up" on the text, to recreate it in cooperation – that we wouldn't change anything in the content, but pretend that everything was the same as when I wrote it three years ago. The text had indeed arisen from an unexpected encounter and spontaneous conversation and it included a lot that was possibly insignificant and random, but now we'd stick to these details, dwell into them as if they were all of utmost importance. But how these details would be performed through stagings, choice of images, locations, and individuals was a matter of negotiation and cooperation.

Not least Zdenko's peculiar, broad fingernails had gotten a prominent position in the text. In some rhyming way the nails carried with them a string of events having to do with hand and mouth: smoking, spitting wine, dropping honey on its way to the mouth, sticking hand in mouth, wetting thread in mouth to thread a needle. I wanted to stage a first random encounter with another person. The body's appearance,

15. Depending on the circumstances, context, and location, I used reading apparatuses, banners, or signs, or had the text placed directly on furniture. Cf. <http://www.magnusbartas.se>.

16. The film was produced by Filmform and was part of the project *The Magnificent Six* in cooperation with Swedish Television and the Swedish Film Institute.

som var närmast transparent, som undvek det sentimentala och melankoliska som hotade att smyga in i varje enskild utsaga om en människas tillvaro. Det krävdes en viss tråkighet. Efter ett tag insåg jag att texterna handlade lika mycket om mig själv som om personerna.

Efter att på olika sätt ha presenterat texterna i installationer på gallerier, museum, läsrum och bibliotek mellan 1998 och 2002 beslöt jag mig för att återvända till några av personerna. Jag ville be dem spela rollen av sig själva enligt de ”handlingar” som förelåg i texterna.¹⁵ Den förste var Zdenko. Omvandlingen av texten, eller förflyttningen till ett nytt medium, skulle bygga på en enkel och hanterbar arbetsprocess. Jag och möjligen en eller två andra skulle sköta kamerorna, inspelningen skulle vara möjlig att göra på två veckor.¹⁶

Verket skulle fungera som ett utfall mot verkligheten. Eller som en stickprovskontroll. Man kan jämföra med militärläkarna på 1800-talet som med överrumplande slag och tryck mot vissa punkter på patienternas kroppar försökte skilja simulanterna från de sjuka.

På ett annat plan innebar arbetet en förhandling. Jag sa till Zdenko att jag ville ”följa upp” texten och återskapa den i ett samarbete. Att vi inte ändrade något i innehållet, utan låtsades att allt var som när jag skrev den tre år tidigare. Texten hade ju uppstått ur ett oförmodat möte och spontan konversation och den innehöll mycket som möjligen kunde ses som oviktigt och slumpartat, men nu skulle vi hänga fast vid dessa detaljer, gå till botten med dem som om de alla var av största vikt. Men hur dessa detaljer skulle gestaltas genom iscensättningar, val av bilder, platser och individer var en fråga om förhandling och samarbete.

Inte minst Zdenkos egendomliga, breda naglar hade fått en framskjuten position i texten. På något rimmande sätt förde naglarna med sig ett koppel av händelser som hade med hand och mun att göra: att röka, spotta vin, tappa honung på väg till munnen, att stoppa in handen i munnen, att väta tråden i munnen för att kunna trä den genom nålsögat. Jag ville iscensätta ett första obetingat möte med en annan män-

15. Beroende på sammanhang, kontext och lokal använde jag mig av läsapparater, banderoller, skyltar eller så lät jag texterna placeras direkt på möbler. Se <http://www.magnusbartas.se>.

16. Filmen producerades av Filmform och ingick i projektet *Sex vågade livet* i samarbete med Sveriges Television och Svenska Filminstitutet.

look and expression become unavoidable in such a first encounter. "First impressions last" is a popular saying, not entirely truthful, but it was still from such a thought that this work emanated.

Everything was easy and smooth with Zdenko. We took walks in the neighborhood, traveled to Nikola Iskra by the Slovenian border, and flew to Skopje to recreate the situation when Zdenko fled the war. He cooperated with me as if it was the most natural thing in the world.

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In Zdenko's studio room in the amber apartment, one wall had irregular color lines from all the canvases that had been taped to the wall and painted all the way to the edge. From the futon where I was usually offered a bed I could peer through a crack in the window at pine tress and chestnut trees between the houses – chestnut trees that in the autumn surrendered suddenly, shedding all their leaves within a day or two. Zdenko collected his objects from this room for the *Biografija* exhibition, which we did together with Zeljko Zorića in Zagreb in 1999.¹⁷ In the installation *Supplement to the Biography of Zdenko Bužek* he showed scraps of paper he had used to wipe off his ink pens, a small booklet with 76 jokes, and different objects from his desk, among these a cork screw, some rulers, a knife used as a pencil sharpener, a cigarette case with a built-in lighter that was a gift from his uncle to a person called Serafina Avramović, a mineral that was supposed to have a positive radiance, and a bunch of keys from Istanbul. There was also an address book, pieces of paper with phone numbers jotted on them, business cards, and a list with notes on different vacation houses that Zdenko was interested in buying, among these a Finnish wooden house of the Honka brand.

Zdenko had sold most of his books to an antiquarian bookseller. One of the few remaining in the string shelf, *Torpedo*, an absurdist short story collection in the spirit of Daniil Charms, he had himself authored and published with a Belgrade publisher in the 1980s. His preface consists of only two sentences: "I am first and foremost a reader. I dedicate this book to myself."

17. At VN Galley, curated by Suzana Milevska, with a catalogue text by Nina Butić.

niska. Kroppens framträdande, utseende och uttryck blir ofrånkomliga i ett sådant första möte. Populärt säger man ”första intrycket består”, vilket inte är helt sant, men det var ändå från en liknande tanke detta arbete uppstod.

Allt var mycket lätt och smidigt med Zdenko. Vi gjorde vandringar i kvarteret, reste till Nikola Iskra vid slovenska gränsen och flög till Skopje för att återskapa den situation då Zdenko flydde från kriget. Han samarbetade med mig som om det var det mest naturliga i världen.

*

I Zdenkos ateljérum i bärnstenslägenheten hade den ena väggen oregelbundna färglinjer efter alla upptejpade dukar som satts upp och målats ända ut i kanten. Från den utdragssoffa där jag brukade erbjudas sängplats kunde jag genom en springa i fönstret se tallarna och kastanjerna mellan husen, kastanjerna som på hösten gav upp helt hastigt och släppte alla sina blad på en eller två dagar. Zdenko samlade sina objekt från detta rum till utställningen *Biografija*, som vi gjorde tillsammans med Zeljko Zorića i Zagreb 1999.¹⁷ I installationen *Supplement to the biography of Zdenko Bužek* visade han pappersbitar som han använt för att torka av sina tuschpennor, en liten booklet med sjuttiosex skämt samt olika objekt från skrivbordet, bland annat en korköppnare, några linjaler, en kniv som användes som pennvässare, en cigarettask med inbyggd tändare som var en gåva till hans morbror från en person som hette Serafina Avramović, en mineral som skulle ha positiv utstrålning samt en nyckelknippa från Istanbul. Här fanns också en adressbok, lappar med nedklottrade telefonnummer och visitkort. Dessutom en lista med anteckningar om olika fritidshus som Zdenko var intresserad av att köpa, bland annat ett finskt timmerhus av market Honka.

Zdenko hade sålt de flesta av sina böcker till ett antikvariat. En av de få som fanns kvar i stringhyllan – *Torpedo*, en absurdistisk novellsamling i Daniil Charms anda – hade han själv författat och publicerat på ett Belgrad-förlag på 1980-talet. Hans förord består enbart av två meningar: ”Jag är först och främst en läsare. Jag dedicerar denna bok till mig själv.”

17. På VN Gallery, curerad av Suzana Milevska och med en katalogtext av Nina Butić.

Torpedo earned Zdenko a certain reputation in Zagreb's literary circles, even if Zdenko hadn't seemed very interested in belonging there; he had at any rate made no effort to do so, just like he hadn't made one to belong to the art scene. Zdenko doesn't write "ordinary" literary texts anymore, but in 2003 he published an *artist's book*, containing the first one hundred pages of Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot*. In his opinion as a reader, this was the interesting part; there was no need for more.

The textual form that Zdenko worked with in the autumn of 2005 was the joke – the funny story – or, as it's called in Croatia: *vicevi*. Zdenko had written down close to 200 jokes as support for his performances. After having selected among these jokes, he came to the conclusion that 76 of them were of interest. As soon as he found new ones, some were eliminated from the collection. Seventy-six was the ideal number.

Kommt eine Tunte zur Tankstelle, nimmt einen Zapfhahn und schiebt ihn sich in den Hintern.

Ein Deutscher, der vor der Zapfsäule in der Schlange gewartet hat, sieht das und sagt:

– Das ist nicht NORMAL!

– Nein!, erwidert die Tunte. Das ist SUPER!¹⁸

George Macianus, who launched the word Fluxus, elevated the joke – together with all sorts of play and distractions – to art. Or rather, the other way round – art was brought down to the level of the joke. As fleeting, "unnecessary," and bound to coincidence as the joke was, so was Fluxus art (which he often called "Fluxus Art-Amusement"). "It is the fusion of Spike Jones, Vaudeville, joke, children's games and Duchamp."¹⁹

When I think about it, I hardly know anyone but Zdenko who tells jokes. I myself probably don't know a single one by heart. Neither does it amuse me to hear them. With some effort I laugh out of duty. But if I'm fond of the joke teller I can

18. Zdenko Bužek, *Witze*, Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst Leipzig (preface: Barbara Steiner), Leipzig 2004, pp. 17f.

19. From Macianus' 1965 manifesto, quoted in Bengt af Klintberg, *Svensk Fluxus/Swedish Fluxus*, Rönnefs Antikvariat, Stockholm 2006, p. 47. The historic roots of Fluxus also included, according to Macianus, ".../ not only Dada, futurist theater, and Buster Keaton, but also Baroque fireworks, medieval church processions, and Roman circus." *Ibid.*, pp. 47–48.

Torpedo gav Zdenko ett visst rykte i Zagrebs litterära kretsar, även om Zdenko inte verkar ha varit så intresserad av att ingå där. Han har åtminstone inte ansträngt sig, lika lite som han ansträngt sig att ingå i konstlivet. Zdenko skriver inte längre några ”vanliga” litterära texter, men 2003 gav han ut en *artist book* som innehöll de första hundra sidorna av Dostojevskijs *Idioten*. Det var denna del som var intressant var hans åsikt som läsare, mer behövdes inte.

Vitsen var den textuella form som Zdenko sysslade med hösten 2005, den roliga historien, eller som det heter i Kroatien: *vicevi*. Zdenko hade tecknat ner närmare 200 vitsar som ett stöd för sina performances. Efter att ha valt bland dessa vitsar kom han fram till att sjuttiosex av dem var intressanta. Så fort han hittade nya vitsar, tog han borta några ur samlingen. Sjuttiosex var det ideala antalet.

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– Nein!, erwidert die Tunte. Das ist SUPER!¹⁸

George Maciunas, som var den som lanserade ordet Fluxus, upphöjde vitsen tillsammans med all slags lek och förströelse till konst. Eller snarare tvärtom – konsten togs ner på vitsens nivå. Lika flyktig, ”onödig” och bunden vid tillfälligheter som den roliga historien var fluxuskonsten (som han ofta kallade ”Fluxus konst-nöjen”). ”Fluxus konst är summan av Spike-Jones, vaudeville, vits, barnlek och Duchamp.”¹⁹

När jag tänker efter känner jag knappast någon annan person än Zdenko som drar vitsar. Själv kan jag nog inte en enda rolig historia utantill, inte heller roas jag av att höra roliga historier. Med viss ansträngning skrattar jag av ren plikt men om jag är

18. Zdenko Bužek, *Witze*, Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst Leipzig, (förord: Barbara Steiner), Leipzig 2004, s. 17–18.

19. Ur Maciunas manifest från 1965 citerat i Bengt af Klintberg, *Svensk Fluxus/Swedish Fluxus*, Rönnells antikvariat, Stockholm 2006, s. 47. I Fluxus historiska rötter ingick också, enligt Maciunas, ”/.../ inte bara dada, futuristteater och Buster Keaton utan också barockens fyrverkerier, medeltida kyrkliga processioner och romersk cirkus.” (s. 48).

easily laugh at that person laughing. Zdenko often has enormous fits of laughter after having told a joke. It's the kind of laugh that can't be stifled, that runs through the body without mercy. Muscles contract and shiver in an unstoppable manner. The laughter puts on a performance of its own, not just the face but the whole body. It's a contagious phenomenon, always equally entertaining to behold. Like a natural phenomenon, you never tire of watching.

In the autumn of 2005, Zdenko participated in an exhibition in Leipzig and had his 76 jokes translated in a little booklet. The German language has created a displacement – a strange distance to the source. Some of the jokes, transported through three languages, receive a wholly tragic and frightening meaning.

Ein Ustasa flieht durch einen Wald vor den Cetniks und gelangt schließlich auf eine Lichtung. Mitten auf dieser Lichtung befindet sich ein Brunnen, schnell springt er dort hinein.

Schon kommen auch die Cetniks angelaufen und bleiben verwundert neben dem Brunnen stehen.

– Wohin ist er verschwunden?

Aus dem Brunnen ertönt das Echo: – Verschwunden, verschwunden...

– Na, vielleicht ist er im Wald? – Aus dem Brunnen: – Im Wald, im Wald...

– Nicht, dass er im Brunnen ist?

– Ist er nicht, ist er nicht...²⁰

Zdenko divided the jokes into three categories: Yugoslavian-era jokes, transit-period jokes, and post-socialist jokes. They expressed hopes for political change, disappointment in political change that never was, traumas, prejudice about ethnicity, insanities of the system, sexism, infantilism...

Zdenko's joke performances had a simple arrangement. He announced that he would be at certain bars for limited periods of time. He sat there with a beer or coffee and told his jokes and suffered laughing fits that made his eyes well up with tears. On one occasion, in Istanbul,²¹ a phone was placed on a podium in a gallery. The visitors

20. Zdenko Bužek, *Witze*, p. 29. Ustaša were Croatian fascists who were allied with Hitler and Mussolini 1941–45 (and also a designation for the Croatian neo-fascists of today). Četnici were Serbian nationalists who fought both Ustaša and Tito's Partisans. Serbian paramilitaries in the latest war also referred to themselves as Četnici.

21. Yıldız Sabancı Kültür Merkezi, at the 6th Istanbul Biennial, Istanbul.

fäst vid personen som drar en vits kan jag utan ansträngning skratta åt att personen skrattar. Zdenko får ofta enorma skrattattacker efter att ha dragit en historia. Det är den sortens skratt som inte kan hejdas, som obarmhärtigt drar genom kroppen. Muskulaturen drar sig samman och rister på ett ohejdbart sätt. Skrattet utför sin egen föreställning, inte bara i ansiktet utan i hela kroppen. Det är ett smittsamt fenomen, alltid lika roligt att se. Som ett naturfenomen man inte tröttnar på att iaktta.

Zdenko hade hösten 2005 just deltagit i en utställning i Leipzig och låtit översätta sina 76 vitsar i ett litet häfte. Tyskan har skapat en förskjutning, ett egendomligt avstånd till källan. Transporterade genom tre språk får vissa av vitsarna en helt igenom tragisk och skrämmande innebörd.

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– Nicht, dass er im Brunnen ist?

– Ist er nicht, ist er nicht...²⁰

Zdenko delade in vitsarna i tre kategorier: vitsar från Jugoslavientiden, vitsar från transitperioden och post-socialistiska vitsar. Vitsarna uttrycker förhoppningar om politiska förändringar, besvikelse över uteblivna politiska förändringar, trauman, etnicitetsfördomar, systemgalenskap, sexism, infantilitet...

Zdenkos vits-performance var enkla arrangemang. Han annonserade sin närvaro på en viss bar under en angiven tidsrymd. Han satt där med en öl eller en kaffe och drog sina roliga historier och drabbades av egna skrattattacker som fick hans ögon att tåras. Vid ett tillfälle, i Istanbul,²¹ placerades en telefon på ett podium i ett gal-

20. Zdenko Bužek, *Witze*, s. 29. Ustaša var kroatiska fascister i allians med Hitler och Mussolini 1941-45 (och är även en beteckning på dagens kroatiska nyfascister). Četnici var serbiska nationalisterna som stred mot både Ustaša och Titos partisaner. Serbiska frikåren under det senaste Jugoslavienkriget betecknade sig också som Četnici.

21. Yıldız Sabancı Kültür Merkezi, den 6:e Istanbulbiennalen, Istanbul.

were encouraged by a small sign to dial a number. The number went to a hotel room in the same city where Zdenko sat on the bed delivering jokes about earthquakes.

The jokes are otherwise usually about police officers (corrupt), blondes (stupid), and politicians (untrustworthy or primitive).²² As in most countries in the world, jokes are made about neighboring countries where the people are portrayed as retarded. This was also the case during the Yugoslavian era when it was more about the regional character than the national. Montenegrins are indolent, work-shy enjoyers of life. They never participate in battle but are always celebrating new victories. Mujo, Haso, and Fatima (Fata) are three licentious but not very bright Bosnians. They like sex and coffee. Stef, Jura, and Bara are three Croatian rednecks, dense, easily fooled, and prone to drink.

Der Kroatie Franjo, der Serbe Sloba und der Bosnier Alija sind zum Angeln und fangen dabei ein Goldfisch. Der Goldfisch bittet um seine Freiheit, im Gegenzug würde er jedem von ihnen einen Wunsch erfüllen.

Sloba erwidert wie aus der Pistole geschossen: –Alle Kroaten sollen verschwinden!

Der Wunsch wird sofort erfüllt.

Franjo: –Alle Serben sollen verschwinden! – Auch dieser Wunsch wird erfüllt.

Alija muss kurz überlegen und beschließt dann: –Bring mir eine Tasse Kaffee!²³

Slavoj Žižek posits that political jokes in communist countries weren't at all subversive, but a part of the system; that they belonged to the set of obscene, unwritten laws that in every society complements the official, written laws. A truly subversive act would, on the other hand, be to truly subscribe to the official doctrine and act as if the other part, the unwritten law, didn't exist. In such situations the regime was forced to either use violence or to offer real concessions. The typical dissident was, according to Žižek, the person who, from the start, had taken the system more seriously than did the system itself. The people of power had conversely adopted a cynical distance that, in reality, was the very precondition to reach the inner core of the party

22. Politicians are systemized into a typology of special roles. Džemal Bijedić (1917–1977), Bosnian minister in Tito's cabinet, had in the Socialist-era jokes the role of the primitive, provincial type who was either impressed by everyone and everything or dropping busybody comments around him. See Barbara Steiner's preface, *ibid.*, pp. 7f.

23. *Ibid.*, pp. 18f. The characters' names refer to Franjo Tuđman, Slobodan Milošević, and Alija Izetbegović.

leri. Besökarna uppmanades av ett litet anslag att slå ett nummer. Numret gick till ett hotellrum i samma stad där Zdenko satt på sin säng och levererade vitsar om jordbävningar.

Skämten gäller annars vanligtvis poliser (korrupta), blondiner (dumma) och politiker (opålitliga eller primitiva).²² Liksom i de flesta länder i världen skämtar man om sina grannar och framställer dem som efterblivna. Så var det även under Jugoslavientiden då det handlade om regionalkaraktärer snarare än nationalkaraktärer. Montenegriner är lättjefulla, arbetsskygga livsnjutare. De deltar aldrig i strider men firar ständigt nya segrar. Mujo, Haso och Fatima (Fata) är tre liderliga, och inte alltför smarta bosnier. De gillar sex och kaffe. Stef, Jura och Bara är tre kroatiska lantisar, enfaldiga och lättlurade, begivna på starka drycker.

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Slavoj Žižek menar att de politiska vitsarna i kommunistländerna inte alls var subversiva utan en del av systemet, att de tillhörde den uppsättning obscena, oskrivna lagar som i alla samhällen fungerar som ett komplement till de offentliga, skrivna lagarna. En verkligt subversiv handling vore däremot att verkligen leva upp till den officiella doktrinen och agera som om den andra delen, den oskrivna lagen inte existerade. I sådana lägen tvingades regimen antingen att ta till våld eller till att erbjuda verkliga eftergifter. Den typiske dissidenten var enligt Žižek den person som från början tagit systemet på större allvar än systemet självt. Maktmänniskorna däremot lade sig till med en cynisk distans som egentligen var själva förutsättningen för att nå in i partiets

22. Politikerna inordnas i en typologi med särskilda roller. Džemal Bijedić (1917–1977), bosnisk minister i Titos regering, hade i skämten under socialisttiden rollen som den primitive, provinsielle typen som antingen imponerades av allt och alla eller spred beskäftiga kommentarer runt sig. Se Barbara Steiners förord i a.a. s. 7–8.

23. Zdenko Bužek, *Witze*, s.18-19. Karaktärerna syftar på Franjo Tudman, Slobodan Milošević, och Alija Izetbegović.

(and was the same cynical malleability that made it possible for them to swiftly shift their positions when the system fell).²⁴

Mujo bekommt einen Sohn.

– Wem sieht er ähnlich?, fragt ihn Haso.

– Schwer zu sagen, auf jeden Fall niemandem, den du kennst...²⁵

So it wasn't the humor that toppled the communist regimes, as is sometimes proposed. The resplendence of that image is a fallacy, according to Žižek; the humor was part of the cynical game – that is to say the unwritten laws – and was included in a gratification following from the submission to the socialist order. Žižek holds that the fall of the Eastern Bloc came when people stopped believing in the system inasmuch as they suddenly started to dismiss or ignore the unwritten laws.

Still, one wonders about the reasons for individuals suddenly changing vocabularies or deciding to rescind the dialectics between the official laws and the obscene, unwritten laws of the underside. What moved certain individuals in this direction? What made people talk and laugh so differently that no revolution was needed? Eventually, the point was reached where half a continent's systems that had been linked together, built up with meticulous control for close to fifty years, crumbled in a few months.

*

During my visits with Zdenko Bužek over the years, I knew that he came to life pretty quickly after the special breakfast of coffee-sodden cornflakes with milk and brown sugar. We walked around the area or took the tram to the city center if there was a reason to, which there rarely was. In the neighborhood, people came forward who had an eye for Zdenko. A nod acknowledges another person's existence; a conversa-

24. See Slavoj Žižek, "Totalitarian laughter" in *The Sublime Object of Ideology and The Metastases of Enjoyment: Six Essays on Women and Causality*, Verso 2005. See also Alexei Yurchak, who dismisses the political explosive force in the Soviet Union in *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*, Princeton University Press 2006.

25. Zdenko Bužek, *Witze*, 2004, p. 12.

inre krets (och det var samma cyniska följsamhet som gjorde det möjligt för dem att snabbt skifta position när systemet föll).²⁴

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Det var alltså inte humorn som fällde kommunistregimerna som det ibland påstås. Tjuskraften i bilden är falsk, enligt Žižek, humorn var en del av det cyniska spelet, det vill säga de oskrivna lagarna, och ingick i en njutning som underkastelsen under den socialistiska ordningen medförde. Žižek menar att fallet i öst berodde på att människor slutade tro på systemet i den meningen att man plötsligt började underkänna eller strunta i de oskrivna lagarna.

Ändå undrar man om skälen till att enskilda människor plötsligt började använda ett annat vokabulär eller fick för sig att upphäva dialektiken mellan de officiella lagarna och fränsidans obscena, oskrivna lagar. Vad var det som vissa individer förflyttade i den här riktningen? Vad fick människor att tala och skratta så annorlunda att det inte behövdes någon revolution? Till slut nåddes den punkt då de sammanlänkade systemen som dominerade en halv kontinent, uppbyggda med minutiös kontroll på alla nivåer under närmare femtio års tid, rasade samman under några månader.

*

Under mina olika besök under årens lopp hos Zdenko Bužek visste jag att han levde upp ganska fort efter den speciella frukosten av cornflakes uppblött i kaffe med mjölk och brunt socker. Vi gjorde vandringar i området eller tog spårvagnen in till centrum om det fanns skäl, vilket det sällan finns. I kvarteret gav sig människor till känna som hade ett öga till Zdenko. En nickning erkänner en annan människas existens, en

24. Se Slavoj Žižek, "Det totalitära skrattet", i *Ideologins sublima objekt* och "Överjagets obscena fränsida" i *Njutandets förvandlingar: Sex essäer om kvinnan, kulturen och makten*, Natur och Kultur 1999. Se även Alexei Yurchak som underkänner vitsens politiska sprängkraft i Sovjetunionen i *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*, Princeton University Press 2006.

25. Zdenko Bužek, *Witze*, s. 12.

tion is something else. The talkative called him Charlie, for some reason long since forgotten. The housing block accommodated close to a thousand people; with the surrounding identical buildings it came to about five thousand people, a small town in itself. Traditionally, this was a tenant area for police and military personnel. In line with the official Yugoslavian doctrine of “brotherhood and unity,” Croats, Serbs, Montenegrins, Bosnians, and Macedonians were mixed here. All but a few were city servants. During the latest war, many of the Serbs and Montenegrins were afraid they were going to be murdered and fled. There were weapons in every apartment here. On birthdays and at weddings, blasting gun salutes were always heard – a tradition not yet abandoned. After the war, people were indeed asked to hand in their weapons, but here all sorts of licenses were produced, and a weapon or two in the drawer could always come in handy.

In the same house lived Gotcha, a Serbian woman who would not be frightened into leaving. She was a corporate accountant and wore suits. I had gotten it in my head that she fancied Zdenko and, when I suggested as much, he didn't protest. Patiently she drove us to Zdenko's friend Nikola Iskra by the Slovenian border. It was a full day's trip, including the detour over Karlovac, the drinking of beer and playing of pool.

In the block lived Predrag, a rotund lawyer working for the Croatian state. When he was younger he could fit his whole hand in his mouth. At the time of shooting for my video he claimed he was still able to do so, but made various excuses when asked to prove it. (Luckily, Zdenko recorded such an occasion in 1987 and I was able to borrow the sequence for my video.) Predrag published absurdist prose when he was younger, not unlike Zdenko's. When we met to talk about his participation in my video, he gave me a present – a bottle of apple cider vinegar branded “Magnus.” Then he complained about not having written a single line in ten years. But now he had an idea for a text that he wanted to create through a kind of performance, which was to result in a collective story. He had recently paused outside a school and let his mind run freely for a moment. He had thought about his childhood and started to weave a story about a grown man who enters a school, and starts to relive past events at the sight of corridors and classrooms. Now he wanted to invite friends to his apartment and have a reading of this story. The friends would be asked to enter the school themselves to then build further on the story.

pratstund är något annat. De pratsamma kallade honom Charlie, av något skäl som alla för länge sedan glömt bort. Huskroppen rymde närmare tusen personer, med de omgivande identiska huskropparna blev det ungefär fem tusen personer, i sig en mindre stad. Traditionellt sett var det här ett hyresområde för poliser och militärer. I linje med den officiella jugoslaviska doktrinen om ”broderskap och enighet” blandade man kroater, serber, montenegriner, bosnier och makedonier. I stort sett alla tjänade staten. Under (det senaste) kriget blev många av serberna och montenegrinerna rädda för att bli mördade och gav sig av. Här fanns vapen i var och varannan lägenhet. Vid födelsedagar och bröllop hördes alltid salutmatter, en tradition som ännu inte har övergivits. Efter kriget bad man visserligen folk lämna in sina vapen, men här uppvisades licenser av alla slag, och ett och annat vapen kunde vara bra att ha i byråådan.

I samma hus bodde Gotscha, en serbisk kvinna som inte lät sig skrämmas utan stannade kvar. Hon var revisor på ett företag och bar dräkt. Jag hade fått för mig att hon var förtjust i Zdenko och när jag föreslog det protesterade han inte. Tålmodigt körde hon oss till Zdenkos vän Nikola Iskra vid slovenska gränsen. Resan tog en hel dag med omväg förbi Karlovac för ölrickande och biljardspel.

I kvarteret bodde Predrag, en rundlagd advokat som arbetade åt den kroatiska staten. När han var yngre kunde han stoppa in hela handen i munnen. Vid tiden för inspelningen av min video påstod att han fortfarande att han var kapabel till det, men kom med undanflykter när någon bad honom bevisa det. (Lyckligtvis filmade Zdenko en sådan händelse 1987 och jag fick låna sekvensen till min video.) Predrag hade publicerat absurdistiska prosatexter när han var yngre, inte olika Zdenkos. När vi träffades för att tala om hans närvaro i min video gav han mig en present, en äppelvinäger av märket ”Magnus”. Sedan beklagade han sig över att han inte skrivit en rad på tio år. Men nu hade han en idé om en text som han ville skapa genom ett slags performance som skulle resultera i en kollektiv berättelse. Han hade nyligen stannat till utanför en skola och låtit tankarna flyta fritt en stund. Han hade tänkt på sin barndom och börjat brodera på en historia om en vuxen man som går in i en skola och vid åsynen av korridor och klassrum upplever händelser från det förflutna. Nu ville han bjuda in vänner till sin lägenhet och läsa upp denna berättelse. Vännerna skulle uppmanas att själva gå in i skolan för att sedan bygga vidare på berättelsen.

Robert is another of these friends who appeared between the shabby house fronts in a housing area that, on the surface, met the expectations that Westerners have of a worn-down suburb in this part of Europe, but whose architectural likes are found in many places all over the world, not least in Stockholm. Robert was a skinny translator of indeterminate age. He had a pious smile and bad teeth. He spent most of his time caring for his ailing, completely helpless wife who had been bedridden for years, having had a colostomy. Robert lived on a minimum. He made his living as a translator of classical drama and told me that he dreamed of publishing a manuscript full of mistakes and proofreading errors. To discuss something with Zdenko was, for Robert, a much-needed break from the books and the caretaking of his wife; it was a moment of freedom. Robert talked at length about the theater and which stagings he really would like to see. He suggested engaging psychotic and other mentally ill people for the roles in some classic psychological drama, by Ibsen, for example. He imagined how some actor would soon get stuck on a phrase and repeat it over and over again: "...the sky is blue, the sky is blue, the sky is blue..." He suggested that a production of Oedipus should have a young man making love to an older woman in the background all the way through the performance. Furthermore a reality drama should be staged at Zagreb's city theater where you could follow, as in a docusoap, people's everyday lives on stage, including bathroom visits. Playing hours would be from 8am to 3pm every day.

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Zdenko showed me during my visits where the neighborhood K67 kiosks were. K67 is the official name for peculiar polyfiber-reinforced kiosks. The kiosks, designed in the latter part of the 1960s, look like nothing else with their rounded corners and bright colors; they look like they're from the future and seem to have landed on carefully selected spots around the cities. The design goes together with a style found in typefaces, signs, and a certain brutal functionalist architecture in the former com-

Robert var en annan av dessa vänner som uppenbarade sig mellan de slitna husfasaderna i ett bostadsområde som till det yttre uppfyllde alla de förväntningar som västmänniskor har om en sliten förort i denna del av Europa, ett slags område som emellertid finns på många platser världen över, inte minst i Stockholm. Robert var en mager översättare i obestämbar ålder. Han hade ett fromt leende och dåliga tänder. Han ägnade sin mesta tid åt att vårda sin sjuka fru som var sängliggande sedan många år, stomiopererad och fullständigt hjälplös. Robert levde på ett minimum. Han försörjde sig som översättare av den klassiska dramatiken och berättade att han drömde om att få publicera ett manus fullt av misstag och korrekturfel. Att dryfta något med Zdenko innebar för Robert en välbehövlig paus från böckerna och vårdandet av frun, det var en stunds frihet. Robert utgöt sig om teatern och vilka föreställningar som han egentligen skulle vilja se. Han sa att man borde engagera psykotiska och mentalsjuka människor i rollerna av något klassiskt psykologiskt drama, till exempel av Ibsen. Han föreställde sig hur någon av skådespelarna ganska snart skulle fastna i en fras och upprepa den om och om igen: "...himlen är blå, himlen är blå, himlen är blå...". Han föreslog att man i bakgrunden av en Oedipus-uppsättning borde ha en ung man som älskar med en äldre kvinna föreställningen igenom. Dessutom borde det sättas upp ett verklighetsdrama på Stadsteatern i Zagreb där man på samma sätt som i en dokusåpa kan följa människors vardag på scenen – toalettbesök inkluderade. Speltiden skulle vara 08.00 –15.00 varje dag.

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Zdenko visade mig under mina besök var K67-kioskerna i grannskapet finns. K67 är det officiella namnet för märkliga kiosker i formpressat glasfiber. Kioskerna, formgivna under senare delen av 1960-talet, liknar inget annat med sina rundade former och klara färger. De verkar komma från framtiden och tycks ha landat på väl valda platser i städerna. Designen hör ihop med ett formspråk som är vanligt förekommande i de forna kommunistländerna och återfinns i typsnitt, skyltar och en viss brutalfunktio-

munist countries.²⁶ Everything is sold from K67 kiosks: nylon stockings, newspapers, lottery tickets, candy, books, flowers, sausage, bus tickets... In Zagreb they often function as ticket booths, but in many other places they work as miniature department stores.

Since 1998 I have located and photographed the kiosks everywhere in Croatia, but also in Serbia, Macedonia, Slovenia, Poland, and in Minsk, Belarus.²⁷ Depicted I call them *Satellites*. In Zagreb most are blue, some a mustard yellow; in Belgrade the red and orange predominate but there are also pink ones, not rarely are they expanded or adorned with a giant key, an awning or a chimney. Ljubljana is littered with them; white, army green, red; almost all in excellent condition, which cannot be said for the predominately green ones found in Skopje, where most of them are faded, scraped, and cracked. The most exemplary kiosks are found in Minsk. Minsk is like a museum of Soviet communism and with none of the erosion and deliberate destruction that have befallen monuments and memorials in the rest of the Eastern Bloc. Minsk is, on the whole, the only town where you can't even find a piece of paper between the tracks at the railway station.

A Polish curator told me that the introduction of these kiosks in communist-era Poland really was a way for the state to control the free market. You were allowed only one employee and the volume afforded by the K67 kiosk set the maximum space for private enterprise. It was then I understood the subversive structure of the satellites. The kiosks were created for control but have a modular design, enabling them to be put together in an ingenious way, like parts of a beehive, to form larger units. This meant an inherent possibility to grow uncontrollably.

I came to learn that the kiosk model was designed by the Slovenian architect and designer Saša J. Machtig, still active in Ljubljana; that the model was created in

26. In Prague I saw a 1988 exhibition with designs from most Comecon countries and was convinced that there really was a unique style that had developed parallel to that of the Western world. The exhibition showed industrial design, utility articles, interior decoration, and graphic design from Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Cuba, Hungary, East Germany, Poland, and the Soviet Union. The type form of the word *design* on the catalogue cover was almost identical to the form of the so-called K67 kiosks. Comecon (in Russian: Sovet ekonomicheskoy vsaymopomoshchi) was an organization for economic support to the countries that espoused communism; i.e., the Soviet Union's puppet states.

27. Architecture theorist Lars-Henrik Ståhl has in addition photographed a yellow K67-kiosk in Budapest that I have incorporated in my collection.

nalistisk arkitektur.²⁶ Från K67-kioskerna säljs allt möjligt: strumpbyxor, tidningar, lotter, godis, böcker, blommor, korb, bussbiljetter... I Zagreb fungerar de inte sällan som biljettkiosker, men på många andra platser fungerar de som minimala varuhus.

Sedan 1998 har jag letat upp och fotograferat kioskerna överallt i Kroatien, men även i Serbien, Makedonien, Slovenien, Polen och i Minsk i Vitryssland.²⁷ Avbildade kallar jag dem för *satelliter*. I Zagreb är de flesta blå, några senapsgula, i Belgrad dominerar de röda och orangea men där finns även rosa och är inte sällan tillbyggda eller utsmyckade med en gigantisk nyckel, en markis eller en skorsten. I Ljubljana vimlar det av dem, vita, militärgröna, röda, nästan alla i utmärkt skick vilket man inte kan säga om de företrädesvis gröna som finns i Skopje där de flesta är blekta, skavda och spruckna. De mest exemplariska hittar man i Minsk. Minsk är som ett museum över sovjetkommunismen, helt utan den erosion och medvetna förstörelse som drabbat monument och minnesmärken i det övriga östblocket. Minsk är överhuvudtaget den enda stad där man inte ens hittar en bit papper mellan spåren på järnvägsstationen.

En polsk curator berättade att införandet av dessa kiosker under kommunisttiden i Polen egentligen var ett sätt för staten att kontrollera den fria marknaden. Man fick bara ha en anställd och det utrymme som K67-kiosken utgör angav den maximala rymden för privat företagande. Det var då jag förstod det subversiva i satelliterna. De var skapta för kontroll men de var formgivna i ett modulsystem och kunde likt delarna i en bikupa sättas ihop på ett sinnrikt sätt så att de bildade större enheter. Det innebar en inneboende möjlighet till att växa okontrollerat.

Efterhand lärde jag mig att kioskmodellen är designad av den slovenske arkitekten och designern Saša J. Mächtig, fortfarande verksam i Ljubljana. Att modellen

26. I Prag såg jag 1988 en utställning med design från huvuddelen av länderna inom Comecon och övertygades om att det verkligen fanns ett eget formspråk som utvecklats parallellt med västvärldens. Utställningen visade industri-design, bruksföremål, inredning och grafisk formgivning från Bulgarien, Tjeckoslovakien, Kuba, Ungern, Östtyskland, Polen och Sovjet. Bokstavsformerna i ordet "*design*" på katalogens omslag sammanföll närapå exakt med formen på de så kallade K67-kioskerna. Comecon (på ryska kallad Sovjet ekonomitjeskoj vzaimopomosjtj) var ett organ för ekonomiskt understöd till de länder som bekände sig till kommunismen, det vill säga Sovjets "lydstater".

27. Arkitekturteoretikern Lars-Henrik Ståhl har dessutom fotograferat en gul K67-kiosk i Budapest som jag införlivat i min samling.

1966, and that several copies appeared around the Eastern Bloc (for example those produced in Struga, Macedonia, and one of the Polish models with slightly sharper edges).

In my photographs, I have cut out the kiosks and placed them against a black background. I have them mounted with a heavy sheet of Plexiglas that creates depth in the black space. Thus, it's hard to relate them to scale, time, and space; the form is what stands out – the object. I want to highlight them as historic, crucial objects; as transit objects that have both foreboded and contributed to a paradigm shift. In my thought-model, these remarkable kiosks are not only satellites for capitalism, but things that actually turned over the system.

It's an idea you can play with and have people comment on. This I did in the video that I recorded over a number of years and which complemented the photographs and their focus on form. I presented the hypothetical idea to people I met on my travels – artists, architects, curators, and others. I explained that I thought the kiosks in their being so widely spread, linked together and manifested the Eastern Block Communism style but that they must have worked treacherously, as they actually opened up a potential space for the private market. In this way you could see them as an omen of change, and therefore – nowadays – as a monument of sorts. I tried to present the idea as a suggestion, without sounding officious.

Some of those I interviewed laughed at my ideas and found them to be naïve; others were annoyed and declared that you couldn't bunch together Yugoslavia and the Warsaw Pact countries so recklessly; still others took the idea seriously and embarked on long, enthusiastic expositions; someone agreed with me and said curtly that that was of course the case, just to have an end to the conversation. The K67 kiosks were usually good conversation pieces.

Igor Antic, a Serbian artist living in Paris, told me that the Belgrade K67s had a boom in the 1980s when many thought they would make a fortune on kiosk enterprises. In Belgrade at the time, the most diverse enterprises could be found in the kiosks – even gynecology practices. The K67s of Belgrade maintained their position and became even more important during the war when the larger department stores

skapades 1966 och att flera kopior uppstod runt om i östblocket (till exempel de som tillverkades i Struga i Makedonien och en av de polska modellerna som har lite kantigare former).

I mina fotografier frilägger jag kiosken och placerar den mot en svart bakgrund. Jag låter montera dem med en kraftig plexiglasskiva som skapar ett djup i den svarta rymden. På så vis blir det svårt att relatera dem till skala, tid och rum. Framträder gör formen – tinget. Jag vill hålla fram dem som historiska, avgörande objekt, som transitobjekt som både förebådat och bidragit till att skapa ett paradigmskifte. I min tankemodell är dessa märkvärdiga kiosker inte bara satelliter för kapitalism utan ting som i själva verket störtade systemet.

Det är i alla fall en idé man kan laborera med och låta människor kommentera. Så gjorde jag i den videofilm jag spelade in under ett antal år och som kompletterade fotografierna och deras fokusering på formen. Jag presenterade den hypotetiska idén för människor jag mötte under mina resor: konstnärer, arkitekter, curatorer och andra. Jag förklarade att jag tyckte att kioskerna med sin spridning länkade samman och manifesterade det öststatskommunistiska formspråket samtidigt som de måste ha fungerat på ett förrådiskt sätt då de i själva verket öppnade en potentiell rymd för den privata marknaden. På så vis kunde man se dem som omen för förändring, och numera som ett slags monument. Jag försökte framföra idén som ett förslag, utan att låta besvärlig.

Några av de som jag intervjuade skrattade åt mina idéer och fann dem naiva, andra blev irriterade och förklarade att man inte kunde bunta ihop Jugoslavien med Warszawapaktens länder på ett sådant vårdslöst sätt. Andra tog idén på allvar och gav sig in i långa entusiastiska utläggningar, någon höll med mig och sa helt kort att ”visst var det så” bara för att få slut på samtalet. K67-kioskerna är vanligtvis bra *conversation pieces*.

Igor Antic, serbisk konstnär som bor i Paris, berättade att K67:orna i Belgrad fick ett uppsving under 1980-talet då många fick för sig att de skulle kunna göra sig en förmögenhet på kioskverksamhet. I Belgrad kunde man på den tiden finna de mest skiftande verksamheter i kioskerna, till och med gynekologmottagningar. K67:orna i Belgrad behöll sin ställning och blev ännu viktigare under kriget då de större varu-

went out of business because of the blockade, and sales moved into the streets.²⁸

Tanja Ostojić, another Serbian artist, told me that the kiosks came into focus during the Zoran Djindjić's government – that they for some reason became a symbol of the bad and ugly that was to be purged. She found this to be contradictory, as Djindjić was a market liberal, but maybe he repressed their pioneer function and meant that they represented the Communist era.

The Slovenian artist and architect Apolonija Šušteršič told me about the short-term job she had had as a newly graduated architect in the early 1990s in Ljubljana. Her job was to register all the K67s in the city, to enter into a protocol their position, function, and expansions and modifications, if any. When the inventory was completed, she understood that it was all a part of a plan to rid Ljubljana of all K67s. But this has not yet been successful, to the best of my knowledge.

I have many times wondered at the ways displays are made in these kiosks. In many of them, one or several sides have an arched plastic window functioning as a display. In one such K67 kiosk that I have photographed in central Skopje (a bright red one carrying a large sign saying “West”) is found a peculiar collection of goods. On the lower shelves the shopkeeper has placed different plastic toys, such as toy cars, together with a four-pack of toilet paper. The shelf next to the top has chocolate cookies, plastic rulers for school purposes, playing cards, a guidebook over a monastery, and two bags of powdered cappuccino. On the top shelf there is a swim ring, a pair of yellow arm pads, an anal porn video (with bold, vertical writing: “ANAL”), one pack of “Turbo Tuggy” race cars, and the doll “Flora” with blond, curly hair and a smiling mouth.

One could also remain cold and use György Lukács's terms and claim that this is a triumph of realism, a true image of the commodity society, where all needs are commodified and inscribed on one and the same level. But, when I bring up the displays, Zdenko speaks of “a chaotic mind” that goes along with the transit period. Igor Antic tells me, for his part, that during the Yugoslavian era, the attitudes towards pornography and towards nudity in general were very strict, not to say prudish. In Belgrade, says Igor, the kiosks' displaying of pornography coincided to the very day

28. Something that is emphasized by the architect Ivan Kucina and the Serbian-Dutch designer group Stealth in a project called “Wild City.” See: http://www.stealth.ultd.net/stealth/01_wildcity.html, 20/3 2010.

husen gick i konkurs på grund av handelsblockaden och försäljningen flyttade ut på gatorna.²⁸

Tanja Ostojić, en annan serbisk konstnär, berättade att kioskerna hamnade i fokus under Zoran Djindjićs regeringstid och att de av någon anledning blev en symbol för det onda och fula som skulle rensas bort. Hon såg det som motsägelsefullt då Djindjić var marknadsliberal, men kanske glömde han bort deras pionjärfunktion och menade att de representerade kommunisttiden.

Den slovenske konstnären och arkitekten Apolonija Šušteršič berättade om det tillfälliga arbete som hon haft som nyutexaminerad arkitekt i början av 1990-talet i Ljubljana. Hennes uppgift var att registrera samtliga K67:or i staden: att i ett protokoll ange deras läge, funktioner och eventuella till- och ombyggnader. När inventeringen var klar förstod hon att allt var en del av en plan som gick ut på att befria Ljubljana från alla K67:or. Men det har de inte lyckats med än, så vitt jag vet.

Jag har många gånger förundrats över sättet att skylta i dessa kiosker. Hos många av dem har en eller flera sidor ett välvtt plastglas som fungerar som skyltfönster. På en sådan K67-kiosk som jag fotograferat i centrala Skopje (en lysande röd försedd med en stor reklamskylt med texten ”West”) finns en märkvärdig sammanställning av varor. På de nedre hyllorna har innehavaren placerat olika plastleksaker såsom leksaksbilar tillsammans med ett fyrpack toalettpapper. Den näst översta hyllan rymmer chokladbiskvier, plastlinjaler för skoländamål, spelkort, en guidebok över ett kloster samt två påsar cappuccino i pulverform. På den översta finns en badring, ett par gula armkuddar, en analporrfilm (med den kraftfulla lodrätta texten ”ANAL”), ett paket ”Turbo Buggy”-racerbilar, samt flickdockan ”Flora” med blont lockigt hår och leende mun.

Man skulle kunna vara kallsinnig och plocka fram György Lukács termer och hävda att det här är en realismens triumf, en sann bild av varusamhället, där alla behov är förtingligade och inskrivna på en och samma nivå. Men när jag för skyltningen på tal talar Zdenko om ”ett kaotiskt sinne” som hör ihop med transitperioden. Igor Antic berättar, å sin sida, att man under Jugoslavientiden hade en mycket restriktiv, för att inte säga pryd inställning till pornografi och nakenhet. I Belgrad, säger Igor, samman-

28. Vilket framhölls av arkitekten Ivan Kucina och den serbiska/holländska designgruppen Stealth i ett projekt kallat ”Wild City”. Se: http://www.stealth.ultd.net/stealth/01_wildcity.html, 19/3 2010

with the outbreak of the war.

In the summer of 2005 I had shown a selection of the satellite pictures, together with the interviews video, in *Pančevo*, outside Belgrade. My works got stuck in customs at the airport in Belgrade. Not until two trips there and many hours spent in corridors with smoking customs officials and three days of waiting did my works arrive. I was by then strangely grateful, even though one of the customs officials had quite recklessly cut one of the packages open with a box cutter and damaged the Plexiglas.

I installed my works in one of the rooms of the rather dilapidated Museum of Modern Art. The upper floor exhibited a part of the museum's collection that was dominated by a giant painting placed in view upon entering the room – *Departure from Kosovo Polje*. The painting became an important symbol during the war, I was told, its meaning being to remind people of past sufferings. The bitterness and lust for revenge beaming from the eyes of a wounded man walking toward the viewer, fur hat on his head and a bandage around his arm, is the centerpiece of the painting. It was in this face inspiration was found in the early stages of the war.²⁹

A restorer who had his studio nearby the room where I hung my exhibition invited me for a cup of coffee. On his worktable he kept some ancient arrowheads he was in the process of cleaning and in the corridor outside were more advanced weapons. They embodied a leap of several thousand years in the evolutionary chain of weapons: two American missiles, each about four meters in length. He had found them in the forest while hunting for wild bore. The missiles had never detonated, he explained, which made me slightly worried. (The restorer was the sort of elegiac Serbian man I believe I've learned to identify, a man who holds no illusions about anything, not even about getting his meager pay regularly.) He showed me pictures from the bombings of the town, how the petrochemical plant of Pančevo had been bombed to pieces. The town was swept up in a hellish, poisonous, tallow-black smoke that darkened the sun for days.

On the day of the opening I did a presentation of my exhibition in which I of-

29. The Serbian artist Ivan Grubanov told me a few years later when I met him in Stockholm (October 2008) that one year after the exhibition, he had come across *Departure from Kosovo Polje* in one of the museum's warehouses, carelessly shoved in together with various junk.

föll pornografins exponering i kioskerna exakt på dagen med krigets utbrott.

Sommaren 2005 hade jag visat ett urval av bilderna på satelliterna tillsammans med videon med intervjuer på en utställning i *Pančevo* utanför Belgrad. Mina verk fastnade i tullen på flygplatsen i Belgrad. Först efter två resor dit och många timmar i korridorer med rökande tulltjänstemän och tre dagars väntan anlände mina verk. Jag var då märkligt tacksam trots att en av tulltjänstemännen helt vårdslöst snittat upp ett av paketen med en mattniv och skadat plexiglas.

Jag installerade mina verk i ett av rummen i det tämligen förfallna Moderna Museet. På övervåningen exponerades delar av museisamlingen som dominerades av en gigantisk målning placerad i blickfånget när man kom in i salen – *Uttåget från Trastfältet*. Målningen blev under kriget en viktig symbol, sa man, som skulle påminna om plågorna i det förflutna. Den bitterhet och revanschlusta som strålar ur ögonen på en sårad man som vandrar mot betraktaren, med pälsmössa på huvudet och bandage om armen, är den centrala händelsen i målningen. Det var i den blicken man fann inspiration under krigets inledning.²⁹

En konservator som hade sin ateljé i närheten av det rum där jag hängde min utställning bjöd in mig på en kopp kaffe. På konservatorsbordet hade han några uråldriga pilspetsar som han var i färd med att rengöra och i korridoren utanför låg mer avancerade vapen. De materialiserade ett språng på flera tusen år i vapnens utvecklingskedja: två amerikanska missiler, var och en ungefär fyra meter långa. Han hade hittat dem i skogen under vildsvinsjakten. Missilerna hade aldrig detonerat, förklarade han, vilket gjorde mig en aning orolig. (Konservatorn var den sortens elegiske serbiske man som jag tror mig ha lärt mig identifiera, en man som inte gör sig några illusioner om något, inte ens om att få ut sin magra lön regelbundet). Han visade mig bilder från bombningen av staden, hur man hade bombat sönder den petrokemiska fabriken i Pančevo. Staden hade svepts in i en helvetisk, giftig, gulsvart rök som för-mörkade solen under flera dagar.

På vernissagedagen gjorde jag en presentation av min utställning där jag lade fram

29. Den serbiske konstnären Ivan Grubanov berättade några år senare när jag träffade honom i Stockholm (oktober 2008) att han ett år efter utställningen hade stött på *Uttåget från Trastfältet* i ett lager på museet helt vårdslöst intryckt bland diverse bråte.

ferred my assumptions about the satellites. In addition, I had invited the design historian Helge Kühnel, born in East Germany and a resident of Amsterdam for a number of years, to give his view. Helge Kühnel had set up a website about the K67 kiosk (he prefers the correct name) giving the history and distribution of the structures, and featuring an interview with the creator, Sasa Maechtig.³⁰ Kühnel, who began his survey a few years after my collection, has worked up an immense enthusiasm over the kiosks and when he, in an inspired moment of the presentation, suggested the K67 as the only remaining but unifying symbol for the post-socialist societies, several in the audience protested:

“We don’t want some kiosk as a symbol!”

“What, then, could it be?” I asked.

No one spoke for a while, then someone offered,

“A bike. Bicycles were the number one means of transport in the East.”³¹

At the end of my stay in Rijeka in 2005, I went to Zagreb to install the satellite images, together with the video, at the Museum of Contemporary Art (in a collective exhibition of Swedish art called *Delayed on Time*). The curator, Nada Beros, had involved herself in my work with much energy and sent me pictures of yellow-green satellites she had found during a trip to Vukovar. She had suggested that we place a satellite outside the museum and I thought that would be an excellent place to show the video. She had herself selected the object, a worn-down blue and white creation that stood unused in a suburb. Nada’s assistants had even managed to track down the owner, who apparently welcomed this opportunity to get rid of it. Since the museum is in the historic part of town, it took a special permit from the city to take this

30. The Slovenian artist and architect Marjetica Potrč has also used the K67 kiosk in an installation at Moderna Galerija in Ljubljana (“Next Stop, Kiosk,” 2003).

31. Marina Gržinić, a Ljubljana artist and theorist, sets her hopes on new media and the virtual world when it comes to the postsocial subject. “With new media and technology, we have the possibility of an artificial interface, one dominated by non-identity, or difference. Instead of producing a new identity, something more radical has to be proposed: the total loss of identity. /.../ The moment when familiar models of identity are lost is perhaps the moment when the (Post-communist) subject is constructed.” Marina Grzinic, *Fiction Reconstructed; Eastern Europe, Post-socialism & The Retro-Avantgarde*, Springerin, Edition Selene 2000, p. 202. See also Helge Kühnel, “K67 The Kiosk Shots – A European Project Between Public Space and Politics”; <http://www.publicplan-architects.com/k67/> (3/2 2010).

mina antaganden om satelliterna. Dessutom hade jag bjudit in designhistorikern Helge Kühnel, född i Östtyskland men sedan ett antal år bosatt i Amsterdam, för att ge sin syn på kioskerna. Helge Kühnel har gjort en hemsida om K67-kiosken (han föredrar det korrekta namnet) som berättar om dess historik och spridning, dessutom finns en intervju med dess skapare Saša J. Mächtig.³⁰ Helge Kühnel, som började med sin kartläggning några år efter mitt insamlande, har arbetat upp en oerhörd entusiasm för kioskerna. När han i ett inspirerat ögonblick under sin presentation föreslog K67 som den enda kvarvarande men samlande symbolen för de postsocialistiska samhällena protesterade flera av åhörarna:

”Vi vill inte ha nån kiosk som symbol!”

”Vad skulle man kunna tänka sig, då?” frågade jag.

Det blev tyst en stund, sedan föreslog någon:

”En cykel. Cyklarna var transportmedlet nummer ett i öst.”³¹

I slutet av min vistelse i Rijeka 2005 reste jag till Zagreb för att installera Satellitbilderna tillsammans med videofilmen på Museet för Samtidskonst (i en samlingsutställning med svensk konst kallad *Delayed on Time*). Curatorn Nada Beros hade gått in i arbetet med stor energi och skickat mig bilder av gul-gröna satelliter hon funnit under en resa till Vukovar. Hon hade föreslagit att vi skulle placera en satellit utanför museet och jag tyckte att det var en utmärkt plats för att visa filmen. Hon hade själv valt ut objektet, en förfallen blåvit skapelse som stod oanvänd i en förort. Nadas assistenter hade till och med lyckats spåra upp ägaren som visade sig bli lättad över utsikterna att bli av med den. Eftersom museet befinner sig i ”den historiska delen” krävdes det ett specialtillstånd från staden för att föra in detta ufo bland palats,

30. Även den slovenske konstnären och arkitekten Marjetica Potrč har använt K67-kiosken i en installation på Moderna Gallerija i Ljubljana (”Next Stop, Kiosk”, 2003).

31. Marina Gržinić, konstnär och teoretiker verksam i Ljubljana, sätter förhoppningar till nya medier och till den virtuella världen vad det gäller det postsocialistiska subjektet. ”Med nya medier och teknologi finns möjligheten till ett artificiellt interface, vilket domineras av icke-identitet, eller skillnad. Istället för att producera en ny identitet, måste något mer radikalt föreslås: den totala avsaknanden av identitet. /.../ Momentet när välkända identitetsmodeller går om intet kanske sammanfaller med momentet då ett (postkommunistiskt) subjekt konstrueras.” Marina Gržinić, *Fiction Reconstructed; Eastern Europe, Post-socialism & The Retro-Avantgarde*, Springerin, Edtion Selene 2000, s. 202 (min övers. M.B.). Se också Helge Kühnel, ”K67 The Kiosk Shots – A European Project Between Public Space and Politics”, <http://www.publicplan-architects.com/k67/> (3/2 2010).

UFO in among the palaces, Houses of Parliament, and churches. Nada worked the bureaucrat in charge a long time, the bureaucrat, of course, holding up the decision until the last minute to emphasize its importance. A few days before the opening, the ramshackle kiosk arrived on a truck bed with a small crane. In my thought model, I have sometimes praised the “nomadic quality” of the satellites, but the kiosk proved to weigh more than a metric ton. Once in place and after a thorough cleaning and replacing of its broken glass, its bright colors gleamed right beside the entrance. The baroque-style Saint Katarina Church formed the background.³²

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For the first years of our time together, Zdenko Bužek and I visited local bars in the evenings and played pool with some of Zdenko’s friends. There was Tomislav, a bald bar owner who had traveled to Mongolia and who saw himself as a healer and guru. But one day Tomislav moved away without any announcement. More often we met with Branko, a successful computer consultant who liked experimental music and collected Zdenko’s art (and who, on one occasion, enticed us to join him for a performance of Terry Riley compositions at the concert hall). Sometimes we visited Cobra and Marina, who have two children and who, according to Zdenko, make the only “genuinely happy and functional family” he knows of. On a sofa in their living room, Knez could often be found with his beer and his cigarettes or the occasional joint, a gloomy and brooding military helicopter pilot who, according to his friends, once made the fateful decision to pass up a promotion to general.

What I perceived during the first period of my travels was a gloom and a “NO” among the people of Zagreb – the lack of trust, the suspicion towards your neighbor, the police and those representing the state (politicians were loathed) – all this despair followed the wars and the collapse of the system. I saw an envelope a day before the opening of our exhibition *Biografija* in Zagreb in 1999. The invitation had been

32. The Museum of Contemporary Art is housed in one of the aristocratic palaces that were seized by the Yugoslavian state after the Second World War. A lone painter, who saw his family property expropriated, was allowed to stay in one wing and used to make an entrance at openings through his own door into the museum. He lived there until his death in the 1980s. He was, it is said, a very friendly and happy man.

parlamentsbyggnader och kyrkor. Nada hade under en lång tid bearbetat den ansvarige byråkraten (som givetvis var tvungen att hålla inne på beslutet i det längsta för att understryka hur viktig denna fråga är) och några dagar före vernissagen anlände den illa åtgångna kiosken på ett lastbilsflak med lyftkran. Jag har i min tankemodell ibland prisat satelliternas ”nomadiska kvalité” men kiosken visade väga över ett ton. Efter en grundlig rengöring och byte av ett sönderslaget glas lyste den i klara färger alldeles intill entrén. S:t Katarinas kyrka i barockstil bildade fond.³²

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Under de första åren av vår samvaro gick jag och Zdenko Bužek på barer i området om kvällarna och spelade biljard med någon av Zdenkos vänner. Det kunde vara Tomislav, en skallig barägare som gjort resor till Mongoliet och såg sig som healer och guru, men en dag hade Tomislav utan förvarning flyttat. Oftare då Branko, framgångsrik datakonsult som gillar experimentell musik och samlar på Zdenkos konst (och som vid ett tillfälle lockade med oss till ett uppförande av Terry Riley-kompositioner på konserthuset). Ibland besökte vi Cobra och Marina som har två barn och som enligt Zdenko är den enda ”genuint lyckliga och funktionella familj” han känner till. I en soffa i deras vardagsrum satt ofta Knez med öl och cigaretter eller ibland en joint. Han var en tungsint och grubblande militärhelikopterpilot som enligt vännerna en gång, i ett ödesdigert val tackade nej till en befordran till general.

Vad jag uppfattade, under de första resorna, var ett tungsinne och ett NEJ bland människorna i Zagreb: brist på tillit, misstänksamhet mot grannen, polisen och statens representanter avskydde man – all denna misströstan som systemkollapsen och krigen fört med sig. Jag såg ett kuvert någon dag före öppningen av vår utställning *Biografija* i Zagreb 1999. Vernissagekortet hade kommit tillbaka till galleriet eftersom adressaten var okänd. Man hade stämplat *VRATITI* [RETUR] och nedanför fanns

32. Museet för Samtidskonst är inrymt i ett av de adelspalats som beslagtogs av den jugoslaviska staten efter andra världskriget. En ensam målare, som såg sin familjeegendom exproprieras, tilläts bo kvar i en flygel. Han levde där ända fram till sin död på 1980-talet och brukade göra entré på vernissagerna genom en egen dörr, direkt in i museet. Han var en mycket vänlig och glad man sågs det.

returned to the gallery, address unknown. *VRATITI* [RETURN] was stamped on it and below were eight boxes that could be checked: *Ne prima* [don't wish to receive], *Nepoznat* [unknown], *Zabranjeno* [forbidden], *Umro* [deceased], *Otputovao* [gone away], *Nije pronađen* [not found], *Adresa nedovoljna* [address incomplete], *Ne postoji više* [ceased to exist, or in a more direct translation *evaporated*].

But Zdenko's friends were all friendly and welcoming people, even though I thought several among them, just like a lot of people you see in Zagreb, had something hard in their eyes. It is an exploring look with a hint of doubt, like an inner safety measure.

In certain situations, Zdenko's male friends would, in passing, call themselves war veterans. I reacted to this at first, and wondered if it was ironic. I had an inertia in my reaction or an unwillingness to internalize something so obvious: "war veteran" is a designation for someone who has been in the war.

When we discussed the sentences in the text for the video that deals with the war and how we would illustrate them, Zdenko suggested that it could be done as simply as in the theater: he'd dress in his old uniform and that would suffice. Zdenko, wearing a uniform, standing by a river together with a private photograph of him watching his comrades digging a ditch was all that was needed.

I used what little there was and let the camera examine the uniform as if it in itself contained all secrets. It is a home defense uniform with the mark of *Domobrani* on the sleeve.

According to Zdenko, "Domobrani" has almost become an expression for someone you can't really take seriously. This originates from the time of the occupation, when Domobrani served under the Germans. The Nazis used them as minions. But the home defense men, as opposed to Ustaša, held back, most of the time. If they were ordered by the Germans to execute a person, they went to his house and said he'd better pack up and go away. The Domobrani character was that of the weak fascist who would walk tall in his uniform, but really just wanted to please everyone.

During one leave, Zdenko escaped from his home defense position (which mostly entailed digging ditches) by catching a flight to Skopje. The day we recalled these events with the camera, the airport was teeming with soldiers, police officers, and military police. Zdenko was enlivened by the prospect of flying to Skopje for the

åtta rubriker med små rutor som kunde kryssas i: *Ne prima* [ville inte ta emot], *Ne poznat* [okänd], *Zabranjeno* [förbjuden], *Umro* [avliden], *Otputovao* [bortrest], *Nije pronađen* [ej funnen], *Adresa nedovoljna* [inkomplett adress], *Ne postoji više* [upphört att existera, eller mer direkt översatt: *dunstat bort*].

Zdenkos vänner var alla vänliga och inbjudande människor, även om jag tyckte att flera av dem, liksom många man ser i Zagreb, har något stint i blicken. Det är en utforskande blick med ett stänk av tvivel, som en inre skyddsåtgärd.

Zdenkos manliga vänner kallade sig, i vissa lägen, som i förbigående, krigsveteraner. Jag reagerade över det i början och undrade om det var ironiskt. Det fanns en tröghet i min reaktion eller så var det en ovilja att ta in en så självklar sak. Krigsveteran är en benämning på den som deltagit i kriget.

När vi diskuterade de sentenser i texten till videon som behandlar kriget och hur de skulle gestaltas föreslog Zdenko att man kunde göra det lika enkelt som på teatern. Att han kunde klä sig i sin gamla uniform och att det skulle räcka. Zdenko uppställd i uniform vid en flod tillsammans med en privatbild som visar hur han iakttar sina kamrater gräva ett dike var allt som behövdes.

Jag tog fasta på det lilla som fanns och lät kameran examinera uniformen som om den i sig innehöll alla hemligheter. Det var en hemvärnsuniform som bär märket *Domobrani* på ärmen.

Enligt Zdenko har *Domobrani* blivit något av ett begrepp för en person som man inte riktigt kan ta på allvar. Anspelningen går tillbaka till ockupationstiden då *Domobrani* stod i tjänst under tyskarna. Nazisterna använde dem som underhuggare men hemvärnsmännen lade, till skillnad från Ustaša, fingrarna emellan, för det mesta. Om de fick order av tyskarna att avrätta en person åkte de hem till personen och förklarade att det var bäst att packa och dra. En *Domobrani* karakteriseras av den veke fascisten som sträckte upp sig i sin uniform, men som egentligen ville vara alla till lags.

Under en permission smet Zdenko från sin hemvärnsposition (som mest innebär att gräva diken) genom att ta flyget till Skopje. Den dag då vi återkallade dessa händelser med kamerans hjälp vimlade det av militärer, poliser och militärpoliserna på flygplatsen. Zdenko var upplivad av att för första gången på många år flyga till Skopje. Han skulle träffa vänner, vi skulle se den fallfärdiga byggnad som en gång var

first time in many years. He would meet friends, we would see the derelict building that was once Skopje's art academy, we would eat savory vegetables and have *mastica*, Macedonia's version of Pernod, to drink.

Yet Zdenko was a tad nervous before we'd boarded the plane. I filmed the electronic arrival and departure board with destinations where *Skopje* was next to *Sarajevo* and *Mostar*. Like the names of Polish concentration camp towns, the names of Sarajevo and Mostar carry with them associations of death and destruction. The Skopje choice was, in that context, the choice for survival.

*

Zdenko was always drinking beer in the evenings, growing increasingly more spirited. His laugh, one of the most impressive I know, got more dominating the later it got. The head is still but the tongue and adam's apple are vibrating fast. Zdenko's days of drinking beer ended in 2004, when he started a yoga class. After another year or so, he stopped smoking.

"One difference from the Yugoslavian era," said Zdenko, "is that the street lights in Zagreb work and the clocks show the right time." We had gone unusually deep into the central parts of Zagreb and were in a café close to the city theater. "Stranger yet is that the fog has disappeared," he went on, "the fog that was a patent part of Zagreb's identity." Then he discreetly turned my attention to a man steadfastly walking diagonally across the open space next to the theater. The man lived in Zdenko's neighborhood, and had walked all the way in to this central part of town. "The man always ignores me; he's lived alone since his wife died a few years ago. He's probably destitute, but won't seek help. It's embarrassment that makes him avoid eye contact. Now he attends art openings and freeloads on hors d'oeuvres and has some wine."

Zdenko claimed that the man belonged to a group of deprived people who had found this opportunity: to keep track of all art openings at all museums and galleries. They went from opening to opening with blank faces. Zdenko said they had a gaze all their own that develops when you are watching without actually watching, while

Skopjes konstakademi, vi skulle äta smakrika grönsaker och till det dricka *mastica*, Makedoniens svar på Pernod.

Ändå var Zdenko en aning nervös innan vi kommit på planet. Jag filmade den elektroniska informationstavlan med destinationer där ordet *Skopje* befann sig intill *Sarajevo* och *Mostar*. Liksom namnet på koncentrationslägerorterna i Polen bär Sarajevos och Mostars namn med sig associationer till död och förstörelse. Valet av Skopje handlade i det sammanhanget om att överleva.

*

Zdenko drack alltid öl under kvällarna, han blev allt piggare ju senare kvällen blev hans skratt, som är ett av de mest imponerande skratt jag känner till, blev allt mer dominerande: huvudet är stilla men tungan och adamsäpplet vibrerar snabbt. Öldricket var dock över för Zdenkos del sedan han började i en yogaklass 2004. Efter ytterligare något år slutade han röka.

”En skillnad mot Jugoslavientiden”, sa Zdenko, ”är att gatubelysningen i Zagreb fungerar och att klockorna går i tid.” Vi hade tagit oss ovanligt långt in i Zagrebs centrala delar och satt på ett café i närheten av stadsteatern. ”Än märkligare är att dimman försvunnit”, fortsatte han, ”dimman som var en självklar del av Zagrebs identitet.” Sedan fäste han diskret min uppmärksamhet vid en målmedvetet vandrande man som sneddade över den öppna platsen intill teatern. Mannen bodde i Zdenkos kvarter, och hade gått hela vägen in till dessa centrala delar. ”Mannen låtsas aldrig om mig, han lever ensam sedan hans fru dog. Han är förmodligen utfattig men vägrar söka hjälp. Det är skammen som gör att han undviker ögonkontakt. Nu går han på vernissager och gratis äter snittar och dricker lite vin.”

Zdenko påstod att mannen tillhörde en grupp fattiga som funnit denna möjlighet genom att hålla reda på alla vernissager på samtliga museer och gallerier. De gick från vernissage till vernissage med nollställda miner. Zdenko sa att de hade en alldeles egen blick som uppstår när man betraktar utan att egentligen betrakta samtidigt som

trying to disappear in the crowd.³³

The stories Zdenko told me that I held in the highest regard were a certain kind of non sequiturs that had no point, and no turning point. He spoke of a woman who entered a urinal where he was answering nature's call, and who just stood there staring him in the eye without saying a word. And of a man who worked at the Zagreb airport who had just used many years' savings to buy himself a new car; how the woman who sold him the car innocently in passing commented that he was probably happy now, with his nice new car – a comment that enraged him and made him jump in the car and crash it at high speed against a wall.

They are stories that are barely stories. It is talking to pass the time, but still something more important than a pastime. It is talking that belongs together with what in French is called *civilité* [civility] – the art of living together. The discussions, the storytelling, and the jokes are part of this art that goes way beyond politeness. *Civilité* is a political project with social-philosophical dimensions;³⁴ an area consisting of a whole series of actions, relations, and physical moving patterns that produce and allocate recognition, attentiveness, interest, and respect.

I, for my part, try to understand the character of the trifling anecdotes that I'm interested in and pay attention to. They are not of the kind whose form is distinctive enough to start circulating as folklore. The filtering process that takes place in the oral sharing is more than they could take, most of the time; orally traded, they would evaporate completely by the second line, becoming humiliations, and making the storyteller look like a weirdo. They stay alive only in the first line because they require trust. They can therefore hardly be called stories. I wouldn't raise any objection if someone called them *experience transfer*.

Of course, such stories could exist in literature – literature is indeed full of them

33. In 2002, the Macedonian artist Sasa Stojnakovic held an exhibition about the group of poor art-opening freeloaders who wander from exhibition to exhibition in Skopje. As a tribute to them, Stojnakovic painted their portrait on such a large scale that they, from their marginalized position, suddenly were the center of everyone's eyes. When the exhibition opened, the curator, Suzana Milevska, related that the artist was approached by some of the freeloaders who hadn't got their portraits painted and thus had not become part of the collection. They now no longer wanted to disappear in the crowd; they were indignant at not having been immortalized.

34. On a micro level, it is also about a mental fit. A prerequisite for liking someone is that if you do not like, then you can at least stand yourself in the company of the other.

man försöker försvinna i mängden.³³

De historier Zdenko berättade för mig och som jag höll högst var meningslös-
heter som inte har någon poäng och ingen vändpunkt. Han berättade om en kvinna
som kom in på en pissoar där han utträttade sina behov, som ställde sig och stirrade
honom i ögonen utan att säga ett ord. Han berättade om en man som arbetade på
flygplatsen i Zagreb och som efter många års sparande just hade köpt en ny bil. Kvin-
nan som sålde bilen till honom fällde i förbifarten en oskyldig kommentar om att han
väl var nöjd nu med sin nya fina bil, en kommentar som fick honom att bli rasande
och kasta sig ut i bilen för att i hög hastighet krocka mot en vägg.

Det är historier som knappt är historier. Det är prat som man fördriver tiden med,
men som ändå är något viktigare än tidsfördriv. Det är ett prat som hör ihop med vad
man på franska kallar *civilité* – konsten att leva tillsammans. Diskussionerna, berät-
tandet och skämten är en del av denna konst som är något mycket större än artighet.
Civilité är ett politiskt projekt med socialfilosofiska dimensioner.³⁴ Det är ett område
som består av en hel serie handlingar, relationer och fysiska rörelsemönster som fram-
ställer och fördelar erkännande, lyhördhet, intresse och respekt.

För min egen del försöker jag förstå karaktären av de obetydligheter jag är in-
tresserad av och lystrar till. De är inte av det slaget att de har en tillräckligt distinkt
form för att kunna börja cirkulera som folklöre. Den filtreringsprocess som sker i det
muntliga tål de oftast inte. De skulle traderas redan i andra ledet, förgasas fullständigt
och bli till pinsamheter som får berättaren att framstå som en kuf. De håller sig bara
levande i första ledet eftersom de kräver förtrolighet och kan därför knappast kallas
historier. Jag skulle inte protestera om någon kallade dem *erfarenhetsförmedling*.

Givetvis kan sådana berättelser existera i litteraturen, i själva verket är litteratu-

33. Den makedonske konstnären Sasa Stojnakovic gjorde 2002 en utställning om den grupp fattiga vernissageätare som vandrar mellan utställningarna i Skopje. Stojnakovic målade som en tribut deras porträtt i stor skala så att de från sin marginaliserade position plötsligt hamnade i centrum för allas blickar. När utställningen hade vernissage, berättade curatorm Suzana Milevska, blev konstnären uppsökt av några av de gratisätare som inte fått sina porträtt målade och blivit en del av samlingen. De ville nu inte längre försvinna i mängden, de var indignerade och framförde klagomål över att inte ha blivit förevigade.

34. På mikronivå handlar det också om mentala passformer. En förutsättning för att tycka om någon är att, om inte tycka om så åtminstone stå ut med sig själv i sällskap med den andre.

– but there they are incorporated into structures or embellished into short stories, are psychologized, become moralities or work as character building blocks. It is of course utopian to believe that they can evade the meaning-making process of the narrative. They could possibly exist in fragments or in certain songs and still keep their particular position and their *possibilities*.

*

In Zagreb the relationship between an older group of conceptual artists working since the 1960s and the contemporary artists is very much alive. Such a relation across ages hardly exists in Sweden. At art openings here you can often see the admired *Sanja Iveković*, *Mladen Stilinoić*, *Tomislav Gotovac*, and *Dalibor Martinis*.³⁵ Gotovac is big and loud, and wears a top hat. Martinis is well-dressed, polite, and obliging, resembling Clint Eastwood. Croatian (or Yugoslavian) conceptual art has an interesting history, perhaps Europe's most interesting, even though I think that it's burdened by the heavy shadow of Kazimir Malevich. Malevich is a ghost that haunts all of Eastern Europe's art.

Outside of the commercial art system in Zagreb, in the margins of the art sanctioned by the state – in a peculiar free zone – there arose an exciting number of experiments with “impossible” materials: body art, text, video, photography. It is a history stretching from the 50s, with the Zen-inspired Group Gorgonga (which consisted of four artists, one architect, an art critic, and three historians) to today, and has an astounding consistency, at least viewed from outside. I often think of the kinship with the Fluxus movement, but there is a certain turn of the tide here; you could describe it as a pre-occupation, not to say obsession, with the relationship between artistic work and leisure time. The artistic *means of production* – to borrow some color from Marxist terminology – have become an axis, a focal point, a perpetual source for comments and stagings. You can take in large parts of the Croatian conceptual tradition

35. Tomoslav Gotovac streaked in the streets of Zagreb, or posed as a beggar or demonstrator. Dalibor Martinis is one of Croatia's pioneers in video and has created works that could be compared to the early work of Bill Viola.

ren full av dem, men där inlemmas de i strukturer eller broderas ut till noveller, de psykologiseras, blir till moraliteter eller fungerar som karaktärsdanande byggstenar. Det är förstås en utopi att tro att de kan undgå narrativens meningsbildande process. Möjligen skulle de kunna existera i fragmentform eller i vissa sånger och fortfarande behålla sin partikulära ställning och sina *möjligheter*.

*

I Zagreb finns en levande relation mellan en äldre grupp konceptkonstnärer, verk samma sedan 1960-talet, och de samtida. En sådan åldersöverskridande relation finns knappast i Sverige. Här syns ofta de beundrade *Sanja Iveković*, *Mladen Stiljnović*, *Tomislav Gotovac* och *Dalibor Martinis* på vernissagen.³⁵ Gotovac är stor och högljudd, iklädd hög hatt. Martinis är välklädd, artig och förekommande, inte olik Clint Eastwood. Kroatisk (eller jugoslavisk) konceptkonst är en intressant historia, kanske den intressantaste i Europa, även om jag tycker att den tyngs av Malevitj mörka skugga, Malevitj är en osalig ande i hela den östeuropeiska konsten.

Utanför det kommersiella konstsystemet, i marginalen av den statssanktionerade konsten – i en märklig frizon – uppstod i Zagreb alla dessa experiment med ”omöjliga material”, kropp, text, video och fotografi. Det är en historia som, åtminstone betraktad utifrån, har en förvånansvärd konstans och sträcker sig från 50-talet med den zen-inspirerade Group Gorgonga (som bestod av fyra konstnärer, en arkitekt, en konstkritiker och tre historiker) till idag. Jag tänker ofta på släktskapen med Fluxus-rörelsen men här finns en viss strömkantring; man kan beskriva den som en upptagenhet, för att inte säga besatthet, av relationen mellan konstnärligt arbete och fritid. De konstnärliga *produktionsförhållandena* – för att låta en marxistisk terminologi färga in det hela – har blivit en axel, en brännpunkt, en ständig källa till kommentarer och iscensättningar. Man kan läsa in stora delar av den kroatiska konceptuella tradi-

35. Tomoslav Gotovac streakade på Zagrebs gator, eller uppträdde som tiggare eller demonstrant. Dalibor Martinis är en av Kroatiens videopionjärer och har gjort verk som skulle kunna jämföras med Bill Violas tidiga verk.

in light of this dialectic between art and leisure time.³⁶ Some random titles from the retrospective exhibition of Croatian conceptual art, *The Misfits*, at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Zagreb, 2002, are enlightening, in this respect:

An Artist Who Cannot Speak English is No Artist.

An Attack on My Art is an Attack on Socialism and Progress.

Begging (Please Give a Donation, Thank You).

Sunday Painting.

Weekend-art: Hallelujah the Hill.

I Do Not Wish to Show Anything New and Original.

From Time to Time I Stuck My Finger Through a Hole in the Door of the Modern Art Gallery without the Management's Knowledge.

I Hear the Talk About the Death of Art; The Death of Art is the Death of the Artist.

*Someone Wants to Kill Me. Help!*³⁷

Vlado Martek, who is part of the Group of Six Artists together with Mladen Stilinović, has the motto: *work is a shame*. Stilinović and Martek formulated their poetics in a 1993 tract, *Praise of Laziness*. The difference between artists in the East and those in the West is the way work is viewed, they claim. Western artists have traditionally engaged in production and efficiency; Eastern artists have traditionally been poor and lazy. Even when they produced things, they realized that it was vain, that it was nothing.

Laziness is the absence of movement and thought, dumb time – total amnesia. It is also indifference, staring at nothing, non-activity, impotence. It is sheer stupidity, a time of pain, futile concentration. Those virtues of laziness are important factors in art. Knowing about laziness is not enough; it must be practiced and perfected.³⁸

Artists from the West could have learned from the laziness, but they neglected to do so, Martek/ Stilinović explain. According to the tract, only two artists have dealt with

36. Natasa Ilić does a similar reading in "Work, Laziness, Leisure..." in the catalogue *The Misfits: Conceptual Strategies in Contemporary Croatian Art*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb 2002.

37. Titles of works from Mladen Stilinović (1992 and 1977), Tomislav Gotovac (1980), Goran Trbuljak (1974), Aleksandar Battista Ilić (1996–2000), Goran Trbuljak (1971 and 1969) and Mladen Stilinović (1980).

38. *The Misfits*, p. 92

tionen i ljuset av denna dialektik mellan konst och fritid.³⁶ Några slumpmässigt valda titlar från den retrospektiva utställningen över kroatisk konceptkonst *The Misfits* på Museum of Contemporary Art i Zagreb 2002 är belysande:

An Artist Who Cannot Speak English is No Artist.
En attack på min konst är en attack på Socialism och Framsteg.
Tiggeri (Snälla, skänk en slant tack).
Söndagsmåleri.
Weekend-art: Hallelujah the Hill.
Jag vill inte visa något nytt och originellt.
Då och då stack jag fingret genom nyckelhålet på Museet för Samtidskonst utan ledningens vetskap.
*Jag hör allt tal om konstens död, konstens död är konstnärens död, någon vill döda mig. Hjälp!*³⁷

Vlado Martek, som ingår i De Sex Konstnärernas Grupp tillsammans med Mladen Stilinović har som motto: *Arbete är en skam*. Stilinović och Martek formulerade sin poetik i ett traktat 1993: *Lovsång till lättjan*. De menar här att den främsta skillnaden mellan konstnärerna i öst och de i väst är synen på arbete. Västkonstnärerna ägnar sig åt produktion och effektivitet, östkonstnärerna har traditionellt varit lata och fattiga. Även när de producerade saker och ting insåg de att det var fåfångt, att det inte var någonting.

Lättja är frånvaron av rörelse och tanke, stum tid, total minnesförlust. Det är också likgiltighet, stirrande in i intet, icke-aktivitet, impotens. Det är total dumhet, en stunds smärta, meningslös koncentration. Dessa lättjans dygder är viktiga faktorer i konst. Det räcker inte att bara känna till lättja, den måste praktiseras och fulländas.³⁸

Konstnärer från väst kunde ha lärt sig av lättjan, men de försummade det, förklarar Martek/Stilinović. I det stora hela har bara två konstnärer behandlat frågan om lättja,

36. Nataša Ilić är inne på en liknande läsning i "Work, Laziness, Leisure..." i katalogen *The Misfits, Conceptual Strategies in Croatian Contemporary Art*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb 2002.

37. Titlar av Mladen Stilinović (1992 och 1977), Tomislav Gotovac (1980), Goran Trbuljak (1974), Aleksandar Batista Ilić (1996-2000), Goran Trbuljak (1971 och 1969) och Mladen Stilinović (1980), min övers. M.B.

38. *The Misfits*, s. 92 (min övers. M.B.).

the question of laziness: Duchamp and Malevich. Duchamp never openly articulated these ideas but moved around indifference and non-work. Malevich criticized capitalism for allowing only a few people to engage in glorious laziness, and socialism for having a whole ideology based on work, despite having its origins in a true longing for laziness. Laziness has been stigmatized and disgraced everywhere, according to Malevich. Laziness should be liberated.

“Finally, to be lazy and conclude: there is no art without laziness,” Martek/Stilinović write.³⁹ In a suite of photos Stilinović made at the same time, all of this is illustrated. You see the artist himself in bed, in different positions, sleeping with a soft pillow. The title is *Artist at work* (1978).

The only artist in Zagreb I’ve gotten to know through Zdenko Bužek (since Zdenko doesn’t mix with artists very much) is Andrea Kulunčić. Her works have had a great impact far beyond the borders of Croatia and have been displayed at Manifesta, Documenta, and the Whitney Biennial. Several of them put a finger on painful points of the transit situation and Europe’s false proclamation of equality.

There is a basis of experience that is important, not only for Andrea Kulunčić’s works, but for many others’, that you must try to describe even if it becomes sweeping, since it has such significance. Underneath the thin official rhetoric about being a part of Europe, in these countries there is the bitter life experience of being the Other in Europe. It’s a historic experience, founded by those who were horse keepers in the Habsburg Empire, a people of slaves to the German occupants, and workforce immigrants in Scandinavia; by smuggling coffee from Trieste, cleaning apartments in Munich, traveling but never being able to afford other than fast food and bad hotels, being refugees of war, or a whore for UN soldiers; by living at the edge of Europe and looking in through the eye of a needle, by being seen as criminals by birth, or as barbarians, or just generally crude.⁴⁰ This relationship is sometimes referred to as “The Beauty and the East.”⁴¹ Nowadays, Croatian self-esteem is attacked by the selling-off

39. Ibid.

40. E.g., Slavenka Drakulić, “We Traded our Freedom for Italian Shoes” in *Balkan Express: Fragments from the Other Side of War*, Perennial 1994, and the Bosnian artist Šejla Kamerić’s work, *Bosnian Girl*, which takes its starting point in the graffiti of Dutch UN soldiers in Srebrenica.

41. The Slovenian artist Marko Peljhan organized the conference “The Beauty and the East” in Ljubljana in 1997.

enligt traktatet: Duchamp och Malevitj. Duchamp artikulerade aldrig öppet dessa idéer men rörde sig kring likgiltighet och icke-arbete. Malevitj kritiserade kapitalismen för att den enbart tillät ett fåtal människor att ägna sig åt den underbara lättjan och socialismen för att hela dess ideologi var baserad på arbete, trots att dess upprinnelse stammade ur en äkta längtan efter lathet. Lättja har överallt blivit stigmatiserat och skambelagt, enligt Malevitj. Lättjan borde befrias.

”För att vara lat och sammanfatta: det finns ingen konst utan lättja”, avslutar Martek/Stilinović.³⁹ I en fotosvit som Stilinović gjorde vid samma tid gestaltas det hela. Man ser konstnären själv i sängen sovande med en mjuk kudde i olika positioner. Titeln lyder *Artist at work* (1978).

Den enda konstnär i Zagreb jag lärt känna genom Zdenko Bužek (eftersom Zdenko inte beblandar sig med konstnärer i någon större utsträckning) är Andreja Kulunčić. Hennes arbeten har fått stort genomslag långt utanför Kroatien och visats på Manifesta, Documenta och Whitneybiennalen. Flera av dem sätter fingret på smärtsamma punkter i transitsituationen och Europas falska jämlikhetsproklamationer.

Det finns en erfarenhetsgrund som är viktig – inte bara i Andreja Kulunčićs verk utan även i många andras – som man måste försöka beskriva även om man blir svepande. Under den tunna officiella retoriken om att vara en del av Europa finns det i dessa länder en bitter erfarenhet av att vara Europas Andre. Det är en historisk erfarenhet, grundlagd av dem som var hästskötare i det habsburgska imperiet, slavfolk åt de tyska ockupanterna eller arbetskraftsinvandrare i Norden, av att smugla kaffe från Trieste, städa lägenheter i München, turista men inte ha råd med annat än gatuköksmat och usla hotell, att vara krigsflykting, eller hora åt FN-soldaterna. Det är en erfarenhet av att leva vid randen av Europa och titta in genom ett nålsöga, att betraktas som kriminell av börd, barbarisk eller bara osofistikerad i största allmänhet.⁴⁰ Förhållandet benämns ibland som ”The Beauty and the East”.⁴¹ Numera attackeras

39. Ibid.

40. Se t.ex. Slavenka Drakulić, ”Hur vi bytte friheten mot skor” i *Balkan Express. Fragment från andra sidan kriget*, Ordfronts förlag 1993, och den bosniska konstnären Šejla Kamerićs verk *Bosnian Girl* som utgår från holländska FN-soldaters graffiti i Srebrenica.

41. Den slovenske konstnären Marko Peljhan organiserade en konferens under titeln *The Beauty and the East* i Ljubljana 1997.

of a number of national assets. Some say a giant sales sign facing west has been put up above the country: “Everything must go” – the Adriatic coast along with telephone companies and banks and other infrastructure.⁴²

Andreja Kulunčić’s works are related to works with a feminist direction, such as Tanja Ostojić’s and Tanja Dabo’s. But if Tanja Ostojić’s works are furious and Dabo’s are a form of melancholy masochism, then Kulunčić’s are analytical, but no less charged politically.⁴³ Not rarely do they revolve, in the conceptual art tradition of Croatia, around the artistic conditions of production.⁴⁴

One of her works is called *NAMA: 1908 Employees, 15 Department Stores*.⁴⁵ The events surrounding NAMA (Narodni Magazin [The People’s Store]) became a symbol of an individual and collective catastrophe during the transition to a market economy in Croatia. In June of 2000, Andreja had posters – photos of female employees of NAMA – set up in lightboxes around Zagreb, accompanied by the dry but ominous facts about the number of stores and employees. After several years during which the stores were practically occupied by the employees but largely had no goods to sell, the state-owned NAMA chain had finally gone bankrupt. Andreja focused on these women and how they had gone to work without pay, placing themselves at their empty counters, knowing not a single paying customer would come, or spending the whole day wandering along aisles of totally empty shelves until it was time to close up. In the pictures, whose language was paradoxically that of advertising, they stood

42. In Serbia the defeats became a national myth and were made into a mystique of suffering. When ordinary Serbs said, “this time, it is we who have the weapons,” then “this time” covered a very long period of time and referred to the defeat by the Turks at the battle of Kosovo Polje in 1389. The problem of such a perception, in the words of Paul Ricoeur, is not having too little history, but too much. Everyone around you, all nations “[are placed] in the position of owning a debt.” Paul Ricoeur *Memory, History, Forgetting*, University of Chicago Press 2006, p. 86.

43. Tanja Ostojić shaved all head and body hair to make herself look like a camp prisoner. With photographs lit by hard flashes she advertised herself on the Internet, *Looking for a Husband with EU Passport* (2000–2003). Tanja Dabo has, as performance, undertaken the cleaning of galleries, not in front of an audience but alone, as if to “kiss the rod” of the Man and the Institution.

44. Her contribution to Manifesta was a survey on the invited artists’ income and grants from their home countries. Many of the artists from the East, not surprisingly, did not have the same opportunities to make a living and find financing for their work. Manifesta’s somewhat vaguely expressed thought about a common platform between East and West proved to build on a hollow idea of equality.

45. See Ana Devic and Nataša Ilić, *Andreja Kulunčić “NAMA: 1908 Employees, 15 Department Stores,”* WHW 2000.

självkänslan i Kroatien dessutom av en rad utförsäljningar av nationella tillgångar. Somliga menar att en gigantisk reaskylt har satts upp över landet i riktning mot väst: ”Allt ska bort” – Adriatiska kusten tillsammans med telefonbolag och banker och annan infrastruktur.⁴²

Andreja Kulunčićs verk är besläktade med feministiskt inriktade arbeten som Tanja Ostojić och Tanja Dabos. Men om Tanja Ostojićs verk har ett raseri och Dabos en form av melankolisk masochism så är Kulunčićs analytiska, men därmed inte mindre politiskt laddade.⁴³ Inte sällan rör de sig, i enlighet med kroatisk konceptkonstradition, kring de konstnärliga produktionsförhållandena.⁴⁴

Ett av hennes verk heter *NAMA: 1908 Employes, 15 Department Stores*.⁴⁵ Turerna kring NAMA (NARodni MAgazin [folkets affär]) blev en symbol för en individuell och kollektiv katastrof vid övergången till marknadsekonomi i Kroatien. I juni 2000 lät Andreja sätta upp posters i ljustavlor, fotografier av kvinnliga anställda på NAMA, runt om i Zagreb tillsammans med de torra, men ödesmättade fakta som talar om antalet affärer och anställda. Den statliga NAMA-kedjan hade efter flera år, då affärerna i praktiken var ockuperade av de anställda men i stort sett inte hade några varor att sälja, slutligen gått i konkurs. Andreja fokuserade på dessa kvinnor som under lång tid hade gått till jobbet utan lön men ändå hade satt sig i sina kassor utan en enda kund att ta betalt av eller vandrat hela dagarna utmed långa rader av tomma hyllor och kyldiskar tills det var dags att stänga. På bilderna, som paradoxalt nog talade ett

42. I Serbien blev nederlagen en nationell myt och omvandlades till lidandemystik. När vanliga serber sa ”denna gång är det vi som har vapnen”, så inbegrep ”denna gång” en enorm tidsrymd och syftade på förlusten mot turkarna vid slaget om Trastfälten 1389. Problemet med ett sådant medvetande, för att tala med Paul Ricœur, är inte att ha för lite utan för mycket historia. Alla människor i omgivningen, alla nationer ”förvandlas till gäldenärer”. Paul Ricœur, *Minne, historia, glömska*, Daidalos, Göteborg 2005, s. 127.

43. Tanja Ostojić rakade av sig allt kroppshår så att hon kom att likna en lägerfånge. Med fotografier i hårt blyxtljus annonserade hon ut sig på nätet: *Looking for an Husband with EU Passport* (2000–2003). Tanja Dabo har som performance ägnat sig åt att städa gallerier, inte inför publik utan ensam, som för att ”krypa till korset” inför Mannen och Institutionen.

44. Hennes bidrag till Manifesta var en enkätundersökning om de inbjudna konstnärernas inkomster och bidrag från sina egna länder. Många av konstnärerna från öst hade, föga förvånande, inte alls samma möjligheter att försörja sig och finna finansiering för sina verk. Manifestas lite vagt uttalade tanke om en gemensam plattform mellan öst och väst visade sig bygga på en ihålig jämlikhetstanke.

45. Se Ana Devic och Nataša Ilić, *Andreja Kulunčić "NAMA: 1908 Employes, 15 Department Stores"*, WHW 2000.

in their purple polyester NAMA suits and looked confidently into the camera. It was a linguistic short-circuit; a way of dealing with a historic situation when the system floated freely and people didn't know where they were.

Sometimes Andreja and her husband Ivo also joined us in a round of pool, but in October of 2005, we decided to go on a "political trip" by car. Ivo planned our route. In one day we found the time to visit the birth homes of both Franjo Tuđman and Tito; two rulers who no one wants anything to do with today, but who both, at different times, had received the people's accolades. One of course never reached the saint-like status of the other.

Tuđman's birth home is a little less than an hour's journey from Zagreb, in Veliko Trgovišće. It was a small stone house that seemed lost; paltry and white, it was surrounded by roads and neighboring an inn. The home was supposed to be a museum, but the door was locked. After we had waited a while, a young man with hair cropped short appeared, together with his girlfriend. He gave us an incredulous look and let us into the museum.

The house seemed even smaller on the inside. Every room held a set of rustic furniture that didn't have quite enough patina to look old and which furthermore seemed slightly too small. We discussed whether someone had had them custom-made to fit the small rooms, in a scale of, say, 85 percent. In the bedroom, where the bed invoked an image of a very small person, an attempt at statesmanship had been made by covering the bed with the Croatian flag.

On our way to Kumrovec, Tito's birth village, we saw stone houses, vineyards, corn fields, and little white churches on cone-shaped hills. The corn had long since been harvested and stacked in warehouses with wooden laths, where the wind could find its way in. On the half-overgrown sporting ground, a lone runner in a track suit ran lap upon lap.

Tito's birth home was surrounded by a gathering of buildings that was supposed to give the visitor a feel for the simple peasant life of times gone by in the Zagorje region. In the rooms were dressed-up full-scale dolls, frozen mid-movement sewing or rocking a cradle.

The birth home was supposed to present the simple but honest circumstances from whence the great leader sprang. A series of black-and-white photos depicted his

reklamspråk, framträdde de i sina lila NAMA-polyesterdräkter och tittade med trygg blick in i kameran. Det var en språklig kortslutning, ett sätt att behandla en historisk situation när systemet flöt fritt och människor inte visste var de befann sig.

Det hände att även Andreja och hennes man Ivo var med på en biljardrunda. I oktober 2005 bestämde vi oss för att göra en ”politisk resa” med bil. Det var Ivo som lade upp rutten. På en dag skulle vi hinna besöka både Franjo Tuđmans och Titos födelsehem, två härskare som man inte vill veta av idag men som båda vid olika tidpunkter tagit emot folkets hyllningar. Den ene nådde förstås aldrig upp till den andres helgonlika status.

Tuđmans födelsehem ligger en knapp timmes resa från Zagreb, i Veliko Trgovišće. Det var ett ynkligt vitt litet stenhuss som verkade bortkommet, omgivet av vägar och granne med ett värdshus. Hemmet skulle vara tillgängligt som museum, men dörren var låst. Efter en stund uppenbarade sig en ung kortsnaggad man med flickvän. Han gav oss en tvivlande blick och släppte in oss i museet.

Huset tedde sig ännu mindre från insidan. Varje rum innehöll en uppsättning allmogemöbler som inte såg tillräckligt patinerade ut för att vara gamla och som dessutom verkade något för små. Vi diskuterade om någon hade specialtillverkat dem för att passa in i de små rummen, låt säga i åttiofemprocentig skala. I sovrummet, där sängen frammanade en bild av en ytterst kortvuxen person, hade man försökt få till en statsmannalik scen genom att täcka bädden med den kroatiska flaggan.

På väg till Kumrovec, Titos födelseby, såg vi stenhuss, vinodlingar, majsält och små vita kyrkor på kägelformade kullar. Majsen var för länge sedan skördad och staplad i magasin med träribbor där vinden kunde leta sig in. På Kumrovecs halvt igenväxta idrottsplats sprang en ensam löpare i träningsoverall, varv efter varv.

Titos födelsehem var omgivet av en samling byggnader, likt ett mini-Skansen, där man skulle få ett intryck av det enkla bondelivet från förr i Zagorje-regionen. I rummen satt uppklädda dockor i naturlig storlek, frusna i en rörelse där de sydde eller gungade en vagg.

Födelsehemmet skulle framställa de enkla men rejäla förhållanden som var den store ledarens rötter. En serie svartvita fotografier skildrade hans karriär inom stor-

career in big politics and meetings with the world's presidents and kings. Tito was, according to legend, a man of many talents, who could speak on any subject; nothing was foreign to him. If he came to an apple orchard, he could point to a tree and tell how many fruits the tree carried. It was then the peasants' business to pick every fruit, count them and verify that he had been right on the apple, as it were. Among Tito's many abilities were his language skills, musicality, athleticism, elegance, exquisite sartorial taste, and so on.

My friends told me about something that muddied his popularity in these parts: he very rarely visited his home village. Tries were made to explain this with Tito actually being dead and replaced with a double. This could at the same time explain the miracle that a simple peasant's son had turned into a full-blown aristocrat. You could see it clearly when comparing photos, the eyes gave it away, that it was not the same Tito. The double otherwise played his part excellently, except at one point – he neglected to show his love for Kumrovec.⁴⁶

About a kilometer from the museum, on a hill, was a conference complex that worked as the true political center of Yugoslavia. Here the elite gathered for deliberations. We went up there and looked through the windows. Everything was shut; damp and mold was devouring the 1960s interior.

I thought afterwards that it is too easy to make such a political trip and see pathetic museums, collapsed monuments and political ruins. The challenge is getting at the underside, the non-manifested, the unconscious. The political trip that takes place in the everyday, in everyday language, “in the politics of small gestures” – in the words of Mika Hannula⁴⁷ – and not least in dreams.

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After the opening of *Delayed on Time* I was going to take the train back to Rijeka again. I tried to persuade Zdenko to come, but didn't succeed. I spoke of Kostrena, of the boardwalk and the little harbor with its café and little monument featuring a

46. Similar ideas have been launched by certain astrologers and conspiracy theorists who have tried to prove that Tito was the illegitimate son of Franz Joseph of Austria.

47. Mika Hannula, *The Politics of Small Gestures*, Art-ist 2006.

politiken och möten med världens presidenter och kungar. Tito var enligt sägen en multitalang som kunde uttala sig om varje ämne, inget var honom främmande. Om han kom till en äppelodling kunde han peka på ett äppelträd och säga hur många frukter trädet bar på. Det blev böndernas sak att plocka ner varenda frukt, räkna dem och konstatera att han hade haft rätt på äpplet. Till Titos många företrädren kom hans språkkunskaper, musikalitet, sportighet, elegans, utsökta klädsmak och så vidare.

Mina vänner berättade om en sak som grumlade hans popularitet i den här trakten – han besökte ytterst sällan sin hemby. Man försökte förklara det med att Tito egentligen var död och ersatt av en dubbelgångare. På så sätt kunde man också förklara miraklet att en enkel bondson hade förvandlats till en fullfjädrad aristokrat. Man såg det tydligt på ögonen om man jämförde fotografier, att det inte var samme Tito. Dubbelgångaren spelade sitt spel utmärkt utom på en punkt: han försummade att visa sin kärlek till Kumrovec.⁴⁶

Någon kilometer från museet, på en kulle, fanns ett konferenskomplex som hade varit Jugoslaviens verkliga politiska centrum. Här samlades eliten för sina överläggningar. Vi åkte upp dit och tittade in genom fönstrena. Allt var tillbommat, fukt och mögel höll på att äta upp sextiotalsinredningen.

Jag tänkte i efterhand: det är alltför lätt att göra en sådan politisk resa och titta på patetiska museer, kollapsade monument och politiska ruiner. Utmaningen är att komma åt frånsidan, det icke-manifesterade, det omedvetna. Den politiska resa som sker mitt i vardagen, i det vardagliga språket, ”i de små gesternas politik” – för att tala med Mika Hannula⁴⁷ – och inte minst i drömmarna.

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Efter vernissagen på *Delayed on Time* skulle jag ta tåget tillbaka till Rijeka igen. Jag försökte locka med Zdenko dit men lyckades inte. Jag pratade om Kostrena, om strandpromenaden och den lilla hamnen som har ett café och ett litet monument

46. Liknande idéer lanseras av vissa astrologer och konspirationsteoretiker som försöker leda i bevis att Tito var den illegitime arvtagaren till Frans Josef av Österrike.

47. Mika Hannula, *The Politics of Small Gestures*, Art-ist 2006.

submarine propeller, of all the overgrown abandoned lots and of Rijeka with all its curious alleys and passage ways. But I understood that Zdenko was reluctant to leave Zagreb. Speaking with Zdenko on the phone I understand that he leaves the amber apartment more and more reluctantly. His outings grow shorter and shorter, their radius decreasing. In the summertime, if it's really hot, he ventures over one of the little bridges across the Sava to take a swim in a manmade lake. Longer excursions than that do not happen.

Zdenko and I had, in fact, made a trip to Rijeka together a year earlier. I had by then shot but not finished editing my video biography. At this time we were discussing all the ideas that artists ponder but that never become realized; how many artists suffer from an overproduction of ideas and how this could evolve into something that's like an autoimmune disease or an allergy. Some of the ideas that come to artists apparently don't fit their own body of work, others are too complicated or expensive to go through with, and still others never come to fruition due to laziness or personal problems.

We thought that it could do an artist good to verbalize and outline these ideas but then give them away, so as not to be burdened by a feeling of uncompleted work. We wanted to set up a website for all these ideas, that we would call *The Resort of Homeless Ideas*. Considering how ideas, like other immaterial assets in postindustrial society, are seen as the most valuable, it would be interesting to turn this economy on its head. The ideas could, through the website, be offered like *shareware*, together with the information that everyone is free to realize them. Here was a Fluxus echo that we wanted to introduce into the computer age.

With this project we were invited to a gallery-cum-multimedia center in Rijeka. We would do an exhibition and create the website on site, in cooperation with local artists, who could also contribute by gathering ideas. I myself collected non-materialized ideas from colleagues in Stockholm and Zdenko made a similar petition in Zagreb. With a number of printouts of sketches and score-like texts about possible works of art, along with twelve Styrofoam letters that could form the words "HOMELESS IDEAS," we traveled by bus to Rijeka. But on the bus I could tell from Zdenko that things weren't right. The gallery manager, who, like Zdenko, was called Charlie, had been very vague the last few times Zdenko had spoken to him on the

med en ubåtspropeller, om alla övervuxna ödetomter och om Rijeka med alla sina märkliga gränder och passager. Men jag förstod att Zdenko inte ville lämna Zagreb. När jag talar med Zdenko i telefon förstår jag att han alltmer motvilligt lämnar bärnstenslägenheten. Hans utflykter blir kortare och kortare, radien krymper. På sommaren kan han, om det blir riktigt hett, tänka sig att passera någon av de små broarna över Sava för att ta sig ett dopp i en konstgjord sjö. Längre utflykter än så blir inte av.

Zdenko och jag hade visserligen redan gjort en resa till Rijeka tillsammans, ett år tidigare. Jag hade då filmat men inte klippt klart min videobiografi. Vid denna tid diskuterade vi alla de idéer som konstnärer bär med sig men som aldrig blir förverkligade. Att många konstnärer drabbas av en överproduktion av idéer och hur det kunde utvecklas till något som liknar en autoimmun sjukdom, eller en allergi. Vissa av de idéer konstnärer får passar uppenbarligen inte in i de egna konstnärskapen, andra idéer är alltför komplicerade eller dyrbara att genomföra, ytterligare andra genomför man inte på grund av lättja eller personliga problem.

Vi tänkte att det kunde vara nyttigt för konstnärer att formulera och skissa upp dessa idéer men att sedan skänka bort dem för att slippa tyngas av känslan av ofullbordat arbete. Vi ville skapa en hemsida för alla dessa idéer som vi skulle kalla: *The Resort of Homeless Ideas*. Med tanke på att idéer, likt andra immateriella värden i det postindustriella samhället, anses som de mest värdefulla vore det intressant att vända upp och ned på denna ekonomi. Idéerna kunde via hemsidan erbjudas likt *share ware* tillsammans med informationen att vem som helst var fri att använda och materialisera dem. Här fanns ett eko av Fluxus som vi ville föra in i dataåldern.

Med detta projekt blev vi inbjudna till ett kombinerat galleri och multimediacenter i Rijeka. Vi skulle göra en utställning och skapa hemsidan på plats i samarbete med lokala konstnärer, som också kunde bidra med att samla in idéer. Jag själv gjorde en insamling av icke-materialiserade idéer bland kollegor i Sverige och Zdenko gjorde en liknande framställan i Zagreb. Med ett antal utskrifter på skisser och partiturliknande texter om möjliga konstverk samt tolv frigolitbokstäver som kunde forma orden "HOMELESS IDEA" reste vi med buss till Rijeka. Redan på bussen förstod jag av Zdenko att saker och ting inte stod rätt till. Chefen för galleriet, som även han kallades Charlie, hade varit väldigt vag senaste gångerna Zdenko talat med honom i

phone. When I asked Zdenko whether we really had a site at our disposal for the exhibition and computers for the website, Zdenko looked dejected and said that things were a little uncertain.

We saw no computers whatsoever. The multimedia center had two galleries. An exhibition was already opened, featuring works by Mladen Stilinović's brother, Sven Stilinović. (I wasn't aware that people here were ever called Sven, but was told that the name is a remnant from the Vikings' "trade travels.") We arrived just in time for the opening of another artist's exhibition in the room that should have been reserved for *The Resort of Homeless Ideas*. Our project was truly homeless.

The place was dominated by a club with a bar and a dance floor. Rijeka-Charlie shuffled around the establishment with a self-conscious look on his face. We sat down over some beers with the curator, Branko Franceschi, who had come there to present a video program. (He would become director of the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Rijeka a year later; something that concurred with my later Rijeka stay.) At this time he ran the Miroslav Kraljević gallery, which was housed in the offices of an oil company in central Zagreb. The state-owned Yugoslavian companies often had a budget for culture and the oil company was one of few companies that backed art, and had continued to do so even after the formation of Croatia.⁴⁸ Branko was one of the people I had interviewed a few years earlier for my *Satellites* film. He was the only curator for contemporary art in the Balkans who wore a sizeable moustache, he relayed with some self-irony – no one else dared to be so masculine. (He would, however, shave off his moustache upon commencing his appointment as director of the museum.)

Rijeka-Charlie was somehow vaguely aware of having given our exhibition space over to someone else on a sudden whim, but was unfazed by it. He avoided us at first, but then got it in his head that he would deal with my critical glares. He pulled out a tried and tested method, used by politruks, security service officers, corporate executives, and other people of power: he offered us to sit down at his table and drink with him. It can be seen as a kind of duel where you try to break down your antagonist, whether he's a difficult negotiating partner, an obstinate subject, a suspected spy,

48. Galerija Miroslav Kraljević has maintained its position as one of the region's most important sites for contemporary art. See <http://www.g-mk.hr> (The gallery got its name from the Croatian painter Miroslav Kraljević, 1885–1913.)

telefon. När jag frågade Zdenko om vi verkligen hade någon lokal till förfogande för utställningen och några datorer för hemsidan såg Zdenko mest olycklig ut och sa att det var lite osäkert.

Multimediacentret hade visserligen två gallerier men vi såg inga datorer överhuvudtaget. Man hade redan öppnat en utställning med verk av Mladen Stilinovićs bror Sven Stilinović (jag visste inte att folk här hette Sven, men man sa att det är ett minne från vikingarnas ”handelsresor”). Vi kom lagom till en invigning av en utställning av en annan konstnär i den lokal som borde varit reserverad för *The Resort of Homeless Ideas*. Vårt projekt var verkligen hemlöst.

Stället dominerades av en klubb med bar och dansgolv. Rijeka-Charlie gled omkring i etablissemanget med självmedveten min. Vi blev sittande med några öl tillsammans med curatorn Branko Franceschi som rest hit för att presentera ett videoprogram. (Han skulle ett år senare bli chef för samtidsmuseet i Rijeka vilket sammanföll med min vistelse där.) Vid den här tiden drev han Galerija Miroslav Kraljević som är inhytt i ett oljebolags lokaler i centrala Zagreb. De statliga jugoslaviska företagen hade ofta en kulturbudget och oljebolaget var ett av få företag som satsade på konst, vilket man hållit fast vid även efter Kroatien bildades.⁴⁸ Branko var en av de personer som jag hade intervjuat några år tidigare i min *Satellites*-film. Han var den ende curatorn för samtidskonst på Balkan som bar en ordentlig mustasch, meddelade han med viss självironi, ingen annan vågade vara så manlig. (Dock kom han att raka av sig mustaschen när han blev museichef.)

Rijeka-Charlie var på något vagt sätt medveten om att han i en plötslig nyck överlätit vår utställningsplats till någon annan, men det bekom honom inte. Han undvek oss till en början men fick sedan för sig att han skulle ta itu med min kritiska blick. Han plockade fram en gammal beprövad metod, praktiserad av politruker, säkerhetspolis, företagsledare och andra maktmänniskor: han erbjöd oss att sitta ner vid hans bord och dricka. Man kan se den som en form av duell då man försöker bryta ner sin antagonist, vare sig det är en svår förhandlingspartner, uppstudsigt undersäte,

48. Galerija Miroslav Kraljević har behållit sin ställning som ett av de viktigaste platserna för samtidskonst i regionen. Se <http://www.g-mk.hr> (Galleriet är uppkallat efter den kroatiska målaren Miroslav Kraljević, 1885-1913).

or an untrustworthy stranger of any kind. With a superior hand gesture you assign a place at the table for the one you want to scrutinize or break. Charlie immediately had his servants in the bar serve us a chain of tequila shots. They were to be slammed down at a high tempo. After each toast, you stare into the eye of your antagonist and utter something more or less provoking. When I wasn't properly softened by a few shots, Charlie wondered whether my wife kept me on a short leash.

At the table were also a number of local artists, among them Tanja Dabo, who thought Zdenko had "a wonderfully lethargic voice." Branko Franceschi, looking more like a pork butcher than a curator with his moustache, ventured on expositions on the character of Sven Stilinović. Sven was a fantastically kind and loyal person even though his art, mainly consisting of the ritual slaughter of sheep, is a tad bombastic. Branko relayed an event that occurred there in the club about a year earlier. A Croatian artist was on tour with a performance that involved him hitting a volunteer from the audience very hard across the back with a bamboo cane. In a Zagreb gallery, the artist had hit so hard that the cane had broken and a long splinter had flown off and hit a cameraman from Croatian television in the eye. Now the stroke would be dealt there in Rijeka and it was hard to find someone to volunteer. After a couple of hours of deliberation, Sven, who spent most of his time in the bar, took it upon himself to be the victim of the day. The cane-carrying artist and Sven sat there all afternoon, drinking and talking. A wet friendship developed. When the time came, Sven took off his shirt without any hesitation and stood up, ready to receive the stroke in front of the tense audience. The artist with the cane stood for a long time, shuffling slightly, then threw his cane away and embraced Sven. No stroke was dealt that night.

I kept a stiff upper lip and downed my tequila shots. Around two in the morning, Charlie gave up his attempts to soften us. We went to the hotel, where Branko, too, was staying, and tried to compose ourselves in front of the night porter. When it dawned on him that we were staying there on Charlie's account, he mumbled something about Charlie's already strained line of credit, and we got our keys without any wishes for a good night.

In the morning I woke up with pressure on my forehead and a feeling that the rest of my body was feeble, floating out into the room. When I opened my eyes I saw Zdenko spinning round on the floor like a dervish with raised arms. He was finishing

misstänkt spion eller opålitlig främling av vilket slag som helst. Med en överlägsen gest med handen anvisar man plats vid bordet åt den man vill skärskåda eller knäcka. Charlie satte omedelbart sina betjänter i baren på att servera oss ett pärlband av tequila. De skulle svepas i snabb takt. Efter varje skål spänner man ögonen i antagonisten och yttrar något lagom provocerande. Charlie undrade, då jag inte tinade upp tillräckligt efter några glas, om jag var hårt hållen av min fru.

Med vid bordet satt ett antal lokala konstnärer, bland annat Tanja Dabo, som Zdenko tyckte hade ”en underbart letargisk röst”. Branko Franceschi, som med sin mustasch mer liknade en charkuterist än en curator, gav sig in i utläggningar om Sven Stilinovičs karaktär. Sven var en fantastiskt vänlig och solidarisk människa även om hans konst, som i huvudsak består av rituella fårslakter, är lätt bombastisk. Branko berättade om en händelse här på klubben något år tidigare. En kroatisk konstnär turnerade med en performance som innebar att han slog en bambukäpp mycket hårt över ryggen på en frivillig i publiken. På ett galleri i Zagreb hade konstnären slagit så hårt att käppen gått av och en lång sticka farit iväg och träffat en kameraman från kroatisk tv i ögat. Nu skulle slaget utdelas här i Rijeka och man hade svårt att hitta någon frivillig. Efter ett par timmars dividerande tog Sven, som tillbringade den mesta tiden i baren, på sig rollen som offer. Konstnären med käppen och Sven blev sittande, drickande och pratande, hela eftermiddagen. En blöt vänskap hann utvecklas. När det var dags tog Sven utan att tveka av sig tröjan och ställde sig upp redo att ta emot rappet inför den spända publiken. Konstnären med käppen blev stående en lång stund, lätt vajande, sedan slängde han käppen, klev fram och omfamnade Sven. Det blev inget slag den kvällen.

Jag bet ihop och drack mina tequila och vid tvåtiden på natten gav Charlie upp sina försök att mjuka upp oss. Vi tog oss hem till hotellet, där även Branko bodde, och försökte samla oss inför nattportiern. När det gick upp för honom att vi var bokade på Charlies konto mumlade han något om Charlies krediter som redan var ansträngda nog, och vi fick våra nycklar utan något god natt.

På morgonen vaknande jag med ett tryck över pannan och en känsla att kroppen i övrigt var lealös och flöt ut i rummet. När jag slog upp ögonen såg jag Zdenko virvla runt på golvet som en dervisch med höjda armar. Han höll på att avsluta sina fem

his Five Tibetans and I had to close my eyes to stave off dizziness.

After breakfast at the hotel in Rijeka, as we passed the bus station, I noticed for the first time *the bag*. Rijeka is a twin city of Trieste (which is called Trst here) and it was to Trieste you would travel in the Yugoslavian era to shop for clothes, shoes and coffee. It is still like this when it comes to clothes, and you still get treated patronizingly there, we were told by the curator, Nataša Ivančević, at the Museum of Contemporary Art. The condescending attitude hadn't gone away just because Croatia had been formed; your worth was no greater just for that. You used to be a Yugo, now you're an ex-Yugo and a non-member of the EU.

The bag is plastic, with white and blue stripes. You pack it until it nearly bursts with clothes when you are in Trieste. You reinforce it with a belt. I became aware of its importance only later, when I read Dubravka Ugrešić's novel *The Ministry of Pain*.⁴⁹ The author was intensely hated in Croatia for this book. She was called a witch and a traitor in the press (along with Slavenka Drakulić and three other female intellectuals). She was threatened and fled the country.

The novel's protagonist is Tanja Lucic from Zagreb, a literature teacher who has ended up in Amsterdam after a separation. She gets a job at the university, teaching Yugoslavs in exile.

Her students don't even know what to call their former homeland; they jokingly say Tito-land or the Titanic. They often speak of *our people*, or Yugos. Not even the language has a name; i.e., what was once Serbo-Croatian is called *our language*.

Tanja describes the restless presence of the exiled Yugoslavs in Amsterdam, indeed in all of Europe—these “our people”—how they walk around with “an invisible slap on their faces. They had that sideways, rabbit-like look, that special tension in the body, that animal instinct of sniffing the air to tell which direction danger is coming from.”⁵⁰

Our people are easily spotted, “the ‘ourness’ came through in a certain strained melancholy in their features, a barely visible, almost internal stoop.”⁵¹ You also know where to find them: “The main railway stations and flea markets were their cult

49. Dubravka Ugrešić, *The Ministry of Pain: A Novel*, Harper Perennial 2006.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

51. *Ibid.*

tibetaner och jag var tvungen att sluta ögonen av yrsel.

Efter frukosten på hotellet i Rijeka, när vi passerade busstationen, lade jag för första gången märke till *väska*. Rijeka är tvillingstad till Trieste (som här heter Trst) och det var till Trieste man på Jugoslavientiden reste för att handla kläder, skor och kaffe. Så är det fortfarande när det gäller kläder och fortfarande blir man nedlåtande bemött där, hade curatorn Nataša Ivančević på samtidsmuseet berättat. Den nedlåtande attityden har inte försvunnit bara för att Kroatien uppstått, man är inte mer värd för det. Förr var man jugge, nu är man ex-jugge och icke EU-medlem.

Väska är blå- och vitrandig, av plast. Man packar den till bristningsgränsen med kläder när man är i Trieste. Man förstärker den med en livrem. Jag blev medveten om dess betydelse först senare när jag läste Dubravka Ugrešićs roman *Smärtans ministerium*.⁴⁹ Författaren blev mycket hatad för denna bok i Kroatien. Hon kallades häxa och landsförrädare i pressen (tillsammans med Slavenka Drakulić och tre andra kvinnliga intellektuella), hotades och flydde landet.

Romanens huvudperson är Tanja Lucić från Zagreb, lärare i litteraturvetenskap, som hamnat i Amsterdam efter en separation. Hon får ett jobb på universitetet där hon ska undervisa exiljugoslaver.

Hennes elever vet inte ens vad de ska kalla sitt förra hemland, på skämt säger de Tito-land, eller Titanic. Oftast talar de om *de våra*, eller juggar. Inte ens språket kan man benämna, alltså det som en gång hette serbokroatiska; man säger *vårska* – vårt språk.

Tanja beskriver exiljugoslavernas rastlösa närvaro i Amsterdam, ja i hela Europa – dessa *de våra* – hur de ”går omkring med en osynlig örfil i ansiktet. De har den säregna sneglande blicken – ’harblicken’, den där speciella spända kroppshållningen, den där stelheten hos djur som sniffar luften omkring sig för att avgöra från vilket håll faran hotar”.⁵⁰

De våra är lätta att känna igen, ”de avslöjas av en särskild sorts rastlöst vemed i ansiktet, en knappt synlig inre kutryggighet”.⁵¹ Man vet också var man hittar dem:

49. Dubravka Ugrešić, *Smärtans ministerium*, Albert Bonniers Förlag 2005.

50. Ibid., s. 22.

51. Ibid.

gathering places.”⁵² They move in groups of three or four, wearing “windbreakers, leather by preference, their hands thrust into their pockets. They would stand together for a while—shifting from one foot to the other, exhaling cigarette smoke /.../”⁵³ They are always talking numbers and money. Within the group they peppered their conversations with “like I say” and “take it from me,” emphasizing their role in the matter at hand. These phrases are “calculated to postpone the encounter with humiliation.”⁵⁴ These *our people* are drawn like magnets to Russians, Poles, Ukrainians, and Bulgarians, seeing them as their kind of people.

Tanja’s students are a motley crew that, besides their studies, get along on odd jobs like cleaning and sorting mail. Some are refugees of war, others could be called opportunists. A couple of them work for a small manufacturer in Amsterdam, making clothes and accessories for a sado-masochist porn store called The Ministry of Pain.

The thing is, the professor is expected to teach a subject that no longer exists – *jugoslavistika*. It used to encompass Slovenian, Croatian, Serbian, Bosnian, Montenegrin and Macedonian literature, but the subject ceased to exist along with Yugoslavia.

A linguistic divorce is going on at this time, “full of sound and fury.”⁵⁵ It is *The Renaming Machine* making its advance. In Zagreb, differential dictionaries appear in stores, an official newspeak with a nationalist seat evolves. The earlier linguistic mixes were of course also part of ideological productions, but as Tanja puts it, “the history of building bridges and roads involved a much longer and more meaningful process than their overnight destruction.”⁵⁶

Professor Lucić makes it clear from the very outset that she has no expectations whatsoever for her students for the two semesters she will be heading class. Everyone would get high grades. When the students ask what they are supposed to do during this study period, she replies, “Nothing.”

52. Ibid., p. 17.

53. Ibid.

54. Ibid.

55. Ibid., p. 36.

56. Ibid.

”Järnvägsstationerna och loppmarknaderna var deras kultplatser.”⁵² De rör sig i grupper, tre eller fyra i varje grupp, ”i korta jackor, oftast av skinn, med händerna nerkörda i fickorna. De stod och stampade med fötterna, blåste ut tobaksrök i luften /.../”.⁵³ De pratar alltid om siffror och pengar. Inom gruppen använder de ofta fraserna *Jag sade minsann* eller *Jag brukar alltid säga*. Fraserna är ett sätt att skjuta ”konfrontationen med den egna förödmjukelsen på framtiden/.../”.⁵⁴ Dessa *de våra* dras som magneter till ryssar, polacker, ukrainare, bulgarer eftersom de upplever dem som sin människosort.

Tanjas elever är en blandad skara som vid sidan av sina studier hankar sig fram på småjobb, som städare och postsorterare. Några är flyktingar från kriget, andra har flytt för att undvika att bli mobiliserade, andra skulle man kunna kalla lycköskare. Ett par av dem arbetar i en liten tillverkning i Amsterdam som framställer kläder och accessoarer till en porrbutik i sado-masochistisk stil: butiken heter *The Ministry of Pain*.

Nu är det så att professorn förväntas ge undervisning i ett ämne som inte längre existerar – *jugoslavistik*. Tidigare rymde ämnet den slovenska, kroatiska, bosniska, serbiska, montenegriska och makedoniska litteraturen, men ämnet försvann när Jugoslavien försvann.

Under denna tid pågår en språklig skilsmässa ”med muller och raseri”.⁵⁵ Det är *The Renaming Machine* som drar fram. I Zagreb börjar skillnadsordböcker förekomma i handeln, ett officiellt nyspråk uppstår med nationalistiska anspråk. Även de tidigare språkblandformerna var förstås delar i ideologiproduktion, men som Tanja formulerar det: ”historien bakom byggandet av broar och vägar var mer genomtänkta än historien bakom förstörelsen av dem”.⁵⁶

Professor Lucić förklarar från första stund att hon inte förväntar sig något överhuvudtaget av sina elever under de två terminer hon kommer att leda undervisningen. Alla kommer att få högsta betyg. När eleverna frågar vad de ska göra under studieti-

52. Ibid., s. 25.

53. Ibid.

54. Ibid.

55. Ibid., s. 44.

56. Ibid., s. 45.

“‘Nothing?’ they asked, tittering.”

“We will come up with something”⁵⁷

But it is now Tanja sets up her “memory academy,” which initially holds real potential. What she imagines is that she ought to be able to find a common, fairly painless point for conversation.

What unites them is that they have all been robbed of their memories and their language. All things Yugoslavian are derided and rejected in the neoconservative rhetoric in their home countries. But a country with no memories will be populated by zombies, Tanja thinks. She envisions how, through a certain form of nostalgia, the group can be united. By the naming of a number of things – films, songs, and more from the past – a fragmentary, slightly awkward yet liberating storytelling ensues. It is a possible means to treat the political phantom pains.

Someone in the group brings up the plastic bag with the blue, red, and white stripes, with a “zip [that] always broke after a few days.”⁵⁸ *The bag* always appears in flea markets and at bus stations. “The Poles, if asked, would have said they got them from the Czechs. The Czechs would have said, ‘No, we don’t make them; we got them from the Hungarians.’ ‘No,’ the Hungarians would have said, ‘we got them from the Romanians.’ ‘No, they’re not ours,’ the Romanians would have said, ‘they’re Gypsy-made.’”⁵⁹

The bag “/.../ is the poor man’s luggage, the luggage of petty thieves and black marketers, of weekend wheeler-dealers, of the flea-market-and-laundrette crowd, of refugees and the homeless. /.../ The plastic bags /.../ were nomads, they were refugees, they were homeless, but they were survivors, too: they rode trains with no tickets and crossed borders with no passport.”⁶⁰

The absent *bag* becomes a center. It is in *the bag* they tuck their “things.” They tell each other stories and, during the telling, they try to find acceptable linguistic forms, such as mixes of Dutch, English, and Serbo-Croatian, or dialects.

57. Ibid., p. 33.

58. Ibid., p. 44.

59. Ibid.

60. Ibid., p. 45.

den svarar hon: ”Ingenting” .

”Vadå ingenting?” frågar eleverna.

”Vi ska nog hitta på något.”⁵⁷

Det är här som Tanja inrättar sin ”minnesakademi”, som till en början verkligen har en potential. Vad hon tänker sig är att hon borde kunna hitta en gemensam, någorlunda smärtfri utgångspunkt för samtal.

Det som förenar dem är att de alla blivit berövade sina minnen och sitt språk. Allt som tillhör Jugoslavien förhånas och förkastas i den nykonservativa retoriken i deras hemländer. Men ett land utan minne kommer att befolkas av zombies, menar Tanja. Hon föreställer sig att man genom en viss form av nostalgi kan förenas inom gruppen. Genom benämning av ett antal saker, filmer, låtar och annat från förr inleds ett fragmentariskt, aningen tafatt men ändå förlösande historieberättande. Det är ett möjligt medel för att behandla den politiska fantomsmärtan.

Någon i gruppen kommer att tänka på den blå-, röd- och vitrandiga plastväskan ”med ett blytlås som snabbt går sönder”.⁵⁸ *Väskan* förekommer alltid på loppmarknader och busstationer. ”Om man frågade skulle polackerna säkert säga att de såg den första gången hos tjeckerna; tjeckerna skulle säga att, nej, vi har inga sådana väskor, vi såg dem första gången hos ungrarna; nej, skulle ungrarna säga, vi såg dem hos rumänerna; nej, de är inte våra, skulle rumänerna säga, det vet väl alla att det är – zigenarväskor.”⁵⁹

Väskan ”/.../ är de fattigas bagage: den tillhör småtjuvar och smugglare, försäljare och uppköpare, folk på loppmarknader, tvättomater och billiga skradderier, den är emigranternas, flyktingarnas och de hemlösas bagage. /.../ Plastväskan /.../ är en nomad, en flykting, en hemlös, en överlevnadskonstnär, den passerar gränser utan pass och åker med de billigaste färdmedlen utan biljett.”⁶⁰

Den frånvarande *väskan* blir ett centrum. Det är i *väskan* de stoppar ner sina ”saker”. De berättar historier för varandra och under berättandet försöker de hitta acceptabla språkliga former, såsom blandningar av holländska, engelska och serbo-

57. Ibid., s. 42.

58. Ibid., s. 56.

59. Ibid.

60. Ibid., s. 57.

Tanja's memory machine proves to be a hazardous creation. It all starts out promisingly but it ends in disaster.

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Branko, who liked our homeless ideas, suggested that we place them around a derelict building in Rijeka, where the building of the future contemporary art museum was being planned to take place. It would mark the possibility of a future materialization, and the elements could deal with the papers. After we had done so in the company of some of the artists from the previous night's drinking, we once again wound up sitting in the club. Branko had now changed his opinion on Sven Stilinović. Sven was a hopeless character, vegetating all day in Charlie's bar, never doing anything. And his art: bloody sheep's testicles hanging from hooks in the ceiling...

Rijeka-Charlie was nowhere to be seen and it dawned on us more and more clearly that we didn't have any business left in the town. Branko offered to take us in his car to Novigrad in Istria, north of Rijeka, where he would be the opening speaker at an exhibition at a small gallery.

It took us half a day to get there. On the way we found time for pasta with truffles.⁶¹ Branko held his speech in Novograd, I shot a photo of a red K67 kiosk, and we decided to book ourselves into a hotel at the harbor and stay there a few days. I had brought *The War Against Sleep*, Colin Wilson's biography on the Armenian mystic George Ivanovich Gurdjieff, so we could discuss the book and take swims in the ocean. Then we would return to Zagreb and make the website for homeless ideas with the help of his friend Cobra.

The artist Jelena Perić, who had a show at the little gallery, was a grave woman who said she could read minds. We were invited to the opening dinner of seafood and pasta, and Zdenko talked to a young man with cerebral palsy who was part of the dinner company. A person brimming with humor and intelligence, said Zdenko,

61. The food culture in Istria is Italian, and so is a lot of other culture, even if many Italians wouldn't agree. Here are also villages named after saints unknown to the Vatican. See Borut Klabjan, "Slovene i Trst," *Pequod*, no 34, May 2004.

kroatiska, eller dialekter.

Tanjas minnesakademi visar sig dock vara en vansklig skapelse. Det hela börjar lovande men det slutar i en katastrof.

*

Branko, som tyckte om vår samling av hemlösa idéer, föreslog att vi skulle placera dem runt en förfallen byggnad i Rijeka där man planerar att bygga det framtida samtidskonstmuseet. Det skulle vara ett sätt att markera en möjlig materialisering i framtiden, sedan kunde väder och vind ta hand om lapparna. När vi hade gjort så i sällskap med några av konstnärerna från gårdagens drickande blev vi återigen sittande på klubben. Branko hade nu ändrat uppfattning om Sven Stilinović. Sven var en hopplös figur, hela dagarna vegeterade han på Charlies bar, aldrig tog han sig för något. Och hans konst: blodiga fårtestiklar som hänger i krokar från taket...

Rijeka-Charlie syntes inte till och det gick allt mer upp för oss att vi inte hade något mer att uträtta i staden. Branko erbjöd oss att följa med i hans bil till Novigrad i Istrien, norr om Rijeka, där han skulle invigningstala på en utställning på ett litet galleri.

Det tog oss en halv dag att ta oss dit. På vägen hann vi äta pasta med tryffel.⁶¹ Branko höll sitt tal i Novigrad, jag fotograferade en röd K67-kiosk och vi beslöt oss för att ta in på ett hotell i hamnen och stanna där några dagar. Jag hade med mig *Kampen mot sömnen*, Colin Wilsons biografi över den armeniske mystikern Georgij Ivanovitj Gurdjjeff, så vi kunde diskutera boken och bada i havet. Sedan kunde vi återvända till Zagreb och göra hemsidan för de hemlösa idéerna med hjälp av Zdenkos vän Cobra.

Konstnären Jelena Perić, som ställde ut på det lilla galleriet, var en allvarlig kvinna som sa att hon kunde läsa tankar. Man bjöd på vernissagemiddag med skaldjur och pasta och Zdenko kom i samspråk med en cp-skadad ung man som ingick i sällskapet. En person full av humor och intelligens sa Zdenko, men jag kunde inte delta i

61. Matkulturen på Istrien är italiensk liksom mycket annan kultur, även om många italienare inte skulle hålla med om det. Här finns också byar uppkallade efter helgon som är okända i Vatikanen. Se Borut Klabjan, "Slovenier i Trst", *Pequod*, nr. 34, maj 2004.

but I couldn't take part in the conversation; I also felt the mind reading of Jelena Perić rendering me transparent. I went back to the hotel before the others.

Lying in bed, I discovered that drops were falling from the ceiling right onto my pillow. I went down to the reception and was told that a pool had been built on the roof, but it was leaking and couldn't be used. Now it had been raining during the day, but never mind. It would dry and I only had to move the bed.

Waking up in the morning, I realized Zdenko had been positioned for the Chinese water torture, but he had solved it by turning around in bed so that the drops fell between his feet.

Zdenko lay sleeping just like in the film, as if on *lit de parade*, perfectly straight with his arms straight by his sides.

I thought about the unwillingness to awaken, to wake up anyway, to resist – it's a different world. To then try to wake up again.

samtalet, dessutom kände jag mig genomlyst av Jelena Perićs tankeläsande. Jag gick till hotellet i förväg.

Jag upptäckte, när jag la mig i sängen, att det droppade från taket rakt ner på huvudkudden. Jag gick ner till receptionen och man förklarade att man byggt en pool på taket, men att man inte använde den då den läckte. Nu hade det regnat på dagen men det var ingen fara, det skulle torka upp och det var bara att flytta sängen.

När jag vaknade på morgonen insåg jag att Zdenko hade hamnat i position för den kinesiska vattentortyren. Men han hade löst det genom att vända sig så att dropparna slog ner mellan hans fötter.

Zdenko låg och sov på samma sätt som i filmen. Som på *lit de parade*, alldeles rak med raka armarna utmed sidorna.

Jag tänkte på oviljan att vakna, men att ändå vakna, men att det är en annan värld. Att då försöka vakna igen.

Afterword/Appendix

In May, 2009, Zdenko Bužek and I took part in the exhibition *The Renaming Machine* at Galerija Miroslav Kraljević in Zagreb, curated by Suzana Milevska. In keeping with our common interest in biographies, we discussed the people who appear in this text. The following was revealed:

Zdenko's brother, If, still works at the "casino."

Robert's wife died.

Branko Franceschi has become chairman of the Croatian Association of Visual Artists.

Predrag has taken up writing literary texts again. Two manuscripts are already published.

Andreja Kulunčić is now teaching at the Academy of Fine Arts in Zagreb and her husband, Ivo, has started a transportation company (whose undertakings include transporting strawberries to Sweden). At the university, the mood is one of revolution – the students have revolted against the new teaching policy, which entails charging fees from the students. Andreja follows all the self-organized activities of the students.

Nikola Iskra got a job working highway toll booths. Following a stressful year in Zagreb, he was assigned to a booth on a sparsely trafficked road in his home region. He now has time for coffee drinking, discussions with his colleagues, and short excursions in pursuit of mushrooms.

Efterord/appendix

I maj 2009 deltog Zdenko Bužek och jag i utställningen *The Renaming Machine* på Galerija Miroslav Kraljević i Zagreb, curerad av Suzana Milevska. I linje med vårt gemensamma intresse för biografier diskuterade vi de personer som förekommer i den här texten. Följande kom fram:

Zdenkos bror If arbetar fortfarande på ”casinot”.

Roberts fru dog.

Branko Franceschi har blivit ordförande för de kroatiska konstnärernas intresseorganisation.

Predrag har börjat skriva litterära texter igen. Två manus är redan publicerade.

Andreja Kulunčić har börjat undervisa på Konstakademien i Zagreb och hennes man Ivo har startat ett transportföretag (som bland annat transporterar jordgubbar till Sverige). På universitet råder revolutionsstämning, studenterna har gjort uppror mot den nya undervisningspolitiken som innebär att man tar ut avgifter av studenterna. Andreja följer studenternas alla självorganiserade aktiviteter.

Nikola Iskra fick jobb på betalstationer vid motorvägarna. Efter ett stressigt år inne i Zagreb fick han tjänst i en kur på en glest trafikerad led i sina hemtrakter. Han har nu tid för kaffedrickande och diskussioner med sina kollegor, till och med kortare svamputflykter i omgivningarna.

Kumiko, Johnny Walker & the Cute

(an extended work story)

*Nothing tells memory from ordinary moments.
Only afterwards do they claim remembrance on account of their scars.*

Chris Marker

I

Once I visited one of the world's best places. It is Peter Handke who had exalted the place in a poem. Although he doesn't use the word "best," but rather speaks about "the enduring" [die Dauer], the meaning is without a doubt the same. The place was Fontaine Sainte-Marie, in the forest between the Parisian suburbs of Meudon and Clamart. It was there I went on my excursion at the same time of year that Handke describes in the poem – early spring with its weak light.

I set off from Paris too late, so it had already begun to darken a bit when I got off the commuter train at Clamart. I knew that the whole thing would be a fiasco and therefore it couldn't be too much of a fiasco. 'To walk in the footsteps of the text' will infallibly be a fiasco unless you are prepared to create a new "text," parallel to the original. But it was mostly an impulse I had. I was an editor for *Tidskriften 90TAL* and we were going to publish Handke's poem. Maybe I wanted to illustrate the poem; after all, I had a Polaroid camera with me. I enjoyed the somewhat silly aspect of the project and it was probably here that I seriously acquired a taste for what might be called *seeking-out actions*. To walk in the footsteps of the text involves confronting

Kumiko, Johnny Walker & the Cute

(en utvidgad verkberättelse)

*Nothing tells memory from ordinary moments.
Only afterwards do they claim remembrance on account of their scars.*

Chris Marker

|

En gång besökte jag en av världens bästa platser. Det är Peter Handke som i en dikt upphöjt platsen. Han använder visserligen inte ordet ”bäst”, utan talar om ”varaktigheten” [die Dauer], men betydelsen är utan tvekan densamma. Platsen var Fontaine Sainte-Marie i skogen mellan Paris förstäder Meudon och Clamart och jag gjorde min expedition vid samma tid på året som Handke talar om i dikten – förvåren med sitt klena ljus.

Jag kom iväg för sent från Paris så det hade redan börjat mörkna en aning när jag steg av pendeltåget vid Clamart. Jag visste att det hela skulle bli ett misslyckande och därför kunde det inte bli alltför misslyckat. ”Att gå i textens fortspår” blir ofelbart ett fiasko om man inte är inställd på att skapa en ny ”text”, sidoställd förlagan. Men det var mest ett infall jag fått. Jag arbetade i redaktionen för *Tidskriften 90TAL* och vi skulle publicera Handkes dikt. Kanske ville jag bilsätta dikten, jag hade i alla fall en polaroidkamera med mig. Jag njöt av det lite enfaldiga i projektet och antagligen var det här jag på allvar fick smak för vad man kan kalla *uppsökande handlingar*. Att gå i textens fortspår innebär att konfrontera den frilagda, komponerade verkligheten med

detached, composed reality with unorganized, psychotic reality (the kind that doesn't contain its own interpretation). Literary texts do not contain "living reality" (unless they are magical or ritual), just as little as a life is a narrative; but texts can intrude into reality in a mild or violent way and give rise to reality, and a life path can become (a) narrative and be directed and informed by the narrative about itself. Handke's poem speaks about "a room that can be described, / and the describing creates yet another room."¹

After the train station, I quickly made my way up to the forest, where the trees had the kind of misshapen growths that are easily mistaken for crows' nests, but are in fact, as I know from my time as an illustrator for biology textbooks, the result of a cancer-like cell division caused by a parasite. Here I took my first polaroid photos.

I actually don't know what I thought of Handke's poem then. But something in the text spoke to me. Maybe it was simply the fact that he names a specific place for something so intangible. Handke's way of speaking about "endurance" reminds me of descriptions of the sublime. Endurance, Handke explains, is not anything that "exists in the inductible / timeless stone, / but in the temporal, / pliable."² It is "the most fleeting of all feelings, / often ending more quickly than the blink of an eye, / unpredictable, unsteerable, / intangible, immeasurable."³ Handke seems to imply that endurance arises from the techniques of living, as a consequence of repeated everyday actions. I interpreted it as a feeling of joy that belongs to each person's inner time and can be triggered by small means, but never in an instrumental way. Certain simple things, sounds, and places promote it, according to Handke, as well as certain movements. Endurance is a grace that lets itself be known in snatches. One is alone with the feeling of duration, but shares the possibility with many.

I found a general map on an information board. Handke speaks of a triangle between the paths, where the spring itself was to be found. I walked toward this supposed place. But the forest, which I thought seemed more like a large park, opened up. I saw a large building in a valley. Beyond the building, a sparse settlement spread out. The building was like an institution, maybe a school or some kind of facility.

1. Peter Handke, "Dikt till varaktigheten," *Tidskriften 90TAL*, no. 5/6 1992, p. 72.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 75.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

den oorganiserade, psykotiska verkligheten (den som inte innehåller sin tolkning). Lika lite som ett liv är en berättelse innehåller inte litterära texter "levande verklighet" (om de inte är magiska eller rituella), men texter kan på ett mildt eller våldsamt sätt bryta in i verkligheten och ge upphov till verklighet, och en livsbana kan bli (en) berättelse och få sin riktning och informeras av historien om sig själv. Handkes dikt talar om "ett rum som går att beskriva, / och beskrivandet skapar ännu ett rum".¹

Efter tågstationen tog jag mig snabbt upp i skogen där träden hade den sortens missbildningar som man lätt misstar för skatbon men som är resultatet av en cancerliknande celledelning orsakad av en parasit, något som jag känner till sedan min tid som illustratör för läroböcker i biologi. Här tog jag mina första polaroidbilder.

Jag vet egentligen inte vad jag då tyckte om Handkes dikt. Men något i texten lockade mig. Kanske var det helt enkelt det faktum att han nämner en exakt plats för något så ogripbart. Handkes sätt att tala om "varaktighet" påminner om beskrivningar av det sublimes. Varaktighet, förklarar Handke, är inte något som "finns i den oförgängliga / urtida stenen, / utan i det timliga, / veka."² Det är "den flyktigaste av alla känslor, / oftare hastigare förbi än ett ögonblick, / oförutsägbar, ostyrbar, / ogripbar, omätbar."³ Handke tycks mena att varaktigheten uppstår ur levandets tekniker, som en konsekvens av upprepade vardagliga handlingar, och jag tolkade den som en känsla av lycka som tillhör varje människas inre tid och kan utlösas med små medel, men aldrig på ett instrumentellt sätt. Varaktigheten främjas av vissa enkla ting, ljud och platser, enligt Handke, liksom av vissa rörelser. Varaktighet är en nåd som ger sig till känna ryckvis. Man är ensam om känslan av varaktighet, men delar dess möjlighet med många.

Jag hittade en översiktskarta på en informationstavla. Handke talar om en trekant mellan stigarna. Där skulle själva källan finnas. Jag vandrade mot denna förmodade plats. Men skogen, som jag tyckte framstod mer som en större park, öppnade sig. Jag såg en vidsträckt byggnad i en sänka. Bortom den spred en gles bebyggelse ut sig. Byggnaden såg ut som en institution och var kanske en skola eller någon form av

1. Peter Handke, "Dikt till varaktigheten", *Tidskriften 90TAL*, nr. 5/6 1992, s. 72.

2. *Ibid.*, s. 75.

3. *Ibid.*, s. 28.

There was also a large empty pool. I took a photo with the polaroid camera and saw the pool gently emerge in the emulsion like a bluish amphitheater with a stairway leading down to a deeper level.

When I arrived at the building, I looked in through the windows. The institution seemed deserted. I walked in through a door and saw a long corridor with a well-polished, shining hospital floor, which made me think of Ola Billgren's painting *Korridoren* [The Corridor]. I went out the other side and looked in through another window. There was a man cutting up meat; he was wearing a white apron with red stains. I went back the same way – by now dusk had settled over the park forest – and took the train back to Paris.

Fifteen years later, in January of 2007, I was in Paris to look up a woman named Kumiko Muraoka. It was the same time of year, and there was the same pale light, which made me think of my excursion to Clamart. Along the way from the airport, the same trees with the same malformations. Now I had begun to use seeking-out and repetition more systematically as artistic methods. I had used them in my *Who is...?-series*,⁴ and they were central working ideas in the video essay I was just working with: *Kumiko, Johnnie Walker & the Cute*. I looked up Kumiko Muraoka in order to reawaken some of the questions that Chris Marker had posed in 1964 in his film *Le Mystère Koumiko* (*The Koumiko Mystery*).

Chris Marker traveled to the Olympic Games in Tokyo in 1964 in order to film the events at the stadium; at whose request is unclear. In the film, it is presented as a chance occurrence when he focuses on a woman in the audience while sweeping over the bleachers with his camera. He zooms in on her face, a woman 'between 20 and 30 years old', whom he will follow on a walk through Tokyo.

The Koumiko Mystery is a dialogue film, carried by Kumiko's voice, her actions, and her text, which consists of her answers to Chris Marker's questions. It was above all *one* of the questions that Chris Marker posed that I wanted to examine. But Kumiko explained, once I had found her and spent several days conversing with her in her apartment next to Montmartre Cemetery, that she had hoped that just this question, or rather the answer she had given to the question, would have gone unnoticed or been forgotten.

4. See introduction.

anstalt. Där fanns också en stor torrlagd bassäng. Jag tog en bild med polaroidkameran och såg bassängen sakta framträda i emulsionen likt en blåaktig amfiteater med en trappa som leder ner till en djupare nivå.

Framme vid byggnaden spanade jag in genom fönstren. Institutionen verkade öde. Jag klev in genom en dörr och såg en långsträckt korridor med ett hårdpolerat, blänkande sjukhusgolv som fick mig att tänka på Ola Billgrens målning *Korridoren*. Jag klev ut på andra sidan och tittade in genom ett annat fönster. Där stod en man och styckade kött, han hade vitt förkläde med röda fläckar. Jag tog mig tillbaka samma väg – nu hade skymningen lagt sig över parkskogen – och tog tåget tillbaka till Paris.

Femton år senare, i januari 2007, var jag i Paris för att söka upp en kvinna vid namn Kumiko Muraoka. Det var samma tid på året, samma bleka ljus, vilket fick mig att tänka på utflykten till Clamart. Utmed vägen från flygplatsen samma slags träd med samma slags missbildningar. Jag hade nu tagit uppsökandet och upprepningen som metoder på allvar. Jag hade använt dem i min *Who is...?-serie*⁴ och de var bärande idéer i arbetet med den videoessä som jag just då arbetade med: *Kumiko, Johnnie Walker & the Cute*. Det främsta skälet till att söka upp Kumiko Muraoka var att väcka till liv några av de frågor som Chris Marker ställde 1964 i sin film *Le Mystère Koumiko* [Mysteriet Koumiko].

Chris Marker hade åkt till olympiaden i Tokyo 1964 för att filma händelserna på stadion, oklart på uppdrag av vem. I filmen framställs det som om han av en slump fäster sig vid en kvinna i publiken när han sveper med kameran över läktaren. Han zoomar in hennes ansikte, en kvinna ”mellan 20 och 30 år”, som han kommer att följa på en vandring genom Tokyo.

Mysteriet Koumiko är en dialogfilm och den bärs upp av Kumikos röst, hennes agerande och hennes text, som är hennes svar på Chris Markers frågor. Det var framförallt *en* av dessa frågor som jag ville ta upp. Men Kumiko Muraoka förklarade, när jag väl hade hittat henne och under flera dagar blev sittande i långa samtal i hennes lägenhet intill Montmartres kyrkogård, att hon hade hoppats att just denna fråga, eller snarare det svar hon som gav den, skulle passera obemärkt eller falla i glömska.

4. Se introduktionen.

I had arrived in Tokyo in the autumn of 2006 for a three-month stay on an IASPIIS fellowship. I had asked my hosts at AIT⁵: “Can you help me find Kumiko Muraoka?” They smiled a bit indulgently at my naiveté. Kumiko Muraoka is a very common name. The slightly unusual spelling *Koumiko* instead of *Kumiko* could be disregarded; it was a transcription that had sometimes been used in the past by the French, I was told.⁶

My idea, when I arrived in Tokyo, was actually to make two films, or rather, a video biography and a video essay. The biography would be a fourth video in my *Who is...?* series. Eight years earlier I had met a man in Tokyo, an eccentric Japanese Jew, who became our guide during the three weeks we spent in the city. Along with Fredrik Ekman, I had made my way through the galleries and art museums in Tokyo. When, during our gallery tours, we asked questions about some younger Japanese artist or about some artwork, we often received the same answer: “You better speak to Johnnie Walker.”

Johnnie Walker? What kind of name is that? People said that he knew everything about the Japanese art scene. But who was he? We got very evasive answers. Someone said he was an American, another person firmly declared that he was Dutch, someone else remarked simply: Jew.

“You better speak to Johnnie Walker.” We got the idea that it was a saying, or a way to wind up a discussion. Maybe it meant, “You’re asking too much.” But at the gallery 360°, located right next to the Omotesando crossing, the gallery owner gave us a business card with the name in elegant script: “Johnnie Walker, Za Moca Foundation.”

When I called the number, I was met by a sharp voice with an American accent. The man ordered me to come to the gallery Röntgen Kunstraum a few evenings later. It was a voice that didn’t want to waste time on anything. I found out what time I should be there, then the conversation was ended abruptly.

The gallery was minimal and overcrowded with opening night guests. We won-

5. Arts Initiative Tokyo.

6. In this text I use the spelling “Kumiko,” a spelling that Muraoka herself prefers. In this text, I also mainly use her first name in a familiar way that I hope will not seem diminishing. The familiarity builds on the friendship we were able to develop and follows Chris Marker’s title for the film (*Le Mystère Koumiko*) – which is my point of departure for the whole project.

Hösten 2006 hade jag kommit till Tokyo för att vistas där tre månader som IAS-PIS-stipendiat. Jag frågade mina värdar på AIT⁵: ”Kan ni hjälpa mig att hitta Kumiko Muraoka?” De log lite överseende åt min naivitet. Kumiko Muraoka är ett högst vanligt namn. Den lite ovanliga stavningen *Koumiko* istället för *Kumiko* kunde man bortse från, det var en transkribering som förr då och då användes av fransmän, sa man mig.⁶

Min idé, när jag kom till Tokyo, var egentligen att göra två filmer, eller rättare sagt: en videobiografi och en videoessä. Biografin skulle vara en fjärde video i min *Who is...?-serie*. Åtta år tidigare hade jag mött en man i Tokyo, en excentrisk japansk jude, som kom att bli min och Fredrik Ekmans guide under de tre veckor som vi tillbringade i staden. Tillsammans med Fredrik Ekman hade jag tagit mig mellan gallerierna och konstmuseerna i Tokyo. När vi under våra galleriturer ställde frågor om någon yngre japansk konstnär eller om något verk fick vi flera gånger samma svar: ”You better speak to Johnnie Walker?”.

Johnnie Walker? Vad är det för ett namn? Man sa att han visste allt om den japanska konstscenen. Men vem var han? Vi fick mycket svävande svar. Någon sa att han var amerikan, en annan hävdade bestämt att han var holländare, en annan kort och gott: jude.

”You better speak to Johnnie Walker?” Vi fick för oss att det var ett talesätt, eller ett sätt att runda av ett resonemang. Kanske betydde det ”du frågar för mycket”? Men på galleriet 360°, beläget strax intill Omotesando-korsningen, gav oss galleristen ett visitkort med namnet i sirlig skrift: ”Johnnie Walker, Za Moca Foundation”.

När jag ringde numret möttes jag av en skarp röst med amerikansk accent. Mannen beordrade mig att komma till galleri Röntgen Kunstraum några kvällar senare. Det var en röst som inte ville slösa tid på något. Jag fick veta vilken tid jag skulle vara där, sedan avslutades abrupt samtalet.

Galleriet var minimalt och överfullt av vernissagegäster. Vi undrade hur vi skulle

5. Arts Initiative Tokyo.

6. Jag använder mig i denna text av stavningen Kumiko, en stavning som Muraoka själv föredrar. Företrädesvis använder jag också hennes förnamn, vilket jag inte hoppas ska verka förminskande. Det familjära tilltalet bygger på den vänskap vi hann utveckla och går i linje med Chris Markers titel på den film (*Le Mystère Koumiko*) som är utgångspunkten för hela detta arbete.

dered how we would be able to find a person who hadn't described his appearance. But I couldn't escape the sight of a man with red eyeglass frames, shaved head, and a voice that penetrated everything. I heard how the voice switched languages between English, Japanese, and Italian. The man had a shaved head, except for two strips of black hair that ran down his skull, joining in a "V" at the back of his head. He suddenly caught sight of me, stepped forward, took the cigarette that I was smoking out of my hand, put it up his nose, and said: "Hello. My name is Johnnie Walker."

For the remaining time that I stayed in Tokyo, I was Johnnie Walker's guest. He explained that we had to call him every day to inform him of our plans. Then he would tell us whether we were on the right track or should do something different. He always disqualified our plans and suggested that we follow him on his opening reception rounds.

So we drove around in Johnnie Walker's dark blue Mercedes. Often it was hard to follow his temperamental rhythm. Sometimes we barely had time to get in and turn around at one event before it was time to move on, at other times he lingered on for a disproportionately long time, perhaps waiting for something or someone. Johnnie Walker liked dirty jokes; he was loud and domineering. He spent all of his spare time dragging around guests that he didn't know. We formed a randomly assembled group that expanded and shrank – an Austrian video artist who filmed everything that happened, a grim translator of Gertrude Stein into Japanese, some diplomat or newly arrived artist with jet lag who had Johnnie Walker's phone number scribbled on a piece of paper and so on. He took us to banquets, openings, receptions, parties, and restaurants. We were the audience for whom he performed small dramas. Often he shocked the tactful guests at the restaurants with loud sexual innuendos, usually homoerotic, then he managed to make people laugh with him, and when he left the restaurants or the bars people sometimes bowed.

His real (Japanese) name was Joni Waka. Johnnie Walker was a homonym that he amused himself with. But in terms of ethnicity he was not Japanese; exactly what he was was impossible to say, if one even wanted to define him by those categories.

I soon realized that Johnnie Walker was obsessed with introducing people, always with the most exaggerated declarations of these people's importance. You were asked to greet "one of the leading," "one of the most important," and "the legendary."

kunna hitta en person som inte beskrivit sitt utseende. Men jag kunde inte undgå anblicken av en man med röda glasögonbågar, rakat huvud och en röst som perforerade allt. Jag hörde hur rösten växlade språk mellan engelska, japanska och italienska. Mannen var rakad, förutom två strängar svart hår som löpte ner över hjässan så att de förenades till ett V på bakhuvudet. Han tog plötsligt sikte på mig, stegade fram, tog den cigarett som jag rökte ur min hand, satte den i sin egen näsa och sa: ”Hello, my name is Johnnie Walker.”

Den återstående tiden i Tokyo var vi Johnnie Walkers gäster. Han förklarade att vi varje dag måste ringa honom för att delge våra planer. Han skulle då förklara för oss om vi var på rätt kurs eller borde göra något annat. Alltid diskvalificerade han våra planer och föreslog att vi skulle följa honom på hans vernissagerundor.

Så for vi runt i Johnnie Walkers mörkblå Mercedes. Ofta var det svårt att följa hans lynniga rytm. Ibland hann vi knappt in och vända på en tillställning innan det var dags att åka vidare, vid andra tillfällen dröjde han sig kvar som om han väntade på något eller någon. Johnnie Walker gillade snuskiga skämt, var högljudd och dominerande. Han använde all sin lediga tid till att släpa runt på gäster som han inte kände. Vi bildade en slumpmässigt sammansatt grupp som utökades eller reducerades. En österrikisk videokonstnär som filmade allt som hände, en bister översättare av Gertrude Stein till japanska, någon diplomat eller nyanländ konstnär med jetlag som hade Johnnie Walkers telefonnummer nedklottrat på en lapp. Han tog oss till bjudningar, vernissager, invigningar, fester och restauranger. Vi var den publik inför vilken han spelade upp små dramer. Ofta chockerade han de försynta gästerna på restaurangerna med högljudda sexuella anspelningar, oftast homoerotiska, sedan lyckade han få skrattarna på sin sida och när han lämnade restaurangerna eller barerna hände det att folk bugade.

Hans egentliga (japanska) namn var Joni Waka. Johnnie Walker var en homonym som han roade sig med. Men etniskt var han inte japan, vad han var var omöjligt att säga, om man nu ville försöka ringa in honom i sådana termer.

Jag förstod snart att Johnnie Walker var besatt av att introducera folk, alltid med de mest överdrivna proklamationer av dessa människors betydelse. Man ombads att hälsa på ”en av de främsta”, ”en av de mest betydande”, ”den legendariske” och så vi-

Often, once these same people had disappeared out of hearing range, he explained what hopeless losers they were: stuck up, incompetent, incapable, helpless, or simply idiots.

Based on his constant storytelling, it was possible to create a fragmentary and unreliable biography. Johnnie Walker is from a family of Sephardic Jewish origin that was exiled from Spain during the Inquisition. The family spread through eastern Russia and onward to Manchuria. He was possibly born in Harbin (then Manchuria, now China). At least he spent his early years there – moved with his family to Osaka at age three, and was then sent to boarding school in India.⁷ Johnnie Walker explained that no one who was not ethnically Japanese could attend a regular school in Japan at that time; the child would have been literally bullied to death. This was one of the questions to which he steadily returned: the Japanese form of racism that includes oppression of the Korean minority; the expulsion of the group of people called *burakumin* – who, according to Johnnie Walker, are still considered “untouchable”⁸; the hatred toward all kinds of foreigners, which is only barely concealed by stiff politeness; his own position as an eternal *gaijin* (outsider), regardless of the fact that he was born as a Japanese citizen and that his family had been Japanese citizens for several generations.

Johnnie Walker said that from an early age, he had received the gift of certain supernatural abilities, that he experienced premonitions and energy forces. He moved to Tokyo in his twenties, if I have understood correctly. He was drawn to the Japanese avant-garde scenes in art and music. He began to arrange exhibitions, performance events, and parties. He wanted to “serve” the avant-garde scene.

Johnnie Walker described Tokyo of the 1950s and 1960s as his Eden. Most Japanese men at that time had not, at least not until they married, defined their sexuality,

7. On one occasion he claimed to have been born on a boat outside of San Francisco, and pointed out that he therefore has the right to American citizenship – a right that he has never claimed.

8. A group of people in Japan who are descendants of butchery and tannery workers. Some of them live in areas that are not even marked on official maps. Nowadays, they are often engaged in dirty work for the mafia, *yakuza* (who are also thought to consist largely of burakumin), for example, in road construction. In *Sans soleil* (1982), Chris Marker addresses their existence, or rather non-existence: “I saw them in Osaka hiring themselves out by the day, sleeping on the ground. Ever since the Middle Ages, they’ve been doomed to grubby and back-breaking jobs. But since the Meiji era, officially nothing sets them apart, yet their real name – *eta* – is a taboo word, not to be pronounced. They are non-persons.”

dare. När samma människor försvunnit utom hörhåll förklarade han ofta vilka hopplösa fall de var; uppblåsta, odugliga, tafatta, hjälplösa eller kort och gott: idioter.

Utifrån hans ständiga historieberättande gick det att skapa en fragmentarisk och opålitlig biografi: Johnnie Walker härstammar från en släkt av sefardiskt judiskt ursprung, fördrivna från Spanien under inkvisitionen. Slakten spred sig i östra Ryssland och vidare till Manchuriet. Han föddes möjligen i Harbin (dåvarande Manchuriet, numera Kina), åtminstone tillbringade han sina första år där, flyttade med familjen till Osaka tre år gammal och placerades sedan på internatskola i Indien.⁷ Johnnie Walker förklarade att ingen som inte är etnisk japan skulle kunna gå på en vanlig skola i Japan på den tiden. I så fall skulle man bokstavligen ha blivit mobbad till döds.

Det här var en av de frågor som han ständigt återkom till: den japanska rasismen som inbegriper förtrycket av den koreanska minoriteten; utstötningen av den grupp människor som kallas *burakumin* – vilka enligt Johnnie Walker fortfarande anses ”oberörbara”⁸; hatet mot alla slag av utlänningar, som bara nödtorftigt döljs under den stela artigheten; hans egen position som evig *gaijin* [”person utifrån”] oavsett det faktum att han var född som japansk medborgare och att hans familj hade varit japanska medborgare i ett antal generationer.

Om jag förstått saken rätt flyttade Johnnie Walker flyttade till Tokyo i 20-årsåldern. Han sade att han tidigt hade begåvats med vissa övernaturliga förmågor, att han upplevde varsel och energikrafter. Han drogs till de japanska avantgardescenerna inom konst och musik. Han började arrangera utställningar, performance-tillställningar och partyn. Han ville ”betjäna” avantgardeescenen.

Johnnie Walker utmålade femtio- och sextiotalets Tokyo som sitt Eden. De flesta japanska män på den tiden hade inte, åtminstone inte innan de gift sig, definierat

7. Vid ett tillfälle påstod han att han fötts på en båt utanför San Francisco och att han därför har rätt till amerikanskt medborgarskap, ett medborgarskap han emellertid aldrig utkrävt.

8. En grupp människor i Japan som är ättlingar till arbetare inom slakteri- och skinnhanteringsnäringarna. Vissa av dem bor i områden som inte ens är utmärkta på de officiella kartorna. Numera fungerar de ofta som grovarbetare åt maffian, *yakuza* (som också till stor del anses bestå av burakumin), t.ex. vid vägbyggen. Chris Marker tar i *Sans soleil* (1982) upp deras existens, eller snarare icke-existens: "I Osaka såg jag dem ta jobb för dagen och sova på marken. Allt sedan medeltiden har de varit dömda till föraktade och slitsamma jobb. Men sedan Meiji-eran har officiellt ingen åtskillnad gjorts, och deras riktiga namn – *eta* – är tabu, förbjudet att uttala. De är icke-personer."

he claimed. You could walk on the street and make contact with beautiful men; you could get them to come with you for a few hours, it was quite uncomplicated. The change in Japan was caused by a negative influence from the West and from Christianity, according to Johnnie Walker. The American influence had been especially destructive.

When I returned to Sweden, I wrote a text based on my fragmented impressions, a text that became my first work of biography in the *Who is...?* series. The text was presented on a microfiche reader along with Styrofoam letters that formed the words “Who is Johnnie Walker?” As proof of his existence, there was also a little photograph – one of the pictures I took of him in an open-plan office at Dresdner Bank near Kamyacho Station in Tokyo.⁹ Visitors could crank out the text on the microfiche reader themselves.

Who is Johnnie Walker?

He lives in Tokyo.

He has a dark blue Mercedes that he drives in a death-defying way.

In the daytime he sits in an open-plan office in Dresdner Bank in Minato-Ku.

He deals in options.

In the evenings, he drives around in his Mercedes between different opening receptions and parties.

He says he is able to perform healing.

He speaks Spanish, French, German, Italian, English, Japanese, and Russian.

He has a round face, and glasses with red frames.

He has shaved off all his hair except for two symmetrical strips that run

9. The piece was part of the exhibition *Little Big Stories* at the old National Archives on Riddarholm in Stockholm (along with Annika Eriksson, Elin Wikström, Zdenko Bužek, Oliver Musovic, and Zaneta Vangeli. The curator was Suzana Milesvska). The first part of the exhibition was shown at the National Library in Skopje the same year (1998). See *Little Big Stories*, Directorate for Culture and Art, Skopje 1998.

sin sexualitet, hävdade han. Man kunde gå på gatan och få kontakt med vackra män, man kunde locka dem till sig för ett par timmar, det var helt okomplicerat. Förändringen av Japan hade att göra med ett dåligt inflytande från väst och kristendomen, enligt Johnnie Walker. Inte minst det amerikanska inflytandet hade varit förödande.

När jag kom tillbaka till Sverige skrev jag en text utifrån mina splittrade intryck, en text som blev mitt första biografiverk i serien *Who is...?* Texten presenterades på en läsapparat tillsammans med frigolitbokstäver som bildade frågan ”Who is Johnnie Walker?”. Som ett bevis på hans existens fanns också ett litet fotografi – en av de bilder jag tog av honom i ett kontorslandskap på Dresdner Bank nära Kamyachostationen i Tokyo.⁹ Besökarna fick själva veva fram texten på läsapparaten:

Vem är Johnnie Walker?

Han bor i Tokyo.

Han har en mörkblå Mercedes som han kör på ett dödsföraktande sätt.

På dagarna sitter han i ett kontorslandskap på Dresdner Bank i Minato-Ku.

Han handlar med optioner.

På kvällarna kör han omkring med sin Mercedes mellan olika vernissager och fester.

Han säger sig vara kapabel att utföra healing.

Han talar spanska, franska, tyska, italienska, engelska, japanska och ryska.

Han har ett runt ansikte, och glasögon med röda bågar.

Han har rakat av sig allt hår utom två symmetriska strängar

9. Verket ingick i utställningen *Little Big Stories* på gamla Riksarkivet på Riddarholmen i Stockholm (tillsammans med Annika Eriksson, Elin Wikström, Zdenko Bužek, Oliver Musovic och Zaneta Vangeli. Curator var Suzana Milesvska). Utställningens första del visades på Nationalbiblioteket i Skopje samma år (1998). Se *Little Big Stories*, Directorate for Culture and Art, Skopje 1998.

across the top of his head.

He says that when he was young,
he could meditate for twelve hours at a stretch.

He says that the ice cream vendors in Vladivostok are happy about the cold.
They don't need to have refrigeration for their ice cream.

In his large apartment at Oyamacho 8-12, he arranges parties for artists.
On the invitation, the same thing appears after each item on the program:
"What to bring? Wine, Cheese, French Bread..."
In the apartment, which has a glass atrium, he hosts guest artists and others
who appeal to him.

He says that he hates Tokyo.
He says that Tokyo is a dead city populated by plastic people.

He says that in Vladivostok, people eat ice cream even when it is thirty
degrees below zero.
When the temperature falls below thirty degrees, they stop eating ice cream.

He often travels to Bangkok and Burma.
He says that those are the only places where you can still experience the
real Asia.

In Burma, he met a woman from New York who is translating
Gertrude Stein into Japanese.
He invited her to come and live with him whenever she wanted.
She arrived a few weeks later with a sports bag and a paper shopping bag.

He is fifty-three years old.
He says that Japan was a much nicer country thirty years ago.

He comes from a family of Spanish Jews who were forced to immigrate to
Russia during the Inquisition.
The family moved from Russia to Manchuria and on to Tokyo.
He has lived in Tokyo for forty-three years.

som löper över hjässan.

Han säger att när han var ung
kunde han meditera tolv timmar i sträck.

Han säger att glassförsäljarna i Vladivostok är glada för kylan.
De slipper ha kylanläggningar till glassen.

I sin stora lägenhet på Oyamacho 8-12 anordnar han fester för konstnärer.
På inbjudan står det samma sak efter varje programpunkt: "What to bring?:
Wine, Cheese, French Bread..."
I lägenheten, som har ett atriumrum av glas, hyser han gästkonstnärer och
andra som faller honom i smaken.

Han säger att han avskyr Tokyo.
Han säger att Tokyo är en död stad befolkad av plastmänniskor.

Han säger att man i Vladivostok äter glass även när det är trettio
grader kallt.
När temperaturen når under trettio grader slutar man äta glass.

Han reser ofta till Bangkok och till Burma.
Han säger att det är de enda ställen där man fortfarande kan uppleva det
riktiga Asien.

I Burma stötte han ihop med en kvinna från New York som översätter
Gertrude Stein till japanska.
Han erbjöd henne att komma och bo hos honom närhelst hon ville.
Hon kom några veckor senare med en sportbag och en papperskasse.

Han är femtiotre år gammal.
Han säger att Japan var ett mycket trevligare land för trettio år sedan.

Han härstammar från en släkt av spanska judar som tvingades emigrera till
Ryssland under inkvisationen.
Familjen flyttade från Ryssland till Manchuriet och vidare till Tokyo.
Han har bott i Tokyo i fyrtiotre år.

He says that in his family, there has always been a tradition of patronage, that art is his religion.

He says that young Japanese people might seem cool when you see them with their sunglasses and goatees, but if you prod them, they immediately stand at attention and extend an arm in a fascist salute.

He says that he plans to commit suicide.

He will arrange a big party at home, as usual.

The guests will be encouraged to come in and help themselves to wine, cheese and bread.

The atrium will be covered with rice paper.

A handwritten sign will tell the guests to tear down the rice paper at a certain time.

They will discover him hanging in the glass room.

He says that he likes to drive along the highway that encircles Tokyo.

The city is constantly changing, every week some large building has been torn down and a new one raised.

During my later trips to Japan, I heard his stories repeated, displaced, embellished, and even include events where I myself had been present.¹⁰ Some of the details in my *Who is...?* text were not correct, I realized. He did not live in an apartment, but in a three-story designer house. The address, Oyamacho 8-12, says nothing, not even for a true Tokyo resident. (Few addresses mean anything to Tokyo residents; people orient themselves mainly in relation to buildings.) It is a small, narrow street in a neighborhood with well-off inhabitants, west of Shinjuku. Nearby is one of Tokyo's few mosques. The interior of the house consisted of stone, glass, concrete, and aluminum,

10. Johnnie Walker usually introduces me to strangers as "a prominent Swedish artist" who has made a piece about him, a piece consisting of a gigantic photograph of his head from behind, along with a text. He gives the title of this piece as "Johnnie Walker, Myth or Reality." After his introduction, Johnnie Walker usually tells the same anecdote (followed by a long laugh). He says that during a question and answer session at the opening of this exhibit, an animated debate broke out about whether or not Johnnie Walker existed. During the discussion, a Serbian artist spoke up and claimed: "I know that Johnnie Walker exists. My girlfriend met him recently at the Hanoi airport."

Han säger att det i hans familj alltid funnits en tradition av mecenatskap, att konsten är hans religion.

Han säger att de unga japanerna kanske verkar coola när man ser dem med solglasögon och bockskägg, men petar man på dem ställer de sig omedelbart i givakt och faller ut armen i fascisthälsning.

Han säger att han planerar att ta sitt liv.
Han ska som vanligt ordna en stor fest i hemmet.
Gästerna ska bli anvisade att stiga på och ta för sig av vinet, osten och brödet.
Atriumrummet ska vara klätt med rispapper.
En textad skylt ska anvisa gästerna att riva ner rispappret vid ett visst klockslag.
De ska upptäcka honom hängande i glasrummet.

Han säger att han gillar att köra på motorvägen som går som i en ring runt Tokyo.
Staden ändrar sig hela tiden, varje vecka har någon stor byggnad rivits och någon ny uppförts.

Under mina senare resor till Japan hörde jag hans historier upprepas, förskjutas, broderas ut och även inbegripa händelser där jag själv hade varit närvarande.¹⁰ Några av detaljerna i min *Who is...?*-text stämmer inte har jag förstått. Han bodde inte i en lägenhet utan i ett arkitektritrat trevåningshus. Adressen, Oyamacho 8-12, säger inget, inte ens för en inbiten Tokyobo. (Få adresser säger något för Tokyobor, man orienterar sig mest i förhållande till byggnader.) Det är en liten, smal gata i ett kvarter med välbeställda invånare, väster om Shinjuku. I närheten finns en av Tokyos få moskéer. Husets interiörer bestod av sten, glas, betong och aluminium, vilket gav

10. Johnnie Walker brukar introducera mig för främlingar som "en framstående svensk konstnär" som gjort ett verk om honom, ett verk som bestod av ett gigantiskt fotografi som avbildar hans huvud bakifrån samt en text. Titeln till detta verk brukar han ange som "Johnnie Walker, Myth or Reality". Efter introduktionen drar Johnnie Walker i regel samma anekdot (följd av ett långt skratt). Han berättar att det under en frågestund i samband vernissagen av utställningen utbröt en animerad debatt om huruvida Johnnie Walker existerade eller ej. Under diskussionen tog en serbisk konstnär ordet och hävdade: "Jag vet att Johnnie Walker existerar. Min flickvän träffade nämligen honom nyligen på Hanois flygplats."

which lent it a hard and somewhat cold setting. The black stone slabs on the floor were actually provided with underfloor heating, but the enormous cost of keeping them warm had made Johnnie Walker give it up a long time ago. There was not even hot water anymore, since the water heater had broken.

The atrium courtyard formed a glass shaft where the sun didn't reach. A strong bamboo plant stretched toward the sky. The house has two terraces, one of which faces south. You can go there directly from one of the guest rooms. There was a bonsai that had to be watered with a substantial can of water every day and a stoneware urn with algae-green water in which you could see little goldfish wriggle if you looked long enough. From this terrace you could also look down into a narrow alley with a small Shinto altar that was guarded by a stone sculpture of a dog. The altar seemed to have existed there from time immemorial and then become encapsulated between the buildings over the years.

Johnnie Walker was particular about all the details in the guest room how to handle the metal shutters and the aluminum walls so that they wouldn't get scratched, how much food to give the fish, and the importance of saving energy. This carefulness was in contrast to the upper story's chaos, with piles of objects that covered every available surface and niche: laundry, newspapers, invitations, catalogues, and unopened mail packages as well as letters and bills. One of the rooms on the top floor housed an art collection and a computer. In the mountain of packages and bubble-wrapped pieces, a small ravine had been carved out so that you could make your way to the desk with the computer. The room housed thirty to forty years of Japanese contemporary art history in decay. Various museums sometimes got in touch to borrow pieces for exhibits, but Johnnie Walker usually wasn't sure whether he had the requested pieces or not. The curators had to come there and sift through his piles in order to see what they could find.

Packages, shipments, exhibit announcements, and books formed piles here and there throughout the apartment, not excepting the bathroom. Johnnie Walker rarely opened his mail. One time he opened a package containing a book that he had been asked to give his friend Elie David. Elie David got his book ten years late.

The three-story house was occupied by an enormous Irish wolfhound, Francis Ba-

allt en hård och lite kall inramning. De svarta stenplattorna på golvet var egentligen försedda med golvvärme men de enorma kostnaderna för att hålla dem varma hade fått Johnnie Walker att sedan länge ge upp det företaget. Inte ens varmvatten fanns längre sedan varmvattenberedaren hade gått sönder.

Atriumgården bildade ett glasschakt dit solen inte nådde. En kraftfull bambuväxt sträckte sig mot himlen. Huset hade två terrasser, varav den ena befann sig i söderläge. Dit tar man sig direkt från ett av gästrummen. Där fanns en bonsai som skulle ösas med en rejäl kanna vatten varje dag och en urna i stengods med alggrönt vatten i vilken man kunde se små guldfiskar spritta till om man tittade tillräckligt länge. Från denna terrass kunde man också titta ner i en smal gränd med ett litet shintoaltare som vaktades av en hundskulptur av sten. Altaret verkade ha funnits där sedan urminnes tider för att under årens lopp kapslas in mellan bostäderna.

Johnnie Walker var noga med alla detaljer i gästrummet, hur man skulle behandla metallpersiennerna och aluminiumväggarna för att de inte skulle repas, hur mycket mat fiskarna skulle få och att man sparade på strömmen. Noggrannheten stod i kontrast mot övervåningens kaos med högar av föremål som täckte varje ledig yta och nisch: tvätt, tidningar, inbjudningskort, kataloger, öppnad post såväl paket som brev och räkningar. Ett av rummen på den översta våningen rymde en konstsamling och en dator. I berget av paket och bubbelplastinpackade verk hade en liten ravin skapats så att man kunde ta sig fram till skrivbordet där datorn stod. Rummet rymde trettiofyrtio års japansk samtidskonsthistoria i förfall. Olika museum hörde ibland av sig för att få låna verk till utställningar, men Johnnie Walker hade för det mesta inte klart för sig om han hade de efterfrågade verken eller ej. Intendenterna fick komma dit och arbeta sig igenom hans högar för att se vad de kunde hitta.

Paket, försändelser, vernissagekort och böcker bildade staplar lite här och var i lägenheten, inte minst i badrummet. Johnnie Walker öppnade sällan sin post. Vid ett tillfälle hade han öppnat ett paket som innehöll en bok som han ombads ge till sin vän Elie David. Elie David fick sin bok tio år för sent.

Trevåningshuset hade intagits av den enorma irländska varghunden Francis Ba-

con, named after the artist.¹¹ Irish wolfhounds are considered the world's largest dog. Johnnie Walker had bought two puppies in Budapest, taken them to Tokyo, and sold one. In that way he had financed his own puppy. The animal, which weighed about a hundred kilos, was tremendously strong and its jaws were big enough to catch a soccer ball. Going out on the streets with the dog always turns into a great spectacle. The beast caused a commotion everywhere. People laughed, pointed, were frightened, took detours or – in the case of a few over-confident ones – tried to approach and pet it. But that was forbidden. Bacon might bite someone who touched his head. This had happened several times; I witnessed it myself once.

For Johnnie Walker, Bacon's name was a part of the play with the aura of names in which he is constantly engaging, and where his own name forms an (elusive) center. According to him, it is not self-evident that his name relates to the whisky brand. At the boarding school in India, everyone thought that he was a namesake of the Indian comedian Johnny Walker (Badruddin Qazi).

With Johnnie Walker, I experienced both a disintegration and an exaltation of the meaning of a name. At first I thought that his obsession with the status of names was paradoxical. He was fixated on genealogies, royalty, and celebrities' names. He enjoyed talking about the Jewish British upper class's fixation on names and how especially certain ladies in these families spend so much energy – in fact their entire existence on “guarding” their family name.¹² Yet Johnnie Walker had himself taken a name that is common. A brand name that one can enter and exit. It is a matter of dissolving the special status that a proper name has among other words, a loosening of the bonds to biography; the name is turned into a *word figurant* or artefact and can

11. Johnnie Walker says that he has always highly regarded Francis Bacon, and he related that he once visited the museum in Dublin where the artist's studio had been re-installed. It is an exact replica based on photographs. Each object has been placed in what seems from the photographs to be an indescribable mess. You do not enter the room, but look at it from the outside. Johnnie Walker said that he sat there and quietly looked at the mess (I have a hard time imagining Johnnie Walker quietly looking at anything he is constantly in motion) when an older man sat down by his side. After a moment's contemplation, the man said, in an “Irish way,” seemingly into the air: “So, you think it's gonna rain this afternoon.”

12. Members of the British upper class, when they are nominated for a stipend or a prize, can tell the rest of the world: “I let my name be put forward.”

con, döpt efter konstnären.¹¹ Irländsk varghund räknas som världens största hund. Johnnie Walker hade köpt två valpar i Budapest, tagit dem till Tokyo och sålt den ena. På så vis hade han finansierat sin egen valp. Djuret som vägde omkring hundra kilo var fruktansvärt starkt och kunde fånga en fotboll i sitt gap. Att röra sig ute på gatorna med hunden utvecklas alltid till ett stort spektakel. Överallt väckte besten uppmärksamhet. Människor skrattade, pekade finger, blev rädda, tog omvägar, eller – som vissa övermodiga – försökte gå fram och klappa. Men det var förbjudet. Bacon kunde hugga den som rörde hans huvud. Det hade hänt flera gånger.

För Johnnie Walker ingick Bacons namn i ett spel med namnens aura som han ständigt sysslar med och där hans eget namn bildar ett (undflyende) centrum. Det är ingen självklarhet att han med sitt namn tangerar whiskeymärket, menade han. På internatet i Indien hade alla trott att han var namne med den indiske komikern Johnny Walker (Badrudin Qazi).

Hos Johnnie Walker upplevde jag både en upplösning och en upphöjelse av namnets betydelse. Jag hade först tyckt att hans besatthet vid namnens status var paradoxal som bland annat tog sig uttryck i hans fixering vid genealogier, kungligheter och kända människors namn. Han berättade njutningsfullt om upptagenheten vid namn som råder inom den judiska delen av den brittiska överklassen, hur framförallt vissa damer inom dessa släkter ägnar så mycket möda, egentligen hela sin tillvaro, åt att för släktens räkning vakta sitt familjenamn.¹² Samtidigt hade han själv tagit sig ett namn som är allmänt. Ett varumärke som man kan gå in i och ut ur, något som innebär att upplösa eggenamnens särställning bland orden och lossa förtöjningarna till biografän; namnet förvandlas till en *ordfigurant* eller artefakt och kan få i stort sett

11. Johnnie Walker säger att han alltid hållit Francis Bacon högt och berättade att han vid ett tillfälle besökte museet i Dublin där man låtit installera konstnärens ateljé. Det är ett exakt uppförande efter fotografier. Ting för ting har placerats ut i vad som på fotografierna framstår som en obeskrivlig röra. Man kliver inte in i rummet utan betraktar det utifrån. Johnnie Walker berättade att han satt där och stilla betraktade röran (jag har svårt att föreställa mig Johnnie Walker stilla betrakta något, han är ständigt i rörelse) då en äldre man slog sig ner vid hans sida. Efter en stunds kontemplation sa mannen "på irländares vis" liksom rakt ut i luften: "So, you think it's gonna rain this afternoon".

12. Medlemmar av brittisk överklass kan när de nomineras för ett stipendium eller ett pris meddela omvärlden: "I let my name be put forward!"

acquire almost any position or function.¹³ At first I had not understood that there was a logic to this. Someone who gives up or dissolves his name has no clear past, but creates an opportunity for mythologization. The biography that is linked to such a name is unusually changeable and exchangeable. You can invent yourself every day while at the same time acquiring a special position with omnipotent features; you appropriate a name and a brand.

In Haruki Murakami's novel *Kafka on the Shore* from 2006, "Johnnie Walker" is one of the main characters. Johnnie Walker, who said that he had known Murakami for a long time, was very pleased with that in spite of the fact that in the novel, he is portrayed as a cynical sculptor who devotes himself to killing cats in his spare time, dressing like the figure on the whisky bottle and using his large dog to help catch his victims. An elderly man named Nakata asks him in one passage:

"Are you a foreigner, Mr Johnnie Walker?"

Johnnie inclined his head. "Well, if that helps you understand me, feel free to think so. Or not. Because both are true."¹⁴

"Johnnie Walker" explains to Nakata that he is famous the world over, somewhat of an icon, but that he has taken a name without any particular engagement: "A person's got to have an appearance and a name, don't you think?"¹⁵

Nakata, whom Johnnie Walker of the novel meets in this scene, can be seen as the holy fool, a mythological figure whose deficiencies are compensated for by super-

13. It is reminiscent of the development in many of Erik Beckman's earlier texts, where the narrative "I" suddenly, in the middle of a text, leaves the scene. About Erik Beckman's use of *word figurants*, see Sven Hansell, *Livet även om jag dog av det*, Brutus Östlings Bokförlag Symposion 1991. Erik Beckman himself used the concept "word bodies"; see Erik Beckman, *Sigges gäng*, Bonniers förlag 1993, p. 29.

14. Quotes from Haruki Murakami, *Kafka on the Shore*, Vintage 2005, p. 165.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 164.

vilken position och funktion som helst.¹³ Jag hade först inte förstått att det fanns en logik i detta. Den som upphäver eller upplöser sitt namn har inget tydligt förflutet men skapar möjligheter till en mytologisering. Biografin kopplad till ett sådant namn är ovanligt föränderlig och utbytbar och man kan uppfinna sig själv varje dag. Samtidigt får man en särställning med omnipotenta drag: man approprierar ett namn och ett varumärke.

Haruki Murakami låter i romanen *Kafka på stranden* (2006) ”Johnnie Walker” vara en av huvudkaraktärerna. Johnnie Walker, som sa att han kände Murakami sedan länge, var mycket nöjd med detta trots att han i romanen är en cynisk skulptör som ägnar sig åt att döda katter på sin fritid. Här är han klädd som figuren på whiskyflaskan och tar hjälp av sin stora hund för att fånga sina offer. En gamling vid namn Nakata frågar honom i en passage

”Är Herr Johnnie Walker från utlandet?”

Han svarar:

”Ja, om det gör det enklare för dig att tänka mig som utlänning så gör det.

Det spelar ingen roll. Kanske är det så också.”¹⁴

”Johnnie Walker” förklarar för Nakata att han är känd över hela världen, något av en ikon, men att det är utan större engagemang som han har tagit sig ett namn: ”För det är ju trots allt nödvändigt att ha en stil och ett namn.”¹⁵

Nakata, som romanens Johnnie Walker möter i denna scen, kan ses som den he-

13. Det påminner om utvecklingen i många av Erik Beckmans tidiga texter där berättarjaget plötsligt mitt i en text lämnar scenen. Om Erik Beckmans användning av ordfiguranter, se Sven Hansell, *Livet, även om jag dog av det*, Brutus Östlings Bokförlag Symposion 1991. Självt använde Erik Beckman begreppet ”ordkroppar”. Se Erik Beckman, *Sigges gäng*, Bonniers förlag 1993, s. 29.

14. Citaten från Haruki Murakami, *Kafka på stranden*, Norstedts 2006, s.144 (övers. från japanska av Eiko och Yukiko Duke).

15. Ibid.

natural capabilities.¹⁶ Nakata is blessed with the ability to speak to cats and predict certain supernatural events. Otherwise he is an autistic, illiterate, but good-natured old man. It was in his childhood that he lost his intellectual capacity and ability for abstract thought. It happened in the Yamanashi prefecture at the end of the war, during a mysterious incident with supernatural elements. A group of children who had been picking mushrooms in the forest with their teacher had all suddenly fallen into a coma after a vessel had been seen flying over the forest. When they awoke, they had all lost their memory of the incident. Nakata was the only one of the children who had lasting problems.

I was not that convinced by this book as a whole, but followed Johnnie Walker's wish to see it as part of his history. He never neglected an opportunity to mention the existence of the book; it had become part of his autobiography and he was extremely offended when someone said that Murakami's Johnnie Walker didn't have anything to do with him. Johnnie Walker had simply absorbed the fiction.

The novel has certain of those roles and relationships that I had begun to write into my video essay: in addition to Johnnie Walker, also the Fool, the big dog, and the cats. I suggested that he could read aloud in front of the camera from the section with the meeting with Nakata, and he immediately agreed. The scene also contained a narrative voice, so three characters, or readers (actors), were needed. Johnnie Walker immediately began calling in people who would take on the different roles. An acquaintance of his who ran a gallery for sound art, a man whose existence he was

16. With this figure, Murakami links up with a long and rich tradition in which the Fool is a socially disregarded and stigmatized character who actually has other forms of knowledge (unseen by the indifferent people around him – except for a few initiates who have a revelation during the course of the story). The sacred fool is close to, or sometimes identical with, the artist (especially in Slavic tradition), the oracle, and various mediums who have the ability to contact the spirit world and the dead. The nerd, the *otaku*, the savant and the autistic person are characters who overlap with the sacred fool in contemporary mythology. My own use of the word “fool” in this text plays with these mythologizations and, above all, with the social function of the Fool. In the video essay, the Fool is connected both to the “artist” (the subject), children, the *Cute*, and the characters of the narratives (Kumiko and Johnnie Walker). In the absence of a higher power, the Fool, like the *Cute*, becomes a site of projection for helplessness, sweetness, lack of productivity, and being on the outside. The Fool is written off from, or rather is assigned a place right outside of, the social community. In my text there is also space for the Fool's connection to *calendar time* (Ricoeur), through his role as “the functionary of travel.” With his blankness and inner emptiness (lack of inner time), the Fool here is a character who travels for the sake of traveling, without goal or meaning. With his enjoyment of the structure and apparatus of travel – he imitates the sounds of trains and moves strictly according to the station platform's markings – the Fool fills in and overemphasizes this structure so that it becomes a caricature.

lige dåren, en mytologisk figur vars brister kompenseras av övernaturliga förmågor.¹⁶ Nakata är benådad med förmågan att tala med katter och förutse vissa övernaturliga händelser. I övrigt är han en autistisk, illitterat men godmodig pensionär. Det var i sin barndom han förlorade sin intellektuella kapacitet och förmåga till abstrakt tänkande. Det hände i Yamanashi-prefekturen vid krigets slutskede, under en mystisk incident med övernaturliga inslag. En grupp barn som plockat svamp i skogen tillsammans med sin lärarinna hade alla plötsligt hamnat i koma efter att en farkost setts flyga över skogspartiet. Vid uppvaknandet hade de alla förlorat minnet av händelsen. Nakata var den ende av barnen som fick bestående men.

Som helhet övertygade mig inte *Kafka på stranden*, men jag följde Johnnie Walkers vilja att se den som en del av hans historia. Han försummade aldrig ett tillfälle att påtala bokens existens och han blev oerhört förnärad när någon påstod att Murakamis Johnnie Walker inte hade med honom att göra. Johnnie Walker hade helt enkelt absorberat fiktionen.

I romanen finns emellertid några av de roller och relationer som jag hade börjat skriva in i min videoessä: förutom Johnnie Walker även dåren ("the Fool"), den stora hunden och katterna. Jag föreslog att han skulle läsa högt framför kameran ur partiet med mötet med Nakata och han var genast med på det. Scenen innehöll också en berättarröst, således krävdes tre karaktärer eller läsare (skådespelare). Johnnie Walker började genast kalla in folk som skulle ta på sig de olika rollerna. En bekant till honom som drev ett galleri för ljudkonst, en man vars existens han blev påmind

16. Med denna gestalt anknyter Murakami till en lång och yvig tradition där Dären är en socialt misskänd och stigmatiserad karaktär som egentligen besitter andra, ovanliga kunskapsformer (fördolda för den likgiltiga omgivningen – utom för några få invigda som drabbas av uppenbarelsen under berättelsens gång). Den helige dåren står nära och är ibland identisk med både konstnären (inte minst i slavisk tradition), oraklet och olika medier som har förmågan att få kontakt med andevärlden och de döda. Nörden, *otakun*, savanten och den autistiske är karaktärer som i samtidsmytologin överlappar den helige dåren. Min egen användning av ordet Dären i denna text spelar med dessa mytologiseringar och främst med Därens sociala funktion. I videoessä sätts Dären i förbindelse både med "konstnären" (subjektet), barnen, *the Cute* samt berättelsernas karaktärer (Kumiko och Johnnie Walker). I avsaknad av yttre makt blir Dären, i likhet med *the Cute*, en projektionsyta för hjälplöshet, gullighet, improduktivitet och utanförskap. Dären avskrivs ur, eller snarare tilldelas en plats strax utanför den sociala gemenskapen. I min text finns också ett utrymme för Därens anknytning till *kalendertiden* (Ricoeur) genom sin roll som "resandets funktionär". Med sin blankhet och inre tomhet (avsaknad av inre tid) är Dären här en karaktär som reser för resandet skull, utan mål och mening. Med sitt njutande av resandets struktur och apparatur – han imiterar tågens ljud och rör sig strikt efter perrongens markeringar – fyller Dären i och överbetonar denna struktur så att den blir karikerad.

reminded of when we happened to meet him at an opening, was asked, without any explanation, to come to his house the next day. He would be perfect in the role of Nakata, Johnnie Walker said, thanks to his nervous way of speaking and his fear of dogs. The man came the next day, in a cold sweat and bowing.¹⁷

When Nora Ibsen (the granddaughter of Henrik) was visiting Tokyo, along with her husband, in connection with the Ibsen anniversary, Johnnie Walker acted as guide in his usual manner. The fact that Nora Ibsen really is named Nora like in *A Doll's House* greatly pleased Johnnie Walker, and he immediately suggested that we should make a video called *Francis Bacon Meets Nora Ibsen*. Instead, we did a reading in front of the camera where Nora Ibsen reads the narrator's sections and her husband reads the part of Nakata.¹⁸

Johnnie Walker took up these readings with the greatest energy. His gaze changed and deepened, his concentration strangely heightened. At one of the sessions, I drove him to the point of insanity by repeatedly breaking off the takes too early by mistake. He yelled at me, and I kept one such scene in the video essay as well.

II

Chris Marker is an assumed name and his biography is a well-kept secret. Few photographs of his face have been published (the most common picture is a little graphic vignette of a man with a camera in front of his face and a cat by his side). According to Catherine Lupton in *Chris Marker: Memories of the Future*, the artist is of Russian-American descent and was born in July, 1921, in Neuilly-sur-Seine, a quiet suburb of Paris. Lupton suggests that in some sense, we could just as well accept any of the alternative biographical facts about Marker, along with all of his pseudonyms and alter egos, even Alain Resnais's assertion that Marker is "a friendly messenger from another planet, or our own future."¹⁹ By concealing his biography, preventing any portraits,

17. His name is Tomoya Saito and he was actually much too young to play Nakata, but Johnnie Walker chose him, mainly for his charisma, and their reading together became an important part of the video essay.

18. These scenes were removed from the final version.

19. Catherine Lupton, *Chris Marker: Memories of the Future*, Reaktion Books 2006, p. 12. Chris Marker seems to have in some way internalised Resnais's words and speaks in *Sans soleil* (1982) about a filmmaker (an alter ego) who comes from the future, a man who lacks the ability to forget: "He hasn't come from another planet, he comes from our future, four thousand and one: the time when the human brain has reached the era of full employment /.../ After so many stories of men who had lost their memory, here is the story of one who has lost forgetting /.../!"

om när vi stötte på honom på en vernissage, ombads utan förklaringar att komma till hans hus nästa dag. Han vore perfekt i rollen som Nakata, ansåg Johnnie Walker, tack vare sin nervösa framtoning och sin hundskräck. Mannen kom kallsvettig och bugande.¹⁷

När Nora Ibsen (dotter-dotter till Henrik) var på besök i Tokyo tillsammans med sin man med anledning av Ibsen-jubileet var Johnnie Walker på sitt sedvanliga manér guide och ciceron. Att Nora Ibsen verkligen heter Nora som i *Ett dockhem* var en stor glädje för Johnnie Walker och han föreslog genast att vi skulle göra en video som skulle heta *Francis Bacon Meets Nora Ibsen*. Istället gjorde vi en läsning framför kameran där Nora Ibsen läser berättarröstens partier och hennes man läser Nakata.¹⁸

Johnnie Walker gick in för dessa läsningar med största energi. Hans blick förändrades, djupnade, hans koncentration var egendomligt förhöjd. Genom att av misstag flera gånger bryta tagningarna för tidigt vid en av sessionerna retade jag honom till vansinne. Han skällde ut mig och jag behöll även en sådan scen i videoessän.

||

Chris Marker är ett påhittat namn och hans biografi är en väl dold hemlighet. Få fotografier av hans ansikte har publicerats (den vanligaste bilden är en liten grafisk vinjett med en man med en kamera framför ansiktet och en katt vid sin sida). Enligt Catherine Lupton i *Chris Marker: Memories of the Future* är konstnären av rysk-amerikansk börd och född i juli 1921 i Neuilly-sur-Seine, en stillsam förort till Paris. Lupton menar att man i någon mening lika väl kan acceptera alla alternativa biografiska fakta om Marker liksom alla pseudonymer och alter egos och till och med Alain Resnais antagande om att Marker är "ett vänligt sinnat sändebud från en annan planet, eller vår egen framtid".¹⁹ Genom att dölja sin biografi, hindra varje porträtt och genom att

17. Hans namn är Tomoya Saito och var egentligen alldeles för ung för att spela Nakata. Men Johnnie Walker valde honom snarare för hans utstrålning och deras läsning tillsammans blev en viktig del av videoessän.

18. Dessa scener togs bort ur den slutgiltiga versionen.

19. Catherine Lupton, *Chris Marker: Memories of the Future*, Reaktion Books 2006, s. 12. Chris Marker tycks på något sätt internaliserat Resnais ord och talar i *Sans soleil* (1982) om en filmare (ett alterego) som kommer från framtiden, en man som saknar förmågan att glömma: "Han har inte kommit från en annan planet, han kommer från vår framtid, fyratusenett: tiden då den mänskliga hjärnan nått full kapacitet /.../ Efter så många berättelser om människor som förlorat minnet, här är en berättelse som har förlorat förmågan att glömma /.../."

and by never showing himself in public, Marker has created a much stronger myth about himself than most artists usually succeed in doing during their lifetime. The lack of a body, an appearance, and a real surname creates an empty space that is filled by a symbol or a sign. Freed from the body and liberated from a concrete place in the world, such a person becomes a concept, a brand name, or an institution in himself. Like an emperor from the past whom no one was allowed to see or create an image of, he has become an elevated figure. Paradoxically enough, this is also what happens if a person's portrait is spread and reproduced in mass editions. When it comes to creating an iconic figure, the vast repetition of images seems to correlate to the ban on images.²⁰

Of course, Chris Marker has not simply been promoted by keeping his name secret. His works have their own power, but this power is in relationship to 'Chris Marker' and all of the masks and roles that he has used within his work.

There are of course many people who have met Chris Marker. He contributed film essays, poetry, political commentary, criticism, and short stories to the Marxist-oriented Catholic journal *Esprit* during the 1940s and 1950s. He has participated in a number of collaborations with other artists and in film collectives. In his filmography, the list of his collaborations and collective films is almost as long as the list of his own films, and these two categories often overlap, as he has sometimes refused to take credit for certain works and has constantly used a variety of pseudonyms, both in his own work and in his collaboration with others. The same is true of his texts and contributions to web journals. For instance, more recently his beloved cat Guillaume-en-Égypte contributed a number of satirical collages to the website *Un Regard Moderne*, appearing as a Barack Obama-supporter.²¹

Kumiko told me a little about Chris Marker during our conversations. It was a

20. Walter Benjamin's assumption in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" about the disappearance of the aura through mass distribution of images, must be regarded as a mistake, something that was effectively demonstrated by Andy Warhol, and later by a number of other artists in various ways (for example, Louise Lawler, Richard Prince, and Hans-Peter Feldman). The repetition in itself (like the repetition of leaders' portraits – Mao, Atatürk), creates a (disembodied) iconisation. See Magnus Bårtås, "The Typically General," *Index Magazine*, no. 3-4 1995.

21. Guillaume-en-Égypte also has the leading role in his short film *Chat écoutant musique* (1990). In *Level five* (1996), Guillaume-en-Égypte is referred to as recently deceased.

aldrig visa sig i offentligheten har Marker skapat en mycket starkare myt om sig själv än vad konstnärer vanligen lyckas med under sin levnad. Avsaknaden av en kropp, ett utseende och ett riktigt egennamn skapar ett tomrum som fylls av en symbol eller ett tecken. Befriad från kroppen och lösgjord från en konkret plats i världen blir en sådan människa ett begrepp, ett varunamn eller en egen institution. Likt en kejsare från förr som ingen fick se eller som aldrig tillät sig avbildas har Marker blivit en upphöjd gestalt. Det är paradoxalt nog också vad som sker om en människas porträtt sprids och upprepas i massupplaga. Den enorma bildrepetitionen tycks sammanfalla med bildförbudet när det gäller förmågan att skapa en ikonisk gestalt.²⁰

Nu har Chris Marker förstås inte enbart upphöjts genom hemlighållandet av sitt namn. Hans verk har sin egen kraft, men denna kraft står i förbindelse med "Chris Marker" och alla de masker och roller som han har laborerat med i sina verk.

Det finns givetvis en mängd människor som träffat Chris Marker. I den marxistiskt orienterade katolska tidskriften *Esprit* bidrog han på 1940- och 50-talet med filmessäer, poesi, politiska kommentarer, kritik och noveller. Han har varit kollektivt verksam genom en mängd samarbeten med andra konstnärer och i olika filmkollektiv. I filmografin är listan över hans samarbeten och kollektiva filmer nästan lika lång som listan över hans egna filmer och ofta glider dessa två kategorier samman då han dels ofta frånsagt sig äran för vissa arbeten, dels ständigt laborerat med olika pseudonymer för de olika insatserna i både egna och andras verk. Detsamma gäller hans texter samt bidrag till nättidskrifter. Hans älskade katt Guillaume-en-Egypte har till exempel under senare år bidragit med en mängd satiriska collage till webbsajten *Un Regard Moderne* och visade sig vara en Barack Obama-supporter.²¹

Kumiko berättade lite om Chris Marker under våra samtal. Det var bilder av en

20. Walter Benjamins antagande i "Konstverket i reproduktionsåldern" (*Benjamin, bild och dialektik*, Brutus Östlings Bokförlag Symposion 1991) om aurans försvinnande genom massspridningen av bilder måste betraktas som ett misstag, vilket på olika sätt effektivt har demonstrerats av Andy Warhol och senare en mängd andra konstnärer (exempelvis Louise Lawler, Richard Prince och Hans-Peter Feldman). Upprepningen i sig (liksom upprepningen av ledares porträtt – Mao, Atatürk) skapar en (okroppslig) ikonisering. Se Magnus Bårtås, "Det typiskt generella", *Tidskriften Index*, nr 3-4 1995.

21. Guillaume-en-Egypte har även huvudrollen i hans kortfilm *Chat écoutant musique* (1990). I *Level five* (1996) omtalas Guillaume-en-Egypte som nyligen avliden.

picture of an eccentric man who lives for his work and lives amid layers of technology, often under quite humble conditions. For a while he was living in a theater prop storeroom²² and at certain periods he subsisted exclusively on the kind of packaged food that astronauts take with them on their space travels. When he served coffee, he would use hot water directly from the faucet, filling a mug and adding Nescafé. Kumiko said that the very special communication that they had had while working on the film in 1964 had disappeared; when she came to Paris two years later, it was no longer there. Marker took her out to lunch with Alain Resnais, but she had nothing to say to them; she sat in silence throughout the lunch.

In *The Koumiko Mystery*, there is a political basis for the symbolic meaning of the Olympic Games – the hosting of the Olympics as the first true opening up of Japan toward the West, and Japan's manifestation of its national identity as a modern industrial country. Would Japan, through the Olympics, establish a genuine form of exteriority?²³ That was a question that could be taken further and posed anew. To repeat a question after a number of years is an artistic method that I have used earlier, although not with such a large time interval.

In the introduction to the film, the current political events are specified. The Pope

22. Later on, Kumiko sent me a letter in which she elaborated on her memories of the room. "A double bed and a shelf full of books were set against a very high wall. This was all that suggested the presence of life. A section of the space was taken up with clothes hangers. I stood there, scared. Was it a back room? A movie studio costume stock-room? Or... were we in a theater? Everything was unreal. And very quiet. I don't know where it was." (Letter from Kumiko Muraoka, 10/1 2010).

23. Something that has not succeeded, if one is to believe the Japanese philosopher Karatani Kojin. See for example: "Japan is interesting because Japan is not interesting," a lecture given in March, 1997, published on Karatani Forum: www.karataniforum.org/jlecture.html (3/5 2009). The sociologist Carl Cassegård argues in an essay that the "closedness," the lack of communication and a genuine will to open up to "the outside" "...corresponds to a mood that can be found in the work of Haruki Murakami, and other literary authors, in which the big city is portrayed as a desolate, self-identical space that seems to stretch out into eternity and to lack exits." Carl Cassegård, "Från gulighetskult till nationalism," *Glänta* no. 3 2006. See also Carl Cassegård, "Exteriority and Transcritique. Karatani Kojin and the impact of the 1990s," *Japanese Studies*, Volume 27, Issue 1 May 2007.

excentrisk man som lever för sitt arbete och bor i ett schakt av teknik, ofta under ganska enkla förhållande. Ett tag bodde han i ett teaterrekvisitaförråd,²² under vissa perioder levde han uteslutande på mat från den sortens tuber astronauterna tar med sig under rymdfärderna. När han bjöd på kaffe tappade han hett vatten direkt från kranen i muggen och tillsatte Nescafé. Kumiko berättade att den mycket speciella kommunikation som de hade under arbetet med filmen 1964 försvann. När hon kom till Paris två år senare fanns den inte kvar. Marker tog henne på lunch med Alain Resnais men hon hade inget att säga dem, hon satt tyst lunchen igenom.

Mysteriet Kumiko är ingen av Chris Markers mest kända filmer, inte heller den mest okända. (Av Markers filmer finns bara *Sans soleil*, *La Jeté* och hans senast fullbordade *Chats perchés* i dvd-distribution.) Jag lyckades få se en kopia på Filminstitutet i Stockholm och fastnade för Kumikos röst, hennes uppenbarelse och hennes svar på Chris Markers frågor. Här fanns också en politisk grund i den symboliska betydelsen av olympiaden – arrangerandet av olympiaden som det första egentliga öppnandet av Japan mot väst, Japans manifestation av sin nationella identitet som ett modernt industriland. Skulle Japan i och med olympiaden upprätta en verklig form av exterioritet?²³ Det var en fråga som kunde föras vidare och ställas på nytt. Att upprepa en fråga efter ett antal år är en konstnärlig metod som jag använt mig av tidigare, om än inte med ett sådant omfattande tidsförlopp.

I inledningen av filmen anges de aktuella politiska händelserna: Påven reser till

22. Efter våra samtal skrev Kumiko ett brev till mig där hon utvecklade sitt minne av rummet: "En dubbelsäng och en hylla full av böcker mot en väldigt hög vägg. Det var det enda som antydde något liv. En avdelning i rummet upptogs av klädhängare. Jag stod där, rädd. Var det ett "back room"? Ett filmbolags kostymförråd? Eller... var vi på en teater? Allt var överkligt. Och väldigt tyst. Jag vet inte var jag befann mig." (Brev från Kumiko Muraoka, 10/1 2010, min övers. M.B.)

23. Något som inte lyckades om man ska tro den japanske filosofen Karatani Kojin. Se t.ex. "Japan is interesting because Japan is not interesting", föredrag i mars 1997, publicerat på Karatani Forum: www.karataniforum.org/jlecture.html (3/5 2009). Sociologen Carl Cassegård menar i en essä att instängdheten, avsaknaden av kommunikation och en genuin vilja att öppna sig mot "det utanför" "... / svarar mot en stämning som man finner hos Haruki Murakami, och andra skönlitterära författare, i vilken storstaden porträtteras som ett ödsligt självvidentiskt rum som tycks sträcka ut sig i oändlighet och sakna utgångar." Carl Cassegård, "Från gullighetskult till nationalism", *Glänta* nr. 3 2006, s. 120. Se också Carl Cassegård "Exteriority and Transcritique. Karatani Kojin and the impact of the 1990s", *Japanese Studies*, Volume 27, Issue 1 May 2007.

travels to Bombay. It is the first time a pope travels to Asia.²⁴ Krushchev resigns. The space age moves toward its zenith. After Chris Marker and Kumiko Muraoka meet in the Olympic Stadium, they stroll together along the streets of Tokyo. Their walk through the city is the visual leitmotif of the film. Chris Marker walks close to Kumiko and she plays with the camera's eye. She is an obvious beauty. The method of filming has elements of *cinéma vérité* (a term Marker hates).²⁵ Images of Tokyo's Dreamland with its dinosaur park pass by, a trip by monorail, a long, drawn-out kendo performance, and a scene or two from the Olympics. But the events at the stadium have almost no importance. The camera moves around Kumiko, who visits department stores and looks at the mannequins, meets a dog, and sees some small kittens offered for sale in a cardboard box. She calls a psychic and has her fortune told, and sometimes she gets tired of playing with the camera lens. Her gaze then turns serious, penetrating, as though she were looking right through the camera.

This is the only film, to my knowledge, where Marker uses his own voice. He poses the questions drily, sometimes a little sternly, sometimes with a slightly teasing tone. Marker says that her French is a little "different," that she has created her own fantastic fusion of the languages, and that some misunderstandings arise because of this. He takes on the role of the journalist and poses questions about Japanese identity and the role of women in society. The questions go on in succession and the digressions become more personal and more specific; about the relationship to animals, about beauty and violence. Even the voices play with each other.

We learn that Kumiko grew up in Manchuria and we understand that the Japanese identity doesn't work, that something is amiss. She tries to adapt; it should work, but it's hard.

Every now and then he cites statistics and Gallup polls about Japan about the use of phones, photography habits, and the view of life. "What makes life worth living? Family life – 8%. Children – 24%. Work – 15%. Money 28%. Pleasures – 4%. For

24. The Pope recurs in *Sans soleil*. His face appears on the streets as advertisement for the exhibition "The Pope's Treasures" at the department store Sogo. "I imagine them bringing out within two years time a more efficient and less expensive version of Catholicism [...]". (*Sans soleil*).

25. Marker says "direct cinema." See one of the rare interviews with Marker: Samuel Douhaire and Annick Rivoire, "Marker Direct" *Film Comment*, May/June 2003.

Bombay. Det är första gången en påve reser till Asien.²⁴ Chrusjtjov avgår, rymdåldern går mot sin zenit. Efter mötet med Kumiko Muraoka på Tokyos Olympiastadion promenerar de tillsammans på Tokyos gator. Vandrandet genom staden är filmens bildmässiga ledmotiv. Chris Marker går nära Kumiko och hon leker med kameraögat. Hon är en uppenbar skönhet. Sättet att filma bär drag av *cinéma vérité* (ett begrepp Marker avskyr).²⁵ Bilder från Tokyos Dreamland med dinosauriepark passerar revy, en resa med monorail, en långdragen kendouppvisning och en och annan scen från olympiaden. Men händelserna på stadion har knappast någon betydelse. Kameran rör sig runt Kumiko som besöker varuhuset och tittar på skyltdockorna, träffar en hund och ser några små kattungar bjudas ut till försäljning i en pappkartong. Hon ringer upp en spåkvinnor och får sin framtid spådd. Ibland tröttnar hon på att leka med kameraögat och får då en allvarlig, genomträngande blick som om hon såg rakt igenom kameran.

Det här är den enda film, så vitt jag vet, där Marker använder sin egen röst. Han framsäger frågorna torrt, emellanåt lite strängt, ibland med en aningen retsam ton. Marker säger att hennes franska är lite ”speciell”, att hon skapat sin egen sällsamma fusion av språken, och att det därför uppstår en del missförstånd. Han tar på sig journalistens roll och ställer frågor om japanskhet och kvinnans roll. Frågorna går vidare i följdfrågor och utvecklingarna blir mer och mer personliga och specifika; om relationerna till djur, om skönhet och våld. Även rösterna leker med varandra.

Man får veta att Kumiko växt upp i Manchuriet och man förstår att den japanska identiteten inte fungerar, att någonting skaver. Hon försöker anpassa sig, det borde fungera men det är svårt.

Emellanåt citeras statistik och gallupundersökningar om Japan; om telefonanvändningen, fotograferingsvanor och synen på livet. ”Vad gör livet värt att leva? Familjeliv – 8%. Barn – 24%. Arbete – 15%. Pengar – 28%. Njutningar – 4%. För

24. Påven återkommer i *Sans soleil*. Hans ansikte dyker upp på gatorna som reklam för utställningen ”The Pope’s Treasures” på varuhuset Sogo. ”Jag föreställer mig att de inom loppet av två år tar fram en mer effektiv och mindre dyrbar version av katolicism /.../” (*Sans soleil*, min övers. M.B.).

25. Marker säger ”direct cinema”. Se en av Markers sällsynta intervjuer: Samuel Douhaire och Annick Rivoire, ”Marker Direct”, *Film Comment*, May/June 2003 (<http://www.filmlinc.com/fcm/5-6-2003/markerint.htm>). Ursprungligen publicerad i *Libération*, 5/3 2003

21% no life is worth living.”²⁶

The soundtrack, with superpositions and interruptions, the music by Toru Takemitsu,²⁷ the experimental editing, and the contact and play with Kumiko’s gaze, disturbs the documentary’s conventional organization (the journalist’s questioning – the foreign correspondent who wants to understand as much as possible about the *situation* in as short a time as possible). And significantly, once again, Kumiko’s voice and text carry this film. Halfway through the film, Chris Marker returns to Paris. He sends her a “questionnaire” and she answers on “magnetic tape.” For the last half of the film we are alone with Kumiko’s voice and her walk. Chris Marker’s voice has fallen silent and the questions appear as signboards. Toward the end, the camera examines her face very closely, as if the mystery could be revealed in her features. The remarkable thing about these sections is Kumiko’s ability to return the camera’s gaze. She stares back, for a few short moments, as if she herself were a camera.

During one of the days when we sat in her apartment in Paris, she told me about how it all happened, about how Chris Marker had tricked her and how she realized only after she received the written questions in a letter from Paris that he was making a film about her. She found it odd but was not annoyed; she understood that this was one of his artistic methods. She recorded her text using a simple tape recorder in the elevator of the office building in Ginza, Tokyo, where she worked.

In the evenings Kumiko had studied at the French-Japanese Institute. Then she started work at the newspaper *France Soir*, as an assistant for a French journalist, Marcel Giuglaris, who had his office near Yurakucho. This was 1962. The office was a refuge, “a ship,” Kumiko told me, for all kinds of people, intellectuals and artists. Kumiko used her memories of the office building Yurakucho in a literary text that she gave me, translated into English and just recently published in the French journal *The Purple Journal*. She had written the first version of this text in the same year that *The Koumiko Mystery* was made. (I thought it was remarkable that she had now taken it up again and re-written it at the same time that I myself, now 43 years later, was trying to bring to life the events of this time.)

26. Chris Marker, *The Koumiko Mystery*, 1965.

27. Toru Takemitsu (1930–1996) occupied a unique position in Japanese modernist music as composer and music theoretician, and worked with elements from jazz, avant-garde music, popular music, and traditional Japanese music.

21% är inget liv värt att leva.”²⁶

Ljudspåret, med överlagringar och störningar, musiken av Toru Takemitsu,²⁷ den experimentella klippningen och kontakten och spelet med Kumikos blick rubbar filmens konventionella upplägg (journalistens frågande – utrikeskorrespondenten som på rekordkort tid vill förstå så mycket som möjligt av *situationen*). Och inte minst återigen: Kumikos röst och text bär denna film. Efter halva filmen reser nämligen Chris Marker tillbaka till Paris. Han skickar henne ett ”frågeformulär” och hon svarar på ”magnetband”. Den sista halvan av filmen är vi ensamma med Kumikos röst och hennes vandring. Chris Markers röst har tystnat och frågorna kommer upp som textskyltar. Mot slutet granskar kamerans hennes ansikte mycket närgånget som om mysteriet kunde avtäckas i hennes anletsdrag. Det egendomliga i dessa partier är Kumikos förmåga att återgälda kamerans blick. Hon stirrar, under vissa korta moment, tillbaka som hon själv var en kamera.

Under en av de dagar vi satt i hennes lägenhet i Paris berättade hon hur det hela gick till, om hur Chris Marker hade lurat henne och att hon först när hon fick de skrivna frågorna i ett brev från Paris förstod att han gjorde en film om henne. Hon fann det märkligt men blev inte sur, hon förstod att det var en av hans konstnärliga metoder. Hon läste in sin text med en enkel bandspelare i hissens till kontorshuset i Yurakucho, Ginza i Tokyo, där hon arbetade.

På kvällstid hade Kumiko varit student på Fransk-japanska institutet. Sedan började hon arbeta som assistent hos en fransk journalist, Marcel Giuglaris vid dagstidningen *France Soir*, som hade sitt kontor vid Yurakucho. Året var 1962. Kontoret var ett tillhåll, ”en farkost” för alla möjliga människor, intellektuella och konstnärer, berättade Kumiko. Hon hade använt sina minnen av kontorshuset Yurakucho i en litterär text som hon gav mig, översatt till engelska och alldeles nyligen publicerad i den franska tidskriften *The Purple Journal*. Denna text hade hon skrivit i en första version samma år som *Mysteriet Koumiko* gjordes. (Jag tyckte det var märkligt att hon nu återupptagit den nu fyrtiotre år senare och skrivit om den i samma veva som jag själv försökte aktualisera händelserna från denna tid.)

26. Chris Marker, *Mysteriet Koumiko*, 1965, översättning Johan Almqvist och Anders Nässil.

27. Toru Takemitsu (1930–1996) hade en unik position i den japanska modernistiska musiken som kompositör och musikteoretiker och arbetade med element från jazz, avantgardemusik, populärmusik och traditionell japansk musik.

Kumiko writes about the dusky light in between the tall buildings in Yurakucho, and how the sound of the trains on the viaduct drowns out the sounds of those people who are habitually on the street. Kumiko describes how, from a distance, they appear only through their movements and moving mouths. A street shoemaker says something to a hunchbacked man and they seem to laugh. A woman steps out every day onto a metal fire escape ladder; she stands there with her mouth wide open. The woman works for the union of a film company, in “the gloomiest office in the building.” Every day at exactly the same time, she steps out onto the fire escape ladder and sings opera, then places her hand over her breast and bows to an imaginary audience. The shoemaker’s hands are “dried out, blackened, deformed.” His pupils are always widened, they “are extremely sensitive toward tiny objects: needles, threads, bits of leather... But his eyes cannot focus on larger things.”²⁸

At Marcel Giuglaris’ office, they were working on preparations for the Olympics. When Chris Marker stepped into the office there was complete silence, for some reason. Kumiko was immediately given a new assignment by Marcel: to assist the newly arrived filmmaker.²⁹ Her assignment was very exact and very simple. Marker filmed using a silent 16-mm Bolex camera that had to be cranked up. Her task was to remind him to crank up his camera. This was Marker’s trick. Every time she reminded him, he said that they’d “better test to see if it works.” That was how the film was made: in playful “tests” of the camera. Kumiko could not guess that these test films were to form the basis of a film about her. She assumed that he was working on a film about the Olympic Games.

For my own part – newly arrived in Tokyo in the autumn of 2006 Kumiko Muraoka was still only an image. I had no concept of how a city of 35 million makes people anonymous and makes them disappear both from present time and from

28. Kumiko Muraoka, “Hour Arithmetic,” *The Purple Journal*, No. 9, 06/07. The first version of the text was published in the poetry review *Sinjinruigaku* 1966, and a part was later published in the French poetry review *La délirante* 1967.

29. Marcel Giuglaris is called “protector” in the film’s ending credits. In 1956 he published a book on Japanese film, *Le cinéma japonais*, Les éditions du Cerf, a pioneer work in the field. In January 2010 Marcel Giuglaris died in Paris, 89 years old. Kumiko had kept in contact with Giuglaris over the years and visited him until the very end. In 2009 her text about the office at Yurakucho was printed in a publication that Giuglaris made for his friends and which summarizes his time in Asia (*Mémoires*). In a drawing in the book he is depicted as a *kamishibai*, a traveling storyteller, with a bike and wooden clappers.

Kumiko skriver om dunklet i Yurakucho mellan de höga byggnaderna och hur ljudet av tågen på viadukten överröstar de människor som har för vana att uppehålla sig på gatan. Kumiko beskriver hur de på avstånd framträder enbart med rörelser och munnar som rör sig. En gatuskomakare säger något till en puckelryggig man och de verkar skratta, en kvinna stiger varje dag ut på en brandstege av metall, hon står där med vidöppen mun. Kvinnan arbetar för ett filmbolags fackförening, i ”det dystraste kontoret i byggnaden”. Varje dag vid exakt samma tid stiger hon ut på brandstegen och sjunger ett operastycke för att sedan lägga handen över bröstet och buga sig inför den imaginära publiken. Skomakarens händer är ”uttorkade, svärtade, deformerade.” Hans pupiller är ständigt vidgade, de ”är extremt känsliga för minimala objekt; nålar, trådar, läderspill... Men hans ögon kan inte fokusera på större saker.”²⁸

På Marcel Giuglaris kontor arbetade man med förberedelserna för bevakningen av olympiaden. När Chris Marker steg in på kontoret blev det av någon anledning alldeles tyst, berättade Kumiko. Av Marcel tilldelades hon genast en ny uppgift: att assistera den nyanlände filmaren.²⁹ Hennes uppgift var mycket exakt och mycket enkel. Marker filmade med en 16 mm Bolex-kamera som skulle vevas upp. Hennes uppgift var att påminna honom om att veva upp kameran. Det här var ett av Markers tricks. Vid varje tillfälle som hon påminde honom sa han att ”då är det bäst att vi provar lite om den fungerar”. Det var så filmen gjordes: i ett lekfullt testande av kameran. Kumiko kunde inte ana att det var dessa provfilmningar som skulle utgöra basen för en film om henne. Hon tog för givet att han arbetade med en film om olympiaden.

För min egen del – nyanländ till Tokyo hösten 2006 – var Kumiko Muraoka ännu bara en bild och jag hade inget begrepp om hur en 35-miljonersstad anonymiserar människor och får dem att försvinna ur både nuet och historien. Jag hade en viss

28. Kumiko Muraoka, "Hour Arithmetic", *The Purple Journal*, Nr 9, 2006/07. Den första versionen av texten publicerades i lyrikidskriften *Sinjinruigaku* 1966 och en del publicerades sedan i den franska tidskriften *La délirante* 1967.

29. Marcel Giuglaris anges som "beskyddare" i filmens eftertexter. 1956 hade han publicerat en bok om japansk film, *Le cinéma japonais*, Les éditions du Cerf, som är att betrakta som ett pionjärvverk. I januari 2010 avled Marcel Giuglaris i Paris, 92 år gammal. Kumiko hade under alla år uppehållit kontakten och besökte honom in i det sista. 2009 trycktes hennes text om tiden vid kontoret i Yurakucho i en publikation som Giuglaris gjorde för sina vänner och som summerar hans tid i Asien (*Mémoires*). På en teckning i boken är han avbildad som en *kamishibai*-berättare, med cykel och träklappor.

history. I had a certain knowledge of Tokyo from my two earlier visits, and thought that this time I would learn to find my way around without help. The idea was to use two of Chris Marker's film essays as maps: in addition to *The Koumiko Mystery*, also the much more widely distributed and known *Sans soleil* (*Sunless*) from 1982 – the work that is one of the most recognized and celebrated examples of the film essay. Seeking out and traveling in the footsteps of a film were Marker's own methods, carried out in *Sans soleil*. But when I looked at the metro map I felt lost; it seemed to me that they had added an additional five or six layers of train lines since I had last been in Tokyo.

Shinjuku station has more than 200 entrances and exits; if you get lost there you could wander about for hours. At certain transfer points between lines you can wind up in underground labyrinths. Tokyo largely lacks exits, according to Haruki Murakami – the city stretches out into eternity.³⁰ I decided to spend my time on the trains and subways and try to learn to find my way in and out of the stations. I had my video camera with me.

Sans soleil is a film essay to which one can return time after time, and which always seems new. The poet Susan Howe writes that it is “/.../ a film consisting of quotations, outtakes, retakes, tape delays, failed military coups, dead pilots, and ghostly warriors.”³¹ It is a film that many claim to have seen though very few know what it is about. One can see it as an organism, or a structure in itself, as a visual and conceptual library. To summarize or get an overview of *Sans soleil* is difficult, but I believe that Chris Marker here shares Michel de Certeau's view of memory – that a human being's memory consists of that which cannot be internalized:

He liked the fragility of those moments suspended in time. Those memories whose only function it was to leave behind nothing but memories. He wrote: “I've been round the world several times and now only banality still interests me. On this trip I've tracked it with the relentlessness of a bounty hunter.”³²

30. See Cassegård, “Från gullighetskult till nationalism.”

31. Susan Howe, “Sorting Facts; or, Nineteen Ways of Looking at Marker” in *Beyond Document: Essays on Non-fiction Films*, Wesleyan University Press 1996, p. 337.

32. Chris Marker, *Sans soleil*, 1982.

erfarenhet av Tokyo från mina två tidigare besök och tänkte att jag denna gång skulle lära mig att hitta och ta mig fram utan hjälp. Idén var att använda två av Chris Markers filmessäer som kartor: förutom *Mysteriet Koumiko* den mycket mer spridda och kända *Sans soleil* [Sunless] från 1982 – verket som är ett av filmessäns mest erkända och upphöjda. Uppsökandet och resandet i filmens fotspår var också Markers egen metod, genomförd i *Sans soleil*. Men när jag tittade på tunnelbanekartan kände jag mig vilsen, jag fick för mig att man hade adderat ytterligare en fem, sex lager av tåglinjer sedan jag var i Tokyo sist.

Shinjuku-stationen har mer än 200 in- och utgångar, om man går vilse där kan man vandra i timmar. Vid vissa övergångar mellan linjerna kan man hamna i underjordiska labyrinter. Tokyo i stort saknar utgångar, enligt Haruki Murakami, staden sträcker ut sig i oändlighet.³⁰ Jag beslöt mig för att tillbringa min tid på tågen och tunnelbanan och försöka lära mig att hitta in och ut ur stationerna. Jag hade videokameran med mig.

Sans soleil är en filmessä som man kan återkomma till gång på gång, som alltid tycks vara ny. Poeten Susan Howe skriver att den är ”/.../ en film bestående av citat, utklipp, omtagningar, fördröjd bandhastighet, misslyckade militärkupper, döda piloter och spöklika krigare.”³¹ *Sans soleil* är en film som många påstår att de har sett men som ytterst få vet vad den handlar om. Man kan se den som en egen organism eller struktur; som ett visuellt och idémässigt bibliotek. Att överblicka eller sammanfatta *Sans soleil* är svårt, men jag tror att Chris Marker här förmedlar samma syn på minnet som Michel de Certeau – att en människas minne består av det som inte kan internaliseras:

Han tyckte om ömtåligheten hos dessa stunder som blivit hängande i tiden. Dessa minnen vars enda funktion är att lämna bakom sig inget annat än minnen. Han skrev: jag har rest runt jorden flera gånger och nu är det bara banaliteter kvar som intresserar mig. Under denna resa har jag jagat dem med en prisjägares obeveklighet.³²

30. Se Cassegård, "Från gullighetskult till nationalism".

31. Susan Howe *Spinnaker*, Albert Bonniers Förlag 2000 (övers. Marie Silkeberg), s. 82.

32. Chris Marker, *Sans soleil*, 1982 (egen övers.).

In *The Koumiko Mystery*, Marker's and Kumiko's conversations weave around many such "banalities" and Kumiko elaborates on them, creating resonances in a most remarkable way. In one passage in *Sans soleil*, Marker points to how the lady-in-waiting Sei Shonagon's tales about courtly life in the 11th century became the "history" that in a way has triumphed over *the grand narrative* about the emperor and his power schemes. Sei Shonagon's diary entries, created completely outside of the concept of literature, possibly born out of boredom, were about the everyday aspects of life. The lady-in-waiting had a passion for lists that she created like a homemade taxonomy: the list of elegant things, the list of painful things, the list of things that aren't worth doing, the list of things that make the heart beat faster... Not bad criteria for a filmmaker, Marker notes. Through these contemplations about the most insignificant things, an impression was left on the Japanese sensibility that was ".../ much deeper than the mediocre thundering of the politicians."³³

Traveling and returning are the most apparent of Chris Marker's artistic methods. In *Sans soleil*, he talks about how he devotes himself to watching TV in Tokyo and how, in a hallucinatory moment, he believes he can speak Japanese, but realizes that he is watching a program about Gérard de Nerval.³⁴ It is no accident that Marker suddenly thinks he understands everything that is said in Japanese about Nerval. It was Nerval who coined the maxim that the purpose of a journey is to verify one's dreams.³⁵ Later Marker would confess that his manic traveling often aimed to check the milieus of his childhood's adventure books.

Here is the divide in how one understands the world and the mysteries of art and

33. Ibid. Shonagon's texts were collected into a book called *The Pillow Book*. In Peter Greenaway's film *The Pillow Book* (1995), the main character, Nagiko Sei, has Shonagon as her role model. Nagiko views writing on the body as the connection between eroticism and text, and her obsession is based on how her father, the calligrapher, each year wrote a birthday greeting on her face. This act equates the Father with God, since a creation story – which is repeated in the film – explains that God forms human beings from clay, paints on eyes and sex, and finishes by writing his name on the clay figure.

34. It is important to emphasize that in *Sans soleil*, it is a female narrative voice (Florence Delay in French and Alexandra Stewart in English) who speaks about, and comments on, what a certain Sandor Krasna has written and said. The name of this constantly traveling Hungarian cameraman is given only in the closing credits; throughout the film, Krasna is referred to as "he." Sandor Krasna is one of Chris Marker's alter egos.

35. In the CD-rom work *Immemory* ("The Travel Zone"), 1998. Guy Gauthier has also examined this link to the sources in adventure books from the 1800s, for example, in *Chris Marker: écrivain multimédia*, L'Harmattan 2001.

I *Mysteriet Koumiko* spinner Markers och Kumikos samtal runt många sådana ”banaliteter” och Kumiko utvecklar dem och utvinner resonanser på de mest märkvärdiga sätt. I en passage i *Sans soleil* pekar Marker på hur hovdamen Sei Shonagons berättelser från 1000-talets hovliv blev den historia som på sätt och vis övertrumpat *den stora berättelsen* om kejsaren och hans intriger om makten. Sei Shonagons dagboksanteckningar, skapade bortom varje begrepp om litteratur, möjligen sprungna ur leda, handlade om livets vardagligheter. Hovdamen hade en passion för listor som hon skapade efter en hemmagjord taxonomi; lista över eleganta saker, lista över plågsamma saker, lista över saker som inte är värda att göra, lista över saker som får hjärtat att slå snabbare... Inga dåliga utgångspunkter för en filmare, lägger Marker till. Genom dessa kontemplationer över de mest obetydliga ting lämnades ett avtryck på japansk sensibilitet som var ”/.../ mycket djupare än politikernas mediokra larmande.”³³

Resandet och återvändandet är de mest uppenbara av Chris Markers konstnärliga metoder. I *Sans soleil* talar han om hur han ägnar sig åt tv-tittande i Tokyo och hur han i ett hallucinatoriskt ögonblick tror sig tala japanska, men inser att han tittar på ett program om Gérard de Nerval.³⁴ Det är ingen slump att Marker plötsligt tror sig förstå allt som sägs på japanska om Nerval. Det var Nerval som myntade maximen om att syftet med en resa är att verifiera sina drömmar.³⁵ Senare kom Marker att bekänna att hans maniska resande i mycket syftade till att kontrollera miljöerna för sin barndoms äventyrsböcker.

Här finns klyvningarna som löper mellan såväl uppfattningarna om världen som

33. Ibid (egen övers.) Shonagons texter samlades i en bok kallad *The Pillow Book*. I Peter Greenaways film *The Pillow Book* (1995) är Sei Shonagon förebild för huvudpersonen Nagiko som ser skrivandet på kroppen som förbindelsen mellan erotiken och skriften. Hennes besatthet grundar sig i hur hennes far, kalligrafen, varje år skrev en födelsedagshälsning på hennes ansikte. Denna akt likställer Fadern med Gud, då en skapelseberättelse – som upprepas i filmen – gör gällande att Gud formar människan i lera, målar dit ögon och kön för att avsluta med att skriva sitt namn på lerfiguren.

34. Det är viktigt att framhålla att det i *Sans soleil* är en kvinnlig berättarröst (Florence Delay på franska och Alexandra Stewart på engelska) som kommenterar och talar om vad en viss Sandor Krasna har skrivit och sagt. Namnet på den ständigt resande ungerske kameramannen ges först i eftertexten; filmen igenom omtalas Krasna som ”han”. Sandor Krasna är ett av Chris Markers alter egon.

35. I CD-ROM-verket *Immemory* ("The Travel Zone") 1998. Guy Gauthier har också utrett denna koppling till källorna i äventyrsböckerna från 1800-talet, t.ex. i *Chris Marker, écrivain multimédia: ou voyage a travers les médias*, L'Harmattan 2001.

reality. This was the conflict that André Breton and Roger Callois encountered when confronted with the mystery of the Mexican jumping bean.³⁶

In *Sans soleil*, Chris Marker dwells on how he has devoted himself to *pilgrimage* in San Francisco, following in the footsteps of Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo*. He had seen *Vertigo* 19 times. He visited the florist Podesta Baldocchi, where James Stewart spies on Kim Novak.

He had followed all the trails. Even to the cemetery at Mission Dolores where Madeleine came to pray at the grave of a woman long since dead, whom she should not have known. He followed Madeleine – as Scotty had done – to the museum at the Legion of Honor, before the portrait of a dead woman she should not have known. And on the portrait, as in Madeleine's hair, the spiral of time.³⁷

He states that the little hotel where Madeleine disappears has disappeared. But in Muir Woods, he finds the sawed off sequoia tree, the place where Madeleine measures the distance between its growth rings. It is here that she says, as her fingers move over the growth rings: "Here I was born... and here I died."³⁸

This Hitchcock scene, in fact, contains all of Marker's most important motifs: in addition to "false" identities, the return, the search, the connections of memory, the presence of history in the present – the only meaningful history – the events of the past that manifest themselves in existence at the verge of haunting. Here is also the movement into the future. Traveling in the footsteps of the text has a utopian, almost metaphysical meaning for Chris Marker. In an essay about Jean Cocteau's film *Orphée*, he wrote: "Life doesn't imitate art, but comes to fulfill its prophecies."³⁹

36. See introduction.

37. Marker, *Sans soleil* (my trans.)

38. The scene recurs in *La Jetée* (*The Terrace*) from 1962, to my knowledge Marker's only pure fiction film, which, except for a single scene, consists of still pictures. (It was on this film that Terry Gilliam modeled his *Twelve Monkeys*, USA 1995.) In *La Jetée*, the main character reveals a mixture of memories and dreams during an experiment. In such a sequence he hears himself say: "This is where I come from..." I myself went to Muir Woods in the autumn of 2007 to see the cut Sequoia tree. The surface was worn smooth, as if varnished by all the fingers that had walked over the growth rings.

39. Chris Marker, "Orphée," *Esprit*, No. 105, November 1950, p. 697, cited in Lupton p. 18.

de mysterier konsten och verkligheten rymmer. Det var denna konflikt som ansatte André Breton och Roger Callois ställde inför mysteriet med den hoppande mexikanska bönan.³⁶

I *Sans soleil* uppehåller sig Chris Marker uppehåller sig i Sans soleil vid hur han i San Francisco har gett sig hän åt *vallfärd* (pilgrimage) i fotspåren av Alfred Hitchcocks *Vertigo*. Han hade sett *Vertigo* 19 gånger. Han besökte floristen Podesta Baldocchi, där James Stewart spionerar på Kim Novak.

Han har följt alla spår. Även till kyrkogården vid Mission Dolores där Madeleine bad en bön vid en kvinnas grav, en kvinna död sedan länge, som hon knappast kunde ha känt. Han följde Madeleine – på samma sätt som Scotty – till museet The Legion of Honor, framför porträttet av en död kvinna som hon inte borde ha känt. Och i porträttet, liksom i Madeleines hår, vindlade tidens spiral.³⁷

Han konstaterar att det lilla hotell där Madeleine försvinner har försvunnit. Men i Muir Woods hittar han det kapade Sequoia-trädet, platsen där Madeleine mättar upp avståndet mellan årsringarna. Det är här som hon säger, samtidigt som hennes fingrar rör sig över årsringarna: ”Här föddes jag... och här dog jag.”³⁸

I denna scen finns egentligen alla Markers viktigaste motiv: ”lögnaktiga” identiteter, återvändandet, uppsökandet, minnens förbindelser, historiens närvaro i nuet – den enda meningsfulla historien: dessa händelser ur det förflutna som manifesterar sig i tillvaron intill hemsökelsens gräns. Här finns också rörelsen in i framtiden. Resandet i textens spår har för Chris Marker en utopisk, nästan metafysisk innebörd. I en essä om Jean Cocteaus film *Orphée* skrev han: ”Livet imiterar inte konsten, men kommer att uppfylla dess profetior”.³⁹

36. Se introduktionen.

37. Marker, *Sans soleil* (min övers. M.B.).

38. Scenen återkommer i *La Jetée (Terrassen)* från 1962, så vitt jag vet Markers enda renodlade fiktionsfilm, en film som, förutom en enda scen, består av stillbilder. (Det var efter denna film som Terry Gilliam modellerade sin *De tolv apornas armé (Twelve Monkeys)*, USA 1995). I *La Jetée* ger huvudpersonen under ett experiment ifrån sig en blandning av minnen och drömmar. I en sådan sekvens hör han sig själv säga: ”This is where I come from...” Självtänkte jag till Muir Woods hösten 2007 för att se det kapade Sequoia-trädet. Ytan var blanksliten, liksom förnissad av alla fingrar som vandrat över årsringarna.

39. Chris Marker, ”Orphée”, *Esprit*, nr. 105, november 1950, s. 697, citerad i Lupton s. 18. (min övers. M.B.)

Sans soleil also involves a return to *The Koumiko Mystery*. Marker seeks out places and situations – “/.../ like a cat who has come home from vacation and in his basket immediately starts to inspect familiar places.”⁴⁰ He situates himself using the locations of the first film; for example, the big Owl billboard in Ginza with its rolling eyes (which Kumiko imitated), and he again takes up the theme of people who watch TV in the store windows and have their fortunes told on the street. He establishes the possibility of the kind of intertextuality between the two film essays (and many other works by him and others), and realizes that his filmed memories have become the actual memories:

I remember that month of January in Tokyo, or rather I remember the images I filmed of the month of January in Tokyo. They have substituted themselves for my memory. They are my memory. I wonder how people remember things who don't film, don't photograph, don't tape. How has humanity managed to remember?⁴¹

But it is hard to devote oneself to pilgrimage in today's Tokyo. So little of places and so few buildings are preserved; the city is in a constant state of transformation. Hardly any person born in Tokyo can go to his or her “mother's street,” point to a house and say, “that's where I was born,” for the simple reason that the house is no longer there. This unsentimental attitude toward buildings is also related to the constant threat of earthquakes: Why build for the future when everything might be razed at any time? This lack of connection, along with the constantly imprinted image of a megacity that can turn into a raging giant that throws itself on its inhabitants, has created a particular attitude that is tense and watchful. I noticed it myself in people's way of speaking about the city; as if it were a being in itself and lived its own life; as if Tokyo is stronger than all of its inhabitants put together. Chris Marker interpreted the threat as the cause of a poetic mobility among the inhabitants, a fruitful uncertainty: “/.../ they've got into the habit of moving about in a world of appearances: fragile, fleeting, revocable, of trains that fly from planet to planet, of samurai fighting in an immutable past. That's called 'the impermanence of things.’”⁴²

40. Marker, *Sans soleil*.

41. *Ibid.*

42. *Ibid.*

Sans soleil innebär också ett återvändande till *Mysteriet Koumiko*. Marker söker upp platser och situationer – ”/.../ som en katt som kommit hem från semestern och i sin korg omedelbart börjar inspektera de välkända platserna.”⁴⁰ Han lokaliserar sig genom den första filmens platser, till exempel den stora Uggleskylten i Ginza med rullande ögon (som Kumiko imiterade) och han tar återigen upp temat med människor som tittar på tv i skyltfönster och får sina spådomar utförda på gatan. Han upprättar möjligheten till den sortens intertextualitet mellan de två filmessäerna (och en mängd andra egna och andras verk) och inser att hans filmade minnen har blivit de verkliga:

Jag kommer ihåg den där januarimånaden i Tokyo, eller snarare: jag kommer ihåg de bilder jag filmade under januarimånaden i Tokyo. De har blivit ersättare för mina minnen. De är mina minnen. Jag undrar hur människor som inte filmar, inte fotograferar och inte spelar in egentligen minns saker och ting. Hur har mänskligheten lyckats komma ihåg?⁴¹

Men det är svårt att ägna sig åt vallfärd i dagens Tokyo. Så lite av platser och så få byggnader bevaras, staden är i ständig förvandling. Knappast någon människa född i Tokyo kan bege sig till sin ”mammans gata”, peka på ett hus och säga ”där är jag född” av det enkla skälet att huset inte finns kvar. Denna osentimentala inställning till byggnader hör dessutom ihop med det ständiga jordbävningshotet: varför bygga för framtiden när allt kan raseras vilken dag som helst? Denna brist på anknytning tillsammans med den ständigt inpräntade bilden av en megastad som kan förvandlas till en rasande jätte som kastar sig över sina invånare har skapat en speciell sorts spänd och vaksam inställning. Jag märkte den själv genom människors sätt att tala om staden som om den vore en varelse i sig och levde sitt eget liv; som om Tokyo är starkare än alla sina invånare tillsammans. Chris Marker uppfattade hotet som upphovet till en poetisk mobilitet hos invånarna, en fruktbar osäkerhet: ”/.../ de har fått vanan att hålla sig rörliga i en värld av sken: ömtålig, flytande, temporär, en värld av tåg som flyger från planet till planet, av samurajstrider i det omutligt förgångna. Det kallas ’tingens flyktighet.’”⁴²

40. Marker, *Sans soleil* (min övers.M.B.).

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid.

Yurakucho in Ginza is, in *Sans soleil*, the site of political manifestations, demonstrations and hunger strikes, but now there is no trace of such activities. Instead the place is dominated by the gigantic Bic camera store. I went there and bought a tripod for my video camera.

The Ginza owl is no longer there. I did not see the locomotive that, in *Sans soleil*, was said to stand at the Shimbashi station. Shimbashi has turned into a futuristic place, thanks to its proximity to Shiodome with all of its elusive levels, both in relation to outdoors and indoors and to the ground area. The levels shift continually and the borders are unclear or porous. The public spaces have fused with the commercial surfaces. You emerge from subway exits into shiny arcades and shopping centers or directly into department stores. If you emerge onto a viaduct, you see trains and cars whether you look up or down. The lines are named after department stores. In an enormous indoor market in Shiodome – which connects the star architect Jean Nouvel's 52-story highrise with passages to hotels, glass-walled galleries with restaurants and shops – a man is cleaning the marble floor with a spray bottle and cleaning cloth. It is a long way from the age of steam engines that the Shimbashi engine represented.

There is also another aspect here. When you stroll around in the Shiodome area, you might suddenly step out onto a very expansive terrace that is absolutely quiet and where no people are to be seen. In pictures of Tokyo, which almost always focus on the crowds and masses of people, this aspect of the city is neglected: the remarkably quiet and deserted places, well-arranged spaces and niches in the city space that have a surprising stillness.⁴³

The Australian sound artist Philip Samartzis's composition *Soft and Loud*, from which various parts have been taken for the soundtrack of my video essay, plays with

43. There is a parallel to the experimental music scene in Tokyo. Noise-music is still strong (according to some, it has arisen as a misunderstanding of punk), but also minimalist, quiet music. The Australian sound artist Philip Samartzis, who researches Japanese sound art and contemporary composition (and stayed with Johnnie Walker) said that the minimalist branch that exists in Tokyo and that involves playing as quietly as possible did not arise as a theoretical construction (à la John Cage), but rather from practical concerns. It is usual to arrange concerts in homes, which has resulted in constant complaints from the neighbors. Certain musicians then made a virtue of necessity and began to play as quietly as possible. Absolute silence was required from the audience in order to hear the music at all. I myself saw a concert (on Loop Line) of a composition that was performed on three laptops. All that could be heard was the analog sound of the synchronized pressing of keyboard keys.

Yurakucho i Ginza är i *Sans soleil* platsen för politiska manifestationer; demonstrationer och hungerstrejker, men nu finns inga spår av sådana aktiviteter. Platsen domineras istället av den jättelika Bic Camera-butiken. Jag gick dit och köpte ett stativ till min videokamera.

Ginza-ugglan finns inte kvar. Det lokomotiv som i *Sans soleil* sades stå uppställt vid Shimbashi-stationen såg jag inte till. Shimbashi har förvandlats till en futuristisk plats tack vare sin närhet till stadsdelen Shiodome – med alla dess gripbara nivåer både i förhållande till utomhus och inomhus och till markytan. Nivåerna skiftar ideligen och avgränsningarna är oklara eller porösa. De offentliga platserna har fusionerats med de kommersiella ytorna. Från tunnelbaneuppgångar kommer man ut i skinande arkader och köpcentrum eller direkt in i varuhus. Om man kommer ut på en viadukt ser man tåg och bilar både när man tittar upp och tittar ner. Linjerna har namn efter varuhus. På ett enormt inomhustorg i Shiodome – som förbinder stjärnarkitekten Jean Nouvels 52 våningar höga byggnad med passager till hotell och inglasade gallerior med restauranger och affärer – städar en man marmorgolvet med sprayflaska och putsduk. Det är långt från ånglokstiden som Shimbashi-loket representerade.

Här finns också en annan aspekt. När man vandrar omkring i Shiodome-området kan man plötsligt stiga ut på en mycket vidsträckt terrass där det är helt stilla och inga människor syns till. I bilderna av Tokyo som nästan alltid fokuserar på myllret och mängden av människor försummas denna aspekt av staden: de märkligt tysta och ödsliga platserna, välordnade rum och nischer i stadsrummet som bjuder en förvånansvärd stillhet.⁴³

Den australiensiske ljudkonstnären Philip Samartzis komposition *Soft and Loud*, från vilken olika partier har hämtats till ljudspåret i min videoessä, spelar med denna

43. Det finns en parallell till den experimentella musikscenen i Tokyo. Noise-musiken är fortfarande stark (enligt vissa har den uppstått som en missuppfattning av punken) men det är också minimalistisk, tyst musik. Den australiensiske ljudkonstnären Philip Samartzis, som forskar om japansk ljudkonst och samtida komposition (och som bodde hemma hos Johnnie Walker) berättade att den minimalistiska gren som finns i Tokyo och som innebär att man spelar så tyst som möjligt inte uppstått som en teoretisk konstruktion (à la John Cage) utan mer ur praktiska omständigheter. Det är vanligt att man arrangerar konserter i hemmen, vilket har fört med sig ständigt klagande grannar. Vissa musiker gjorde då dygd av nödvändigheten och började spela så tyst som möjligt. Av publiken krävdes absolut tystnad för att musiken överhuvudtaget skulle kunna uppfattas. Själv såg jag en konsert (på Loop Line) med en komposition som framfördes på tre bärbara datorer. Det enda ljud som hördes var det analoga ljudet av de samordnade tangenttryckningarna.

these concepts, but on a different, more abstract plane. Like Chris Marker's *Sans soleil*, the composition is based on the notion of the city as an instrument, and is composed of recorded everyday sounds from Tokyo especially the trains and the subway, but also the sound of water, prayers from the temple, the cries of chestnut vendors, the sound of heels and footsteps, different voices, laughter and shouts. Sounds that are subsequently repeated, rhythmicized, and worked on in various ways. His pieces were very near to the sound recordings I had made with my camera but, through small transpositions, they had a completely different spacial sense, drama, and complexity. On an acoustic level, "soft" and "loud" are created, not as a simple pair of opposites, but as words with overlapping and intruding meanings. *Soft and Loud* is partly separate words and partly something that is both: soft *and* loud.

But the keyboard stairway in the Sony building in Ginza is still there, I discovered, where each step produces a tone like on a piano. It is the stairway that Chris Marker, in *Sans soleil*, thought coincided with Tokyo like a gigantic instrument that was an alternative to the stereotypical image of Tokyo as "overpopulated, megalomaniac, inhuman."⁴⁴ The city as instrument also conflates with *Sans soleil's* own rhythm and composition; the film essay that has received its name from a song cycle by Modest Mussorgsky and can be seen as a piece of visual music.

Sundays at the entrance to Yoyogi Park also have the same character of exhibition as in *Sans soleil*. People exhibit themselves in the square between the park and Harajuku. At the time of Marker's stay it was *takenokos*;⁴⁵ now it's cosplay characters, goth Lolitas, punk Lolitas, "waitresses," and manga princesses with stuffed animals. The statue of the dog Hachiko that stands at the Shibuya station is still there, of course; it has long been mentioned in all the guidebooks about Tokyo.⁴⁶ And the Goutokuji temple looked exactly as it did when Marker filmed it. Here people make offerings to

44. Marker, *Sans soleil*.

45. Takenoko-zoku dance, which was an eighties phenomenon, resembles a cross between rave and traditional Japanese dance. Performed by a "leader" with a whistle, people danced in a strictly choreographed style to trance-like music from cassette recorders.

46. In *Sans soleil*, the story of the dog Hachiko is told: the dog was in the habit of going to the Shibuya station in the afternoons and waiting for his master to come home from work on the commuter train. But one day the man didn't return; he had died of a heart attack at work. Hachiko continued to wait, and remained sitting outside of the station. People admired the dog's faithfulness and fed it. It would walk to the station and wait for his master every day until his death. The Hachiko statue was raised in its honor.

stillhet, ödslighet och tystnad, men på ett annat och mer abstrakt plan. Kompositionen utgår, liksom Chris Markers *Sans soleil*, från staden som ett instrument, och är komponerad av inspelade vardagsljud från Tokyo, framförallt från tågen och tunnelbanan, men även ljud av vatten, böner från templet, kastanjeförsäljarens utrop, ljudet av klackar och fotsteg, olika röster, skratt och skrik. Dessa ljud har sedan upprepats, rytmiserats och bearbetats på olika sätt. Hans stycken låg så nära de ljudupptagningar som jag hade gjort med min kamera, men till skillnad från dessa hade de genom små förskjutningar fått en helt annan rumslighet, dramatik och komplexitet. På en akustisk nivå gestaltas ”mjukt” och ”högt”, inte som ett enkelt motsatspar utan som ord vars betydelser överskrider och inkräktar på varandra. *Soft and Loud* är dels särställda ord, dels något som är både och: mjukt *och* högt.

Men tangenttrappan i Sony-byggnaden i Ginza finns kvar, uppträckte jag, där varje trappsteg ger ifrån sig en ton som på ett piano. Det är den trappa som Chris Marker i *Sans soleil* menade sammanföll med tanken på Tokyo som ett jättelikt instrument, en bild av staden som här ska förstås som ett alternativ till den stereotypa bilden av Tokyo som ”överbefolkad, megaloman, omänsklig”.⁴⁴ Staden som instrument sammanfaller också med *Sans soleils* egen rytm och komposition och filmessän har fått sitt namn från en sångcykel av Modest Mussorgsky och kan ses som ett stycke visuell musik.

Söndagarna vid Yoyogi-parkens entré har också samma karaktär av uppvisning som i *Sans soleil*. På platsen mellan parken och Harajuku visar man upp sig. Vid tiden för Markers vistelse: *takenokos*,⁴⁵ nu cosplay-karaktärer; goth-lolitor, punk-lolitor, ”servitriser” och mangaprincessor med gosedjur. Hunden Hachiko som står staty vid Shibuya-stationen finns förstås kvar, den är sedan länge omtalad i alla guideböcker över Tokyo.⁴⁶ Och Goutokuji-templet såg ut exakt som när Marker filmade. Här

44. Marker, *Sans soleil* (min övers. M.B.).

45. Takenoko-zoku-dans, som var en åttiotalsföreelse, liknar en korsning av rave och traditionell japansk dans. Anförd av en ”ledare” med visselpipa dansade man med en strikt koreograferad stil till tranceartad musik från kassettbandspelare.

46. I *Sans soleil* berättas historien om hunden Hachiko. Hunden hade för vana att på eftermiddagarna gå till Shibuya-stationen och vänta på att husse skulle komma tillbaka från arbetet med pendeltåget. Men en dag kom mannen inte tillbaka, han hade dött i en hjärtattack under arbetet. Hachiko fortsatte att vänta och blev sittande utanför stationen. Människor beundrade hundens trohet och matade den. Den kom att vandra till stationen och sitta och vänta på sin husse varje dag ända fram till sin död. Då reste man Hachiko-statyn till dess ära.

cats and place waving cat figurines (*maniki neko*) in memory of their dead pets.⁴⁷

I filmed in all of these places. I had also decided that cats and dogs would be an important theme in my video essay. In *The Koumiko Mystery*, Kumiko says that she talks to cats when she needs to know something. For Marker, it is a subject to which he pays close attention, since he has always been obsessed by them. The Cat is, in fact (along with the Owl), his pseudonym. In Murakami's novel, it is the Fool Nakata who talks to cats. Johnnie Walker, on the other hand (the novel's Johnnie Walker), chases them with the help of his big dog. Once he has captured them he slits their throats, for the compelling reason that he collects ".../ their souls, which I use to create a special kind of flute. And when I blow that flute it'll let me collect even larger souls. Then I collect larger souls and make an even bigger flute."⁴⁸

But my seeking really began with a tour to the French-Japanese Institute in the hope of finding traces of Kumiko's time as a student there. The whole place was redolent of the 1960s; setting foot there gave me the feeling of stepping into a time capsule. In the library's database, I found a book written by a Koumiko Muraoka, but that book was located at the French Cultural House near Ebisu. I went there the next day, and in the deserted library I found a collection of stories in French with the title *L'orme plus grand que la maison*. On the title page was a charcoal drawing representing a woman, possibly in her sixties. It could very well be the woman from the film essay.

At the same time, a trainee at AIT had discovered a name in the film's credits that she recognized – the assistant director. He turned out to still be active as a teacher at a film school in Tokyo. I was excited when I heard about this and suggested that we should call up the film teacher right away. But people explained, somewhat vaguely, that it doesn't work that way. You write a letter – not an e-mail, but a real letter – and then you wait for an answer. After that you can phone. After this process, which took a few weeks, the film man answered the phone: "Go to the bar La Jétée in Goden Gai, in Shinjuku district. Ask the owner. She can give you answers about Kumiko."

47. The film relates that a couple at the Goutokuji Temple make offerings to a dead cat named Tora. Marker points out that *Tora Tora Tora* was the Japanese code name for the attack on Pearl Harbor. ".../ so all this would have begun with a cat name repeated three times."

48. Haruki Murakami, *Kafka on the Shore*, p. 184.

offrar man till katter och placerar vinkande kattfiguriner [*maneki neko*] till minne av sina döda husdjur.⁴⁷

Jag filmade vid alla dessa platser. Jag hade också bestämt att katter och hundar skulle bli ett viktigt tema i min videoessä. I *Mysteriet Koumiko* säger Kumiko att hon pratar med katter när hon behöver veta något. För Marker är det ett ämne han lystrar till då han alltid varit besatt av katter. Katten är i själva verket (tillsammans med ugglan) hans signatur. I Murakamis roman är det dåren Nakata som talar med katter. Johnnie Walker å sin sida (romanens Johnnie Walker) jagar dem med hjälp av sin stora hund. När han väl fångat dem skär han halsen av dem, av det tvingande skälet att han samlar ”/.../ på deras själar. Dom själar jag har fångat in använder jag för att göra en speciell flöjt. Och sen ska jag spela på flöjten för att fånga in ännu större själar. Och när jag gjort det ska jag göra en ännu större flöjt.”⁴⁸

Men mitt sökande började egentligen med en tur till Fransk-japanska institutet med en förhoppning om att hitta spår av Kumikos tid som student där. Hela platsen andades 60-tal, att stiga in där gav känslan av att stiga in i en tidskapsel. I bibliotekets databas fann jag en titel författad av en Koumiko Muraoka, men den boken skulle finnas på Franska kulturhuset i närheten av Ebisu. Jag gick dit nästa dag och hittade i det ödsliga biblioteket en samling berättelser på franska med titeln *L'orme plus grand que la maison*. På försättsbladet fanns en kolteckning som föreställde en kvinna, möjligen i 60-årsåldern. Det skulle mycket väl kunna vara kvinnan från filmessäen.

Samtidigt hade en praktikant på AIT upptäckt ett namn i filmens eftertexter som hon kände till – den assisterande regissörens. Han visade sig fortfarande vara aktiv som lärare på en filmskola i Tokyo. När jag fick reda på det blev ivrig och propsade på att vi genast skulle ringa upp honom. Men utan att vara alltför tydliga förklarade man att det inte går till på det viset. Man skriver ett brev, inte ett e-mail, och sedan väntar man på svar. Därefter kan man ringa. Efter denna process, som tog några veckor, svarade filmmannen: ”Gå till baren La Jétée i Golden Gai-distriktet i Shinjuku. Fråga ägarinnan. Hon kan ge besked om Kumiko.”

47. I filmen berättas att ett par vid Goutokuji-templet offrar till en död katt vid namn Tora. Marker påminner om att *Tora Tora Tora* var det japanska kodnamnet för attacken mot Pearl Harbor. ”/.../ så allt detta skulle ha börjat med ett kattnamn upprepat tre gånger.”

48. Haruki Murakami, *Kafka på stranden*, s. 161.

It was an evasive answer, as I saw it, but also enticing. I was at times irritated, at times fascinated, by this vague communication and the imprecise answers that were open to interpretation. According to Japan expert Monica Braw, this is not a treacherous or false kind of communication, but a condition of transience, which has to do with the character of the Japanese language. The very principle of the language is, as she writes in a text about Haruki Murakami, “/.../ not clarity, not transparency, but ambiguity, unknown depths. Each character expands according to the observer’s knowledge and associations. Half meanings disappear, the tone flows out; understanding, intuition are required.”⁴⁹ For foreigners, especially from the West, this “intuition” is venerated because it is a useful projection surface for fantasies, when in fact it is most often a form of social communication that is part of the technique of living, inaccessible to anyone who doesn’t know the codes and nuances.⁵⁰

Golden Gai is a district with narrow alleys and little bars. It is one of the few places in central Tokyo with buildings that have been preserved from the time just after the war. The bars here are just a hole in the wall. Usually there is room for fewer than a handful of guests, and often you are not welcome unless you know the owner. I should have figured out for myself that this was where I should go. The bar appears in Wim Wenders’s *Tokyo Ga*. Wim Wenders finds Chris Marker here, but Marker doesn’t want to reveal his appearance – he hides his face.⁵¹

Golden Gai is not big but the bar La Jetée was still hard to find, due to the confusion of the alleys and the little signs that I had a hard time tracing to the various establishments. You got to the bar via a claustrophobic stairway that led to a room,

49. Monica Braw, “Shinjinrui, den nya människan. Tankar kring Haruki Murakamis böcker,” *Tidskriften 9OTAL*, no. 1/2 1992.

50. Elie David, an Israeli businessman and friend of Johnnie Walker’s, who participates in my video, had lived and worked his entire adult life in Tokyo and was very knowledgeable about the Japanese language (as well as Korean). He said that in Japanese businesses, there are almost always two meetings: one in which the director lays out the current issues, and another immediately following, in which the subordinates try to analyze and interpret the meaning of the speech that the president just made.

51. According to Lupton, the bar also appears in a sequence in a program that Marker made for French TV (*The Owl’s Legacy*), where a group of Japanese intellectuals gather for a spontaneous seminar where they discuss their first encounters with the culture of ancient Greece. (See Lupton, p. 175). Marker himself says in his interview in *Film Comment*: “To know that for almost 40 years, a group of Japanese are getting slightly drunk beneath my images every night – that’s worth more to me than any number of Oscars!” Samuel Douhaire and Annick Rivoire, “Marker Direct!”

Det var ett undanglidande svar, som jag såg det, men också lockande. Jag ömsom irriterades över och ömsom fascinerades över denna vaga kommunikation: de oprecisa och tolkningsbara svaren. Enligt japankännaren Monica Braw är det ingen svekfull eller lögnaktig kommunikation utan ett tillstånd av flyktighet som har med det japanska språkets karaktär att göra. I en text om Haruki Murakami skriver hon att språkets själva princip är ”/.../ inte klarhet, inte genomskinlighet, utan mångtydighet, okända djup. Varje tecken breder ut sig alltefter betraktarens kunnande och associationer. Halva meningar försvinner, tonen flyter ut, man förutsätter förståelse, intuition.”⁴⁹ För främlingar, inte minst från väst, är denna ”intuition” omhuldad därför att den är en tacksam projektionsyta för fantasier. I själva verket är den oftast en form social kommunikation som ingår i levandets teknik, oåtkomlig för den som inte kan koderna och nyanserna.⁵⁰

Golden Gai är ett område med trånga gränder och små barer. Det är en av få platser i centrala Tokyo med bevarade byggnader från tiden strax efter kriget. Barerna här är bara ett håll i väggen. Vanligen finns det bara plats för mindre än en handfull gäster, ofta är man inte välkommen om man inte känner ägaren. Jag borde själv ha kunnat lista ut att det var hit som jag skulle gå. Baren förekommer i Wim Wenders *Tokyo Ga*. Wim Wenders hittar Chris Marker här, men Marker vill inte avslöja sitt utseende, han döljer sitt ansikte.⁵¹

Golden Gai är inte stort men La Jetée var ändå svår att hitta på grund av gyttret av gränder och de små skyltarna som jag hade lite svårt att koppla samman med de olika etablissemangen. Man nådde baren via en klaustrofobisk trappa som ledde till

49. Monica Braw, "Shinjinrui, den nya människan. Tankar kring Haruki Murakamis Böcker", *Tidskriften 9OTAL*, nr 1/2, 1992.

50. Elie David, en israelisk affärsman och vän till Johnnie Walker som medverkar i min video, hade levt hela sitt vuxna liv i Tokyo och var mycket kunnig i det japanska språket (såväl som det koreanska). Han berättade att man inom de japanska företagen nästan alltid har två möten: ett där vd:n lägger ut texten om de aktuella frågorna, ett direkt därpå följande där de underlydande försöker analysera och tolka meningen i det tal vd:n nyss hållit.

51. Enligt Lupton förekommer baren också i en sekvens i ett program som Marker gjorde för fransk tv (*The Owl's Legacy*) där en grupp japanska intellektuella samlas för ett spontant seminarium då de diskuterar sina första möten med Greklands antika kultur. (Se Lupton, s. 175). Marker själv säger i intervjun i *Film Comment*: "Att veta att en grupp japaner varje natt under nära 40 års tid blivit aningen berusade under mina bilder är mer värt än Oscarspriser!" Samuel Douhaire och Annick Rivoire, "Marker Direct".

no bigger than a closet, without any windows. Yet *La Jetée* did not feel closed in and the air was not oppressive. The walls were covered with shelves filed with brown bottles, many of them elaborately handpainted with cat and owl motifs. Here were cat figures of various kinds, a picture of a cat and a dog sitting peacably side by side watching something, and two sepia-toned photographs scenes from the film *La Jetée*. I recognized the interior from a short sequence in *Sans soleil* where it is referred to as “the little bar in Shinjuku.” (Marker says here that it reminds him of an Indian flute that can only be heard by the player himself.)

In the corner of the bar, a head stuck out above bottles and paraphernalia, a woman of indeterminate age, between sixty and seventy. It was the owner, Tomoyo. The photographs were not sepia colored but nicotine colored, she told me; the bar has existed since 1972. It is redundant to say that she loved Chris Marker’s films. She was also a francophile and a film connoisseur. And Kumiko? Kumiko was a dear old friend and I could have her address. She did not have an e-mail address.

It was an address in Paris. Kumiko had moved there almost forty years ago, only a few years after *The Koumiko Mystery*. This was how I began to correspond with Kumiko, and this was how her text from the film caught up with her. Possibly she had predicted it in the last lines of the film:

When I now know, I am surprised I didn’t know before.
Every morning I am surprised, understanding nothing,
unable to comment on anything.
But soon they will come – the results of the events.
It is like a wave, an earthquake, an accident far away.
The wave comes ever closer – at the end all the way to me.⁵²

|||

In his stream of anecdotes, Johnnie Walker himself is a person who has been set aside or is in constant opposition. The world around him (meaning Japanese society) represents rigidity, repressiveness, and a lack of fantasy. The only city in Japan that he appreciates is Osaka, he says. Osaka is more democratic than Tokyo and has a street life.

52. Chris Marker, *The Koumiko Mystery*.

ett rum, inte större än en klädkammare, helt utan fönster. Ändå kändes inte La Jetée instängt och luften var inte tryckande. Väggarna var täckta av bruna flaskor, flera av dem yvigt handmålade med katt- och ugglemotiv. Här fanns kattfigurer av olika slag, en bild av en katt och en hund som fredligt sitter sida vid sida och betraktar något, samt två sepiafärgade fotografier – scener från filmen *La Jetée*. Jag kände igen interiören från en kort sekvens i *Sans soleil* där stället omnämns som ”den lilla baren i Shinjuku”. (Marker säger här att den påminner honom om en indisk flöjt som bara kan höras av den som själv spelar.)

I hörnet av baren stack ett huvud upp ovanför flaskor och paraferalia, en kvinna i obestämd ålder mellan sextio och sjuttio år. Det var ägaren Tomoyo. Baren har funnits sedan 1972 och fotografierna var inte sepiafärgade utan nikotinfärgade, berättade hon. Det är överflödigt att säga att hon älskade Chris Markers filmer. Hon var i övrigt frankofil och filmkännare. Vad det gällde Kumiko? Kumiko var en god gammal vän och jag kunde få hennes adress. Någon e-mailadress hade hon inte.

Det var en adress i Paris. Kumiko hade flyttat dit för närmare fyrtio år sedan, bara några år efter inspelningen av *Mysteriet Koumiko*. Det var så jag började brevväxla med henne och det var så hennes text från filmen kom ikapp henne. Möjligen hade hon förutsagt det i filmens sista rader:

När jag nu vet, är jag förvånad att jag inte visste förr.
 Jag är förvånad varje morgon, förstår ingenting, oförmögen att kommentera någonting.
 Men snart ska de komma – resultaten av händelserna.
 Det är som en havsvåg, en jordbävning, en olycka långt bort.
 Vägen kommer allt närmare – till slut hela vägen fram till mig.⁵²

|||

I Johnnie Walkers pärlband av anekdoter är han själv en människa på undantag eller i ständig opposition mot världen. Omvärlden (vilket betyder det japanska samhället) representerar det rigida, fantasilösa och repressiva. Den enda stad i Japan han uppskattar är Osaka, säger han. Osaka är folkligare än Tokyo och har ett gatuliv.

52. Chris Marker, *Mysteriet Koumiko*, översättning Johan Almqvist och Anders Nässil.

People in Osaka are storytellers, and Osaka is the only place in Japan where people are able to laugh at themselves, he said. In Osaka, people also practice *kirigami*, a variation of origami. *Kirigami* involves telling a story while at the same time discreetly tearing out (instead of folding, as in origami) a figure. When it's time for the story's punch line, you present the paper figure, and the figure itself accentuates or creates the point of the story. Such a materialization of the story attracted my interest, and I also had the chance to see Johnnie Walker's *kirigami*, which he was in the habit of performing as a party trick during his dinners (a story about a Catholic priest who visited a bordello). I wondered if we could adopt the idea of *kirigami* for my video essay. I was attracted by the idea of a sequence that develops gradually as a practical activity carried out a little in the background, to then materialize or be "deposited" at the end.

Johnnie Walker agreed right away and suggested that we could have a black hood made. He explained that he would use the hood for a *bunraku* walk with Bacon. *Bunraku* is an ancient Japanese form of puppetry, where the subordinate puppeteers (*ningyozukai*) wear the black hoods to be anonymous. The text of the play is read by a male reader (*tayu*), placed on a platform next to the stage together with a *samisen* player (musician who plays a three-stringed instrument). The story is performed in a characteristically mannered tone (*gidayu*). It is a demanding kind of reading in which certain practitioners are considered to have reached the level of masters.

Johnnie Walker decided that we would go to the textile designers at the famous NUNO and have the hood made. In their shop near Roppongi, Johnnie made a sketch and fabric samples were produced. The hood was then tried on and Johnnie made sure that the holes that were to be taken out for the eyes would be Asiatic in shape. In my video essay, these scenes would correspond to the tearing of the figure in *kirigami*.

Johnnie Walker thought that our choice of places for walks should be determined by Bacon's habits, that we should go to those places where the dog was usually walked. Outside of one bar he was given some cabbage every day by the owner; at the Kannondo Temple in Asakusa, Bacon used to lap up "holy" water from a fountain, something that the monks, surprisingly enough, had given him permission to do. We would also go for a walk one Sunday at Harajuku, next to the Yoyogi Park.

Osakaborna är historieberättare, Osaka är den enda plats i Japan där människor har förmågan att skratta åt sig själva. I Osaka utövar man dessutom *kirigami*, en variant av origami. Kirigami innebär att man berättar en historia samtidigt som man lite diskret river (istället för viker som i origami) en figur. När det är dags för historiens poäng slänger man fram pappersfiguren och själva figuren kapar och accentuerar historiens poäng. En sådan materialisering av berättelsen drog till sig mitt intresse och jag fick också se den kirigami som Johnnie Walker hade för vana att uppföra som partytrick under sina middagar (en historia om en katolsk präst som gick på bordell). Jag undrade om vi kunde adoptera kirigamins idé till min videoessä. Jag tilltalades av tanken på en sekvens som utvecklas bitvis som en praktisk aktivitet lite i skymundan, för att sedan materialiseras eller ”fällas ut” mot slutet.

Johnnie Walker var genast med på det och föreslog att vi skulle låta tillverka en svart huva. Huvan, förklarade han, skulle han använda för en *bunraku*-vandring med Bacon. Bunraku är en mycket gammal japansk form av dockteater, där de underordnade dockspelarna (*ningyozukai*) är iklädda svarta huvor för att framstå som anonyma. Skådespelets text läses av en manlig uppläsare [*tayu*], placerad på en plattform vid sidan av scenen tillsammans med en *samisen*-spelare (musiker som spelar ett tresträngat instrument). Berättelsen framförs i ett karakteristiskt manierat tonläge (*gidayu*). Det är en krävande form av läsning som vissa utövare anses behärska på mästarens nivå.

Johnnie Walker bestämde att vi skulle gå till textildesignerna vid det berömda NUNO och tillverka huvan. I deras butik i närheten av Roppongi gjorde Johnnie en skiss och tygprover togs fram. Huvan provades sedan ut och Johnnie var noga med att de hål i huvan som skulle tas ut för ögonen skulle vara asiatiska till formen. Dessa scener fick i min videoessä motsvara framrivandet av figuren vid utövande av kirigami.

Johnnie tyckte att våra val av platser för vandringar skulle styras av Bacons vanor, att vi skulle ta oss till de platser där hunden brukade rastas. Utanför en bar blev han dagligen utspisad med kål av ägarinnan, vid Kannon-templet i Asakusa brukade Bacon lapa i sig ”heligt” vatten från en fontän, något som munkarna förvånansvärt nog gett honom tillåtelse till. Vi skulle också göra en vandring en söndag vid Harajuku intill Yoyogi-parken.

Bacon's mere appearance on the streets of Tokyo already caused a commotion. Johnnie Walker in his Ku Klux Klan-like hood caused a short circuit. The people who met us didn't know where to look or how to react. That was how the "point" was developed.

As I followed him with the camera, I realized that in addition to his odd appearance with the hood and his enormous dog on a leash, he also confused people in the crowds by speaking in different languages from inside his hood. (Johnnie Walker says that he is able to speak seven languages fluently and to insult people in five more.) After a round in the crowds of Harajuku, we met a long line of cars with Japanese ultra-right extremists, who are in the habit of driving around in crowded places in Tokyo with their black, flag-equipped vans with enormous loudspeakers that play marches and bellow out messages. These lines of cars appear in a sequence of *Sans soleil*, and were already at that time "a part of Tokyo's landscape," as Marker formulated it.⁵³ Johnnie Walker walked right toward the vans, to the sound of march music. In the meeting there was an unexpected, tense situation when Johnnie Walker, with his hood and the gigantic wolfhound, blocked the vans' way. In the drivers' eyes was pure astonishment, a desperate fumbling to try to interpret the situation. It was a blessed moment for the video essay, Johnnie Walker confronted with a manifestation of the very thing to which he always returns: the Japanese hatred of strangers – the hardness inside the soft and sweet. The other side of *the Cute*.

IV

When I came to Paris to meet Kumiko, I had long ago decided to bring together the two narratives. Johnnie Walker is an ethnically (and sexually) indeterminable Japanese who considers himself exposed to racism in Japanese society. Kumiko is an ethnically Japanese woman who had her first identity founded on Japanese colonialism. She had since then abandoned her second (Japanese) identity and nowadays considers herself mainly a Westerner.

But I did not know that when I arrived in Paris. I had already written the entire text of the film and had it recorded by a narrator on location in Tokyo. Kumiko had

53. Marker, *Sans soleil*.

Redan Bacons uppenbarelse på Tokyos gator skapade rabalder. Med Johnnie Walker i den Ku Klux Klan-liknande huvan uppstod kortslutning. De mötande människorna visste inte var de skulle titta eller hur de skulle reagera. Det var så ”poängen” fölldes ut.

När jag följde honom med kameran förstod jag att han förutom sin märkliga uppenbarelse med huvan och den enorma hunden i koppel ytterligare förvirrade människorna i folksamlingarna genom att inifrån sin huva tala olika språk. (Johnnie Walker säger att han är kapabel att tala sju språk flytande och förolämpa folk på ytterligare fem.) Efter ett varv i folksamlingarna i Harajuku-distriktet mötte vi en bilkaravan med japanska högerextremister. De har för vana att cirkulera på folktäta platser i Tokyo med sina svarta, flaggförsedda skåpbilar med enorma högtalare som spelar marschmusik och basunerar ut meddelanden. Det är dessa karavaner som förekommer i en sekvens av *Sans soleil* och som redan då var ”en del av Tokyos landskap”, som Marker formulerade det.⁵³ Johnnie Walker gick rakt mot bilkaravanen och marschmusiken. I mötet uppstod en oförutsedd, spänd situation då Johnnie Walker med huvan och den jättelika varghunden blockerade vägen för bilarna. I förarnas ögon lyste ren och skär förvirring, ett desperat famlande efter att försöka tolka situationen. Det var ett benådat moment för videoessän: Johnnie Walker i konfrontation med en manifestation av det som han alltid återkommer till: det japanska främlingshatet, hårdheten innanför det mjuka och gulliga. Frånsidan av *the Cute*.

IV

När jag kom till Paris för att träffa Kumiko hade jag sedan länge beslutat mig för att föra samman de två berättelserna. Johnnie Walker är en etniskt (och sexuellt) svårbestämbar japan som anser sig utsatt för rasism i det japanska samhället. Kumiko är en etnisk japanska som skapade en första identitet grundad i den japanska kolonialismen. Hon har sedan övergett sin andra (japanska) identitet och ser sig i första hand som västerlänning.

Det sista visste jag ännu inte när jag anlände till Paris. Jag hade redan skrivit hela texten för filmen och låtit läsa in den med en berättare på plats i Tokyo. Kumiko hade

53. Marker, *Sans soleil* (min övers. M.B.).

also read the text and now I would just ask her one thing: Could she herself possibly repeat her words from Marker's film essay in front of the camera, almost 43 years later? But that was unthinkable. Kumiko never again wanted to be filmed, and she had deeply regretted her words from the end of the film, the words about violence. It was impossible to repeat such ridiculous heroic assertions.

The American poet and essayist Susan Howe writes that Marker's practice *"!.../ depends on invisible verbal flashes, optical surprises, and split images."*⁵⁴ She sees likenesses and hears echoes between *The Koumiko Mystery* and *Sans soleil*, and she speculates about Kumiko's existence:

In 1965 Kuomiko (sic) is really a young Japanese woman (perhaps a professional actress now) who speaks fluent French. Her beautiful voiceover is one of the striking elements of the *Mystery* that bears her name.⁵⁵

Is Kumiko a double for H el ene Chatelain in the film *La Jet e*, she asks herself. And where is Kumiko in *Sans soleil*? In *Vertigo*, Kim Novak's two voices, as the characters Madeleine and Judy, play an important role. Howe interprets the two narrating voices that are available on the DVD edition of *Sans soleil* – attributed to the names Florence Delay and Alexandra Stewart – as a play with two configurations of the same individual. In Howe's conception these two configurations appear in three films: in *"!.../ La Jet e*, *The Koumiko Mystery*, and *Sans Soleil*, there is the ghostlike presence of two women, their traces, in the narrating unaccented voice that is Stewart's."⁵⁶

In spite of her clearly expressed wish not to be filmed, Kumiko seemed to accept and even appreciate my arrival in Paris. She had spent a good deal of energy cleaning her apartment – the apartment she had lived in for 35 years. She had moved most of her chairs and other objects salvaged from the street into one of the rooms so that there was some space in her workroom. She had folded papers to make lampshades. She had set up her dining room in a narrow hallway between the kitchen and the other rooms. She served pot-au-feu and bœuf bourguignon. I had been in Minsk and had contracted pneumonia a week or so before, but antibiotics and Kumiko's

54. Susan Howe, "Sorting Facts; or, Nineteen Ways of Looking at Marker," p. 334.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 336.

56. *Ibid.*

också fått läsa texten och nu skulle jag bara be henne om en sak: kunde hon möjligen själv inför kameran upprepa sina ord från Markers filmessä, nu nästan 43 år senare? Men något sådant var otänkbart. Kumiko ville aldrig mer filmas och hon hade djupt ångrat vad hon sade i slutet av filmen, de ord som handlade om våld. Det var omöjligt att upprepa sådana fåniga heroiska utsagor, sa hon.

Den amerikanska poeten och essäisten Susan Howe skriver att Markers praktik ”/.../ vilar på osynliga verbala blixtrar, optiska överraskningar och kluvna bilder.”⁵⁴ Hon ser likheter och hör ekon mellan *Mysteriet Koumiko* och *Sans soleil* samt spekulerar om Kumikos existens:

1965 är Koumiko verkligen en ung japansk kvinna (kanske en professionell skådespelerska nu) som talar flytande franska. Hennes vackra röst är ett av de anslående elementen som bidrar till Mysteriet som bär hennes namn.⁵⁵

Är Kumiko en dubbelgångare till Hélène Chatelain i *La Jetée*. frågar hon sig. Och var är Kumiko i *Sans soleil*? I *Vertigo* har Kim Novaks två röster som karaktärerna Madeleine och Judy en väsentlig roll. Howe tolkar förekomsten av de två berättarröster som man kan välja mellan på DVD-utgåvan av *Sans soleil* – tillskrivna namnen Florence Delay och Alexandra Stewart – som ett spel med två gestaltningar av samma individ. I Howes föreställningar finns dessa två gestaltningar i tre filmer: i ”/.../ *La Jetée*, *The Koumiko Mystery* och *Sans Soleil* finns den spöklika närvaron av två kvinnor, deras spår, i den berättarröst utan brytning som är Stewarts.”⁵⁶

Kumiko tycktes, trots sin klart uttalade vilja att inte bli filmad, acceptera och till och med uppskatta min ankomst till Paris. Hon hade ägnat stor energi åt att städa lägenheten, den lägenhet hon bott i under 35 år. Hon hade flyttat in det mesta av sina gatufynd av stolar och annat i ett av rummen så att det blev någorlunda plats i arbetsrummet. Hon hade vikt pappersark till lampskärmar. Matsalen var inrättad i den smala korridoren mellan köket och de övriga rummen. Hon bjöd på pot-au-feu och bœuf bourguignon. Jag hade varit i Minsk och dragit på mig en lunginflammation

54. Susan Howe, *Spinnaker*, s. 80.

55. Ibid., s. 82.

56. Ibid.

strengthening food kept the fever down.

On the first day, we ate lunch and talked until evening. The next day, she wanted to take me to Montmartre cemetery, of which there was a view from her apartment. Already in her letters to Tokyo she had explained that it was here she went to talk to the semiferal cats who lived there. Now she wanted me to film them.

With breaks for the cats in the cemetery, our conversations spread out across the days. I didn't take any notes; it would have destroyed the whole conversational situation, which was quiet and pleasant. It was not an interview, but a conversation.⁵⁷ Kumiko was 71 years old, thoughtful and quiet, and spoke in a mixture of English and French. She was a very good listener, and I found myself sitting there telling long and complicated stories about my family, our cats, Johnnie Walker, and my impressions of Tokyo. Kumiko, for her part, told me about her childhood in Manchuria, her first years in Japan, about her meeting with Chris Marker, the office in Yurakucho, and what happened after the film. On the second last day, I was allowed to film some of our conversations on the condition that her face would not be visible.

Kumiko gave me a little notebook containing a text that she had written based on her childhood memories.⁵⁸ She had spent her first ten years in Manchuria, the last seven of these in Harbin the city that had formed her, the place to which her memories gravitate. It was here, she writes, that she “/.../ began to have a camera-eye that sees and records. These instantaneous images had solidness, depth, duration. They were luminous images in the shape of the present. I was there, inside them.”⁵⁹

The family rented an apartment in a Russian-style house. A flowering garden with an elm, a lilac shrub, and a cherry tree belonged to the house. Her father was a customs officer employed by the Japanese colonial power, but the idea that the family was ethnically Japanese took no hold in her consciousness.

“Japan... what was that? Besides, the word *Japan* wasn't used by the Japanese. They said *Naiche* [‘interior land’]. When they were pointing out a new face, they

57. Later on Kumiko read my text and corrected some mistakes and gave me more detailed information about some issues (during new meetings in Paris and in letters and phone calls).

58. Kumiko Muraoka, “Dust Optimism (1936-1946),” *The Purple Journal* no. 2 2004 (translated from French to English by Bruce Benderson).

59. *Ibid.*

någon vecka tidigare, men antibiotika och Kumikos kraftfulla mat höll febern nere.

Den första dagen åt vi lunch och samtalande till kvällen. Nästa dag ville hon ta mig till Montmartres kyrkogård, som man hade utsikt över från hennes lägenhet. Redan i breven till Tokyo hade hon förklarat att hon brukade gå dit för att tala med de halv-vilda katterna som bodde där. Nu var hon mån om att jag filmade dem.

Med avbrott för katterna på kyrkogården bredde våra samtal ut sig. Jag antecknade inget, det skulle ha förstört hela samtalssituationen som var stillsam och angenäm. Det var ingen intervju utan ett samtal.⁵⁷ Kumiko var sjuttioett år, eftertänksam och stillsam och pratade en blandning av engelska och franska. Hon var en mycket god lyssnare och inför henne fann jag mig berätta långa, komplicerade historier om min familj, våra katter, Johnnie Walker och mina intryck av Tokyo. Kumiko å sin sida berättade om sin barndom i Manchuriet, sin första tid i Japan, om mötet med Chris Marker, kontoret på Yurakucho och vad som hände efter filmen. Den näst sista dagen tilläts jag filma några av våra samtal under förutsättning att hennes ansikte inte syntes.

Kumiko gav mig ett litet häfte med en text som hon hade skrivit utifrån sina barndomsminnen.⁵⁸ Hon hann tillbringa sina första tio år i Manchuriet, de sista sju av dessa i Harbin – staden som präglat henne, platsen mot vilken hennes minnen graviterar. Det var här, skriver hon, som hon ”/.../ började få en kamerablick som iakttar och registrerar. Dessa plötsliga bilder hade en fasthet, ett djup och en varaktighet. Klara bilder i nuets form. Jag var där inuti dem.”⁵⁹

Man hyrde en lägenhet i ett hus i rysk stil. Till huset hörde en blommande trädgård med en alm, en syren och ett körsbärsträd. Hennes far var tulltjänsteman i tjänst hos japanska kolonialmakten, men tanken på att familjen etniskt var japaner fick inget fäste i hennes medvetande.

”Japan... vad var det? Dessutom användes inte ordet ’*Japan*’ av japanerna. De sa *Naiche* [’inland’]. När de pekade ut ett nytt ansikte sa de: ’Han är från Naiche.’

57. Senare läste Kumiko min text och korrigerade vissa misstag och gav mig mer detaljerad information om vissa saker under nya möten i Paris och i brev och telefonsamtal.

58. Kumiko Muraoka, "Dust Optimism (1936-1946)", *The Purple Journal* nr. 2 2004 (översättning från franska till engelska av Bruce Benderson).

59. *Ibid.*, (min övers. M.B.).

would say: 'He's from Naiche.' Naiche people were different. They weren't from here. They had just arrived from afar, from an unknown place. They were not like us. They were foreigners."

Kumiko showed me books of picture postcards from Harbin. It was a large cosmopolitan city, an important point on the extended Chinese part of the Trans-Siberian Railway. It was a city with cafés, cabarets, Russian bakeries, French fashion shops, Chinese opium dens, and spa life by the river. Russian architecture was dominant and all the shops had both Russian and Chinese signs. Here were mighty Russian Orthodox churches, synagogues, Buddhist temples, and a Shinto temple (a pitiful structure, according to Kumiko, located in front of the Saint Nicolai Cathedral). Here lived German Jews⁶⁰ who had escaped Nazi Germany in the 1930s, here were people from Poland, Lithuania, Greece, and Korea. In the neighboring house lived the two Russian sisters, Gaila and Tata, whose braided hair reached to their hips. Gaila and Tata were the most beautiful beings she could imagine, two inaccessible princesses.

Toward the end of the war, anxiety arose in the family. They realized that their existence was precarious. One day just before the end of the war, the Korean boys raided the area and the Japanese children hid in the cellar. The mother went to the bank to take out all of their savings, but the bank was closed. The Chinese gardener's wife began making dinner out in the garden, emerging from invisibility. Her children took the liberty of showing themselves. They begin to live their lives before an open curtain. The atmosphere of doom broke down the hierarchies. Kumiko and her sister, and the other Japanese children, begin playing with the Chinese children, who mixed with the Russian children; the borders dissolved as if nothing meant anything anymore.

60. The Jewish community in Harbin numbered more than 20 000 people at its height. For a time, the railway and its neighboring area became a state within the state and gave Harbin its particular economical and political position until the Japanese occupation in 1932. The Jews were deeply involved in religious, political, economic, and cultural activities. They ran sugar refineries, fur industries, bakeries, coal mines, soya bean industries, printing presses, chocolate factories, hotels, cafés and restaurants. A group of Jews also established the Harbin stock market and worked there as brokers. See, for instance, *The Jews in Harbin*, ed. Qu Wei and Li Shuxiao, Heilongjiang Academy of Social Sciences 2004. Dan Ben-Canaan points out that Harbin did not become the Jewish paradise that it often is described as. "For many of those who stayed on in Harbin during the 13 years of Manchukuo, life was a harrowing experience. Suddenly people, who for years had lived side by side, united by their Russian origins, became identified by the characteristics which divided them: 'white émigré' or 'Soviet', 'Orthodox Christian' or 'Jew'." Dan Ben-Canaan, "Nostalgia vs. Historical Reality," Heilongjiang University, School of Western Studies, Harbin 2007.

Naiche- människor var annorlunda. De var inte härifrån. De hade just anlänt från fjärran, från en okänd plats. De var inte som vi. De var främlingar.”

Kumiko visade mig böcker med vykort från Harbin. Det var en kosmopolitisk storstad, en viktig punkt på den transsibiriska järnvägens förlängda, kinesiska del. Det var en stad med kaféer, kabaréer, ryska bagerier, franska modehus, kinesiska opiumhålur och badliv vid floden. Den ryska arkitekturen dominerade och alla affärer hade både ryska och kinesiska skyltar. Här fanns mäktiga rysk-ortodoxa kyrkor, synagogor, buddhistempel och ett shintotempel (en ynkelig konstruktion enligt Kumiko, belägen mitt emot St. Nicolai-katedralen). Här bodde tyska judar⁶⁰ som flytt från nazi-Tyskland på 1930-talet, här fanns människor från Polen, Litauen, Grekland och Korea. I grannhuset fanns de två ryska systrarna Gaila och Tata, vars flätade hår nådde höfterna. Gaila och Tata var de vackraste hon kunde föreställa sig, två oåtkomliga prinsessor.

Mot slutet av andra världskriget stiger oron i familjen, man förstår att tillvaron kommer att bli osäker. En dag strax före krigsslutet gör de koreanska pojkarna en räd i området och de japanska barnen får gömma sig i källaren. Modern går till banken för att ta ut alla besparingar, men banken är igenbommad. Den kinesiska trädgårdsmästarens fru, framstigen ur sin osynlighet, börjar laga mat i trädgården. Hennes barn tar även de sig rätten att visa sig. De börjar leva sitt liv inför öppen ridå. Undergångsstämningen bryter ner hierarkierna. Kumiko och hennes syster och de andra japanska barnen börjar leka med de kinesiska barnen som blandas med de ryska barnen, gränserna upplöses som om inget betyder något längre.

60. Den judiska gruppen i Harbin uppgick som mest till över 20 000 personer. Järnvägen och dess angränsande områden fungerade under en period som en stat i staten och gav Harbin dess speciella ekonomiska och politiska position fram till den japanska ockupation 1932. Judarna var djupt involverade i religiösa, politiska, ekonomiska och kulturella aktiviteter. De hade sockerraffinaderier, pälsindustrier, bagerier, kolgruvor, soyaböns-industrier, tryckpressar, chockladfabriker, hotell, kaféer och restauranger. En grupp judar startade också Harbins börsmarknad och arbetade där som börsmäklare. Se t.ex. *The Jews in Harbin*, eds. Qu Wei and Li Shuxiao, Heilongjiang Academy of Social Sciences 2004. Dan Ben-Canaan påpekar att Harbin inte blev det judiska paradiset som det ofta utmålas som: "För många av dem som stannade i Harbin under Manchukuos 13 år var livet plågsamt. Plötsligt skulle människor som levt sida vid sida, förenade av sitt ryska ursprung, identifieras med kriterier som skiljde dem åt: 'vit emigrant', 'sovjetmedborgare', 'ortodox kristen' eller 'jude'. Dan Ben-Canaan, "Nostalgia vs. Historical Reality", Heilongjiang University, School of Western Studies, Harbin 2007 (min övers. M.B.).

An apartment in the neighborhood was empty. The Japanese family that had lived there had left it head-over-heels at the first sign of the trouble. The children go into the abandoned apartment and pick among the objects: bowls of rotting food, a telephone off its hook, in the closet a pile of clothing with gold-embroidered kimonos. They take some of the things with them and line them up in the yard. A ruler made of Bakelite, a magnifying glass, dice, playing cards, some picture postcards, a number of photographs, and cigarette packs. They pull out a radio and open it up, pull out the copper spool and begin to pull the wire. It takes a long time, they can wind it all the way around the house. They discover lots of round aluminum cans containing rolls of film. They make a fire and throw the rolls into it, one after the other. The rolls of film twitch in spasms, "they spit out liquid like thick black blood."⁶¹ The gardener's children are wild with joy and they jump, shout, and clap their hands while the sputtering film rolls fill the surroundings with a hellish stench.

Japan had lost the war and thereby its colonies. The emperor had declared his surrender on the radio. It was an enormous shock, partly because the emperor's voice had never been heard before. He was considered divine; for ordinary people it was unthinkable to meet the emperor's face or hear his voice.

The Russian soldiers from the Red Army came, they knocked on the door and Kumiko's mother had to hide in the attic. The soldiers inspected the house and asked about valuable objects. When they left they took with them a fur that hung in the hallway. The mother put a bundle of paper bills in a coffee can, which she buried in the garden. The father scrounged for coal in order to keep at least one room warm.

They received an order to evacuate the civil servant apartment and moved to a smaller apartment that they shared with another family. After the Russian soldiers came the Chinese Red Guard from the so-called Pa Lu Federation in the eighth army. They were proper, courteous and friendly. When they borrowed something, they returned it. The children sang their song: "Pa-Lu, Pa-Lu, Pa-Lu-gun!" instead of, as earlier: "Kropotkin has been defeated, long live Admiral Togo!"⁶²

In August 1946, one year after the end of the war, the family was sent on a long

61. Kumiko Muraoka, "Dust Optimism (1936-1946)."

62. Ibid. "Gun" means "army." Admiral Togo was commander-in-chief of the Japanese empire's fleet during the Russo-Japanese war and had the status of war hero.

En lägenhet i grannskapet står tom. En japansk familj som bott där har lämnat den hals över huvud. Barnen går in i den övergivna lägenheten och plockar bland föremålen; skålar med ruttnande mat, en telefon avhängd från sin klyka, i garderoben en klädhög med guldbroderade kimonos. De plockar med sig ett antal föremål och radar upp dem på gårdsplanen: en bakelitlinjal, en lupp, en tärning, spelkort, några vykort, ett antal fotografier och cigarettpaket. De drar ut en radio och bryter upp den, sliter ut kopparspolen och börjar dra i tråden. Den varar länge, spoltråden går att vira ett varv runt huset. De upptäcker mängder av runda aluminiumburkar som innehåller filmrullar. De gör upp en eld och slänger in rullarna, en efter en. Filmrullarna knycker ihop sig i spasmer, ”de spottar vätska som tjockt svart blod”.⁶¹ Trädgårdsmästarens barn är galna av glädje och hoppar, skriker och klappar händerna när de fräsande filmrullarna pyr in omgivningen med en helvetisk stank.

Japan hade förlorat kriget och därmed sina kolonier. På radion hade kejsaren förkunnat kapitulationen. Detta innebar en enorm chock, inte minst för att kejsarens röst aldrig tidigare hörts offentligt. Han sågs som gudomlig, för vanliga människor var det otänkbart att möta kejsarens ansikte eller höra hans röst.

De ryska soldaterna från Röda armén kom, de knackade på och Kumikos mamma fick gömma sig på vinden. Soldaterna höll husesyn och frågade efter värdeföremål. När de gick tog de med sig en päls som hängde i hallen. Mamman lade en sedelbunt i en kaffekanna, sedan grävde hon ner den i trädgården. Pappan skaffade kol för att åtminstone kunna hålla ett rum varmt.

De fick order att lämna tjänstemannabostaden och flyttade till en lägenhet som de kom att dela med en annan familj. Efter de ryska soldaterna kom de kinesiska rödgardisterna ur det så kallade Pa Lu-förbandet som hörde till den åttonde armén. De var korrekta, förekommande och vänliga. När de lånade något lämnade de också tillbaka det. Barnen sjöng deras sång: ”Pa–Lu, Pa-Lu, Pa-Lu gun!”, istället för som tidigare: ”Kropotkin har besegrats, länge leve amiral Togo!”⁶²

I augusti 1946, ett år efter krigsslutet, sändes familjen på en lång resa tillbaka till

61. Kumiko Muraoka, "Dust Optimism (1936-1946)".

62. Ibid, (min övers. M.B.). "Gun" betyder "armé". Amiral Togo var överbefälhavare i den kejserliga japanska flottan under det rysk-japanska kriget och hade status som krigshjälte.

journey back to Japan. It took months to get there. They traveled by freight train, but Kumiko didn't think it was frightening, it was an adventure. She had as yet not understood that they had left Harbin forever; she thought that this was just a long, exciting trip. She was ten years old when the family settled down in a small town in southwestern Japan.

After she finished school, she moved to Kyoto. She held various temporary jobs. As an assistant in an office, she spent her days staring at a big clock that didn't seem to move forward. She worked at a café, which she liked. (Of all her jobs throughout the years, the job as waitress was the best, she said. It was simple and clear – you serve coffee and wipe down the tables, time passes quickly.) Then she moved to Tokyo, studied French, and ended up at Marcel Gugliaris' office.

In 1966, one year after the premiere of *The Koumiko Mystery*, Kumiko went to Paris. She found a studio that she shared with a Japanese girl who had arrived in Paris almost at the same time. Together they went to a modeling agency that was looking for Japanese extras for *Grand Prix*, by John Frankenheimer, a big production that was going to be filmed in Italy with Yves Montand and Toshiro Mifune in the leading roles. A few days later they received their tickets for Milan. Kumiko said she would never forget the casting director's gaze on the filming location. In some way it became decisive for her. They were three women who were lined up; the man examining them "from head to toe, from toe to head, and then from head to toe again." His secretary stood beside him, a young, thin, tall woman, with slightly tinted glasses, a large notebook in hand. "There was not an atom of kindness, not a wisp of friendship in the man's eyes." It was a gaze that dehumanized her. The three women experienced the same terror at the man's gaze. One of them ran away.

They stayed in a luxury hotel for a week without anything happening. Then one day they were dressed in kimonos and made up. They took the elevator down to the lobby and were filmed as they walked up to the reception desk with mincing steps. It took them less than a minute. For this contribution she was paid enough money to live on for an entire year back in Paris.

She lived in a simple hotel at Odeon, essentially a kind of student housing. In the narrow stairways she found herself eye-to-eye with a tall, dark man with a scowl.

"What do you do in life?" he asked, his eyes close to her.

Japan. Det tog månader att ta sig dit. Man färdades i godståg, men Kumiko tyckte inte det var skrämmande utan ett äventyr. Hon hade ännu inte förstått att lämnade Harbin för alltid och trodde att det bara rörde sig om en lång, spännande utflykt. Hon var tio år när familjen slog sig ner i ett litet samhälle i sydvästra Japan.

Efter skolan flyttade hon till Kyoto. Hon hade olika tillfälliga jobb. Som assistent på ett kontor ägnade hon dagarna åt att stirra på en stor klocka som inte tycktes röra sig framåt. Hon jobbade på ett kafé, vilket hon däremot tyckte om. (Av alla hennes försörjningar genom åren var arbetet som servitris det bästa, sa hon. Det var enkelt och begripligt, man serverar kaffe och torkar av, tiden flyer på). Så flyttade hon till Tokyo, läste franska och hamnade på Marcel Giuglaris kontor.

1966, ett år efter premiären av *Mysteriet Koumiko*, anlände Kumiko i Paris. Hon hittade en liten lägenhet som hon delade med en japansk flicka som kommit till Paris ungefär vid samma tid. Tillsammans gick de till en modellagentur som sökte efter japanska statister till *Grand Prix* av John Frankenheimer, en storproduktion som skulle filmas i Italien med Yves Montand och Toshiro Mifune i huvudrollerna. Några dagar senare fick de sina biljetter till Milano. Kumiko berättade att hon aldrig skulle glömma casting-mannens blick på inspelningsplatsen. På något sätt blev den avgörande för henne. De var tre kvinnor som radades upp, mannen granskade dem ”från topp till tå, från tå till topp och sedan från topp till tå igen”. Intill honom stod hans sekreterare, en ung, smal, lång kvinna med aningen tonade glasögon och ett anteckningsblock i handen. ”Det fanns inte en skymt av vänlighet, inte en gnutta vänskaplighet i hans ögon.” Det var en blick som avhumaniserade henne. De tre kvinnorna upplevde samma skräck inför mannens blick, sa Kumiko. En av dem flydde från platsen.

Det inkvarterades på ett lyxhotell, de bodde där en vecka utan att något hände. Så en dag kläddes de i kimono och sminkades. De tog hissen ner till lobbyn och blev filmade när de trippade fram till receptionen. De tog dem mindre än en minut. För denna insats fick hon pengar som hon kunde leva på i ett helt år när hon väl var tillbaka i Paris.

Det första året bodde hon på ett enkelt hotell vid Odeon, som närmast var som ett studenthem. I det trånga trapphuset blev hon stående öga mot öga med en mörk man.

”Vad gör du här i livet?” sa mannen med ögonen tätt intill hennes.

The man was a Lebanese poet. In his little room in the same hotel he prepared the first issue of the literary magazine *La Délirante*. He published some of her texts, and together they would eventually translate haiku poets like Basho. He was also the one who published the collection of stories that I had found in the French Cultural House library in Tokyo. Their sporadic collaboration continued for almost 40 years, until she finally tired of his irascible temperament.

In 1968, she met a German medical student who had come to Paris. Inspired by the new wave of French film and the revolutionary atmosphere, he wanted to make films. They got married and moved to Berlin. The man wanted to see Japan and they went there for a three-week trip. He was delighted – so thoroughly delighted that he remained in Japan. She returned alone to Berlin.

Soon Kumiko was back in Paris. She had twin daughters and lived with the father for a year, then she asked him to move out. It was from the apartment where we were now. She showed me photos of the children when they were little, in her apartment. The children were extremely sweet and the wooden floor had a dark brown hue that had now been dimmed by wear and the bleaching effect of time.

Kumiko said that she had always had “easy jobs” that didn’t demand too much effort. For many years she was an assistant for a Japanese journalist in Paris. She only worked half days. She met Chris Marker now and then and their friendship endured, but ten years ago he became enraged when she gave someone his address. After that their contact was broken.⁶³ She wrote literary texts all the time but it was no longer possible to write in Japanese. She wrote in French, but made many grammatical errors. She felt that she was hanging in between the two languages and that one of the supports always gave way.

Harbin occupied her thoughts. She showed me slides projected directly onto the wall. They were from her travels back there in the 90s. Harbin no longer resembled the postcards; it was a big Chinese industrial city. The mixture of cultures that had existed was gone, even if a few buildings were still standing as reminders. The mighty Russian Orthodox cathedral, Saint Sophia, had been turned into a museum. In a

63. When my film was finished two months later, Kumiko sent a copy to Chris Marker. She called him up and he was happy about what had happened, that the film had been “revisited.” He was also happy that the two of them had gotten in touch again.

Mannen var en libanesisk poet. I sitt minimala rum på hotellet höll han på att förbereda det första numret av litteraturtidskriften *La Délirante*. Han publicerade några av hennes texter och tillsammans kom de med tiden att översätta haikupoeter som Basho. Det var även han som gav ut den samling berättelser som jag hade funnit på Franska kulturhusets bibliotek i Tokyo. Deras sporadiska samarbete höll i sig i närmare 40 år tills hon slutligen tröttnade på hans koleriska temperament.

1968 träffade hon en tysk läkarstudent som kommit till Paris. Inspirerad av den nya franska filmvågen och den revolutionära stämningen ville han göra film. De gifte sig och flyttade till Berlin. Mannen ville uppleva Japan och de begav sig dit på en treveckorsresa. Han blev förtjust, så överförtjust att han blev kvar. Hon åkte ensam tillbaka till Berlin.

Snart var Kumiko tillbaka i Paris. Hon fick tvillingdöttrar och levde med mannen ett år, sedan bad hon honom flyttat från den lägenhet där vi nu befann oss. Hon visade mig fotografier på barnen i lägenheten när de var små. De var oerhört söta och trägolvet hade en mörkbrun nyans som nu hade mattats av och blekts med tidens slitage och den infallande solen.

Kumiko sa att hon alltid hade haft "lätta jobb" som inte krävde allt för mycket ansträngning. Under många år var hon assistent åt en japansk journalist i Paris. Hon jobbade bara halva dagarna. Hon träffade Chris Marker då och då, deras vänskap höll i sig, men för tio år sedan hade han blivit rasande då hon lämnat ut hans adress till en person. Sedan dess var kontakten bruten.⁶³ Hon skrev hela tiden litterära texter, men det var inte längre möjligt att skriva på japanska. Hon skrev på franska men gjorde många grammatiska misstag. Hon upplevde hur hon hängde mellan de två språken men hur ideligen någon av fästpunkterna gav vika.

Harbin upptog hennes tankar. Hon visade mig diabilder projicerade direkt på väggen. De var från hennes resor tillbaka på 1990-talet. Bilderna liknade inte längre vykortet: Harbin var en stor kinesisk industristad. Den blandning av kulturer som hade funnits var borta även om en och annan byggnad stod kvar som äreminnen. Den mäktiga rysk-ortodoxa katedralen, St Sofia, hade omvandlats till museum. I

63. När min film var klar två månader senare skickade Kumiko en kopia till Chris Marker. Hon ringde honom och han var glad för vad som hänt, att filmen "uppsökts". Han gladdes också åt att de båda hade fått kontakt med varandra igen.

dilapidated house she found a half-blind old Russian woman, one of the few of the original Russian population who had remained after the war.⁶⁴

In one of the pictures from Harbin, one could see the backs of Kumiko and her traveling companion. They are standing in front of an industrial-looking building south of the city. It was here that the Japanese colonial power's Unit 731 had secretly performed horrific experiments on Chinese, Korean, and Russian prisoners, adults as well as children and old people. They had buried people alive, tested grenades on them, injected bacteria, vivisected them, amputated body parts in order to re-attach them, to name a few of the many horrifying ways in which they tested the human body's ability to resist sickness, pain, and sudden shock.⁶⁵

Eventually Kumiko also found her old neighbors from Harbin in Novosibirsk. She traveled there several times. She found one of the pretty sisters who was now a fat lady with her hair in a bun. Kumiko said that these trips, the meetings with people from Harbin, meant a turning point in her life, and that she had suddenly felt calm and settled after years of steadily grinding anxiety.

On the last day in Paris, Kumiko said that she wanted to write a new text for my video essay. She herself would record it and send it to me. She had not recorded for a film since Chris Marker's film essay, but now she was ready, she said. In *The Koumiko Mystery* she had said:

Violence is for me something easy, something simple.
Violence was born with human beings.
It is fundamentally tied to human life.
It is a natural force – no effort is needed for violence.
I am never afraid.
I am never hurt in the face of violence.
I simply die, otherwise I live.

She had been an *idiot* and deeply regretted it. She was ashamed.

64. Kumiko claimed in a later conversation in Paris (5/12/2009) that "two or maybe three" Russians were left in Harbin. The reason that the old woman was allowed to remain was that she had received Chinese citizenship since her medical knowledge was considered unique.

65. In a passage in *Sans soleil*, Chris Marker refers to another of the cruel experiments: They " / ... / exposed prisoners to the bitter frost of Manchuria and then to hot water so as to see how fast flesh separates from the bone."

ett nergånget hus hittade hon en gammal halvblind rysk kvinna, en av de få ur den ursprungliga ryska befolkningen som hade blivit kvar efter kriget.⁶⁴

På en av bilderna från Harbin såg man ryggtavlorna av Kumiko och hennes rese-sällskap. De står utanför en industriliknande byggnad söder om staden. Det var här den japanska kolonialmaktens ökända enhet 731 hade utfört fasansfulla experiment på kinesiska, koreanska och ryska fångar, såväl vuxna som barn och gamla. Man hade begravt människor levande, testat granater på dem, vivisekerat dem, amputerat kroppsdelar, injicerat bakterier, för att nämna några av de många fruktansvärda sätt man testade den mänskliga kroppens förmåga att stå emot sjukdom, smärta och plötsliga chocker.⁶⁵

Kumiko hittade slutligen också sina gamla grannar från Harbin i Novosibirsk. Hon reste dit flera gånger. Hon hittade en av de vackra systrarna som nu var en tjock tant med håret uppsatt i en knut. Kumiko sa att dessa resor, mötena med människor från Harbin, innebar en vändpunkt i livet, att hon plötsligt känt sig lugn och avklarnad efter år av ständigt malande oro.

Sista dagen i Paris sa Kumiko att hon ville skriva en ny text till min videoessä. Hon skulle själv läsa in den och skicka den till mig. Inte sedan Chris Markers filmessä hade hon läst för en film, men nu var hon redo, sa hon. I *Mysteriet Koumiko* hade hon sagt:

Väldet är för mig något lätt, något enkelt.
Väldet föddes med människan.
Det är i grunden knutet till mänskligt liv.
Det är en naturkraft – det behövs ingen ansträngning för våld.
Jag är aldrig rädd.
Inför våldet blir jag aldrig sårad.
Jag dör helt enkelt, annars lever jag.

Hon hade varit en *idiot* och ångrade sig djupt.

64. Kumiko hävdade i ett senare samtal i Paris (5/12 2009) att "två eller möjligen tre" ryssar finns kvar i Harbin. Anledningen att den gamla kvinnan tilläts bo kvar var att hon fått kinesiskt medborgarskap då hennes medicinska kunskaper ansågs unika.

65. Chris Marker refererar i en passage i *Sans soleil* till ett annat av de grymma experimenten: De "...exponerade fångar för Manchirets grymma frost och hällde sedan hett vatten över dem för att se hur snabbt köttet lossnar från benen."

The text that she wrote and recorded is extensive. It could become a small video essay in itself. I had to exclude some parts not because I didn't appreciate them, but because they wouldn't work in the structured exchange that I had established between Johnnie Walker and Kumiko. It is a literary text. It has rhythm, pauses, surprising images, and digressions. In particular, the text contains certain moments of hesitation. Such moments enact mood changes and her own reaction to her words. Sometimes there are places of uncertainty and hesitation that seem to belong to spoken language but that she had, in a remarkable way, written into the text. By having such control over the text, she was also capable of performing her reading with great confidence. I was overwhelmed, but not surprised, by the sound files and texts that she sent to me from Paris. I knew that Kumiko was an author, even if she had never worked as an author to any great extent.

In the part that I left out, Kumiko talks about how she wandered around in Hiroshima for three weeks. She knows all the bridges in the city, all the train stations and train lines. She says that in her thoughts, she constantly returns to Hiroshima, to August 6, 1945. "The sight of the slow and painful death of 38 000 living corpses, until evening. Until dawn." There is only one image she can stand: a soldier suffering from a wound, who receives morphine from a doctor: "Just relax...' His voice is so unbelievably soft, so full of tenderness. The wide eyes of the soldier are full of gratitude. In his body, already relaxed, soothed, a deep relief. /.../ I hold onto this image, this scene. I only feel like seeing this one image."

In the text, Kumiko says that she is glad she is no longer young, that she is more and more at peace with her life the older she has become. She knows that she is in the right place. Her existence is closer to the rhythm of place and time. She is satisfied with her appearance and her clothes; she only dresses in shades of grey and she knows that this becomes her.

But if anyone asks if they can film her, something happens inside her. Warning lights go on, the alarm sounds, she feels panic approach. Suddenly she sees herself with a cold, examining gaze. It is the gaze of the casting man that she assumes and directs toward herself. The terrible gaze moves "from head to toe, from toe to head,

Den text som hon skrev och läste in är omfattande och skulle i sig kunna bli en mindre videoessä. Jag fick välja bort några partier, inte för att jag inte uppskattade dem utanför att de inte skulle fungera i den växelstruktur mellan Johnnie Walker och Kumiko som jag hade upprättat. Det är en litterär text. Här finns rytm, pauseringar, illusoriska, ibland överraskande bilder och utvikningar. Inte minst finns i texten vissa moment av tvekan. I sådana partier finns sinnesförändringar och reaktioner inför de egna orden. Det är partier av osäkerhet och fördröjning som tycks tillhöra talspråket men som hon på ett anmärkningsvärt sätt skrivit in i texten. Genom att ha en sådan kontroll över texten var hon också kapabel att framföra sin läsning med stor säkerhet. Jag var överväldigad, men inte förvånad, när jag hörde de ljudfiler och läste de texter som hon lät skicka till mig från Paris. Jag visste att Kumiko var författare, även om hon aldrig i någon större utsträckning hade verkat som en sådan.

I det parti som jag valde bort talar Kumiko om hur hon vandrat omkring Hiroshima i tre veckor. Hon känner till alla broar i staden, alla tågstationer och tåglinjer. Hon säger att hon i sina tankar hela tiden återvänder till Hiroshima, till den sjätte augusti 1945. "Åsynen av de 38 000 levande döda i långsamt verkande plågor som varade till kvällen. Till gryningen. Hon lever med dessa bilder, men hon tycker inte om det. Enbart en bild står hon ut med: en skadad soldat som får morfin av en läkare: "Slappna av..." hans röst är så obegripligt mjuk, så full av ömhet. Soldatens vidöppna ögon utstrålar tacksamhet. I hans kropp, redan avslappnad, tröstad, en total befrielse. /.../ Jag dröjer mig kvar vid den här bilden, den här scenen. Jag känner att det är den enda bild jag vill se."⁶⁶

Kumiko talar i texten om att hon är glad att hon inte längre är ung, att hon blivit alltmer tillfreds med sitt liv ju äldre hon blivit. Hon vet att hon befinner sig på rätt plats. Hennes tillvaro befinner sig närmare rummets och tidens rytm. Hon är nöjd med sitt utseende och sina kläder, hon klär sig enbart i grå nyanser och hon vet att det passar henne.

Men om någon frågar om man får filma henne sker något inom henne. Varningslampor tänds, larmet går, hon känner paniken närma sig. Plötsligt ser hon på sig själv med en kall, granskande blick. Det är casting-mannens blick som hon övertar och riktar mot sig själv. Den fruktansvärda blicken rör sig "från topp till tå, från tå till

66. Min övers. (M.B.).

and then from head to toe again.” She tries to find an exterior form for herself in order to meet this (her own gaze), but she feels that her surface is pierced and goes up in smoke. She tries to call forth an idea about beauty, think about something wonderful that can be transposed from her interior to her exterior, but it is difficult. She feels sorry for herself, she suffers when she really wants to radiate strength, intelligence, and beauty, “like in the last photo of Virginia Woolf, a few days before her suicide.”⁶⁶

In Nora M. Alter’s monograph about Chris Marker from 2006, she says that Kumiko was only an excuse for Marker to be able to depict Japan at a time of change. Kumiko is no mystery, the title is a joking one. It was Japan, and not her person, that was interesting. Kumiko is even an ignorant character, her “.../ naïvité is shocking.”⁶⁷ Alter argues that Chris Marker’s final words in the film are a kind of apology for her “ignorance,” but as such are deeply problematic: “There are fifty million women in Japan. And on earth, one and a half billion.”⁶⁸ She comments drily: “As if ignorance is a matter of gender.”⁶⁹

It is hard to disregard this passage in an otherwise interesting monograph, one of the few that have been written about Marker (although not the first, as the back cover blurb claims). As I see it, it is Nora M. Alter who is “shockingly ignorant” and also insensitive in these comments. Alter seems not to understand Kumiko’s references to the historical and political situation in Manchuria, nor is she receptive to Kumiko’s porous text, so full of openings, humor, and simple beauty. It is also apparent that Marker both feels a connection to Kumiko and feels challenged by her. In an e-mail conversation with me half a year after my meeting with Kumiko in Paris, Chris Marker writes quite simply that Kumiko’s inability to improve her French is only one of the proofs of her strong character.⁷⁰

66. Translations from French to English by Jennifer Wong.

67. Nora M. Alter, *Chris Marker*, University of Illinois Press 2006, p. 40.

68. Chris Marker, *The Koumiko Mystery*.

69. *Ibid.*

70. In the same e-mail, Marker gives me permission to use his film images. He writes: “It happened twice in my life that a movie of mine begot another, and that it is the best thing that may happen to old movies.” (13/9, 2007).

topp och sedan från topp till tå igen.” Hon försöker hitta en yttre form åt sig själv för att möta denna blick – hennes egen blick – men hon upplever hur den genomborror och låter henne gå upp i rök. Hon försöker frammana en idé om skönhet, tänka på något underbart, något som kan förflyttas från hennes inre till hennes yttre, men det är svårt. Hon tycker synd om sig själv, hon lider när hon egentligen vill utstråla styrka, intelligens och skönhet, ”som i det sista fotot av Virginia Woolf dagarna innan hennes självmord”.

I Nora M. Alters monografi över Chris Marker från 2006 sägs att Kumiko bara var en förevändning för Marker att få skildra Japan i en brytningstid. Kumiko är inget mysterium, titeln är skämtsamt anlagd. Det var Japan och inte hennes person som var intressant. Kumiko är rent av en okunnig karaktär, hennes ”/.../ naivitet är chockerande.”⁶⁷ Alter menar att Chris Markers sista ord i filmen är ett slags ursäkt för hennes okunnighet men som sådan är djupt problematiska: ”Det finns femtio miljoner kvinnor i Japan. Och på jorden: en och en halv miljard.”⁶⁸ Syrligt kommenterar hon: ”Som om okunnighet är en fråga om kön.”⁶⁹

Det är svårt att nonchalera den här passagen i en annars intressant monografi, en av de få som gjorts om Marker (om än inte den första som baksidestexten vill göra gällande). Som jag ser det är det Nora M. Alter som är ”chockerande okunnig” och dessutom klumpig i dessa kommentarer. Alter tycks inte förstå Kumikos hänvisningar till den historiska och politiska situationen i Manchuriet, inte heller är hon mottaglig för Kumikos porösa text som är så full av öppningar, humor och enkel skönhet. Det är också uppenbart att Marker både känner en samhörighet med Kumiko och utmanas av henne. I en e-mailkonversation med mig ett halvår efter mitt möte med Kumiko i Paris skriver Chris Marker helt kort att Kumikos oförmåga att förbättra sin franska bara är ett av bevisen på hennes starka karaktär.⁷⁰

67. Nora M. Alter, *Chris Marker*, University of Illinois Press 2006, s. 40.

68. Chris Marker, *Mysteriet Koumiko*.

69. Ibid.

70. Marker ger mig i samma e-mail tillåtelse att använda hans filmbilder. Han skriver: "It happened twice in my life that a movie of mine begot another, and that it is the best thing that may happen to old movies" (13/9, 2007).

V.

When I decided to bring together the two narratives or the biographies about Johnnie Walker and Kumiko, I first thought that it could either become a test of how much violence was needed to make two such widely different stories about such different ways of life co-exist. Or else it could become a demonstrative form or model for the self-sufficiency of life narratives and biographies – the right to bring them together almost randomly, as a reminder that life stories always have a parallel existence, and that life paths, even aside from the fact that they sometimes converge for unfathomable reasons and cross each other, could be united without any requirements for intersection, tendency, or psychological relevance. The Romanian author Mircea Cărtărescu describes such a method in his novel *Orbitór: The Left Wing* (2002): If you punch a hole in a folded map with a needle, separate, incompatible geographies are united.⁷¹

After all, Chris Marker especially had pointed to a special potential of the film essay, a potential that otherwise is usually associated with the art discourse – but that of course actually derives from the Russian film avant-garde technique of montage – namely, the possibility to bring together, in such an imaginary or real space, a number of subjects, objects, phenomena, events, or narratives that don't seem to have any apparent relationship to each other except as a consequence of the artistic gesture of putting together and grouping.⁷²

But very little violence, and hardly any demonstrative gesture, was needed. The two life stories came to be linked together by a number of overlaps. These bridges or *switching stations* came about through Chris Marker's acts, particularly those geographical places in Tokyo that he had appropriated through his film essays, also through cats and dogs, through the Fool and through *kawaii* (the Cute). In the dialogue bet-

71. Mircea Cartarescu. *Orbitór: Vänster vinge*, Albert Bonniers Förlag 2002.

72. In an interview with Katja Silverman, Harun Farocki speaks of the fundamental differences between Soviet (ideological) film and American (entertainment) film. "Montage for the Soviets meant the juxtaposition of ideas. For the Americans it meant instead the juxtaposition of narrative components /.../ Soviet montage is very out of fashion these days. Only advertisement and political film use it." Harun Farocki and Katja Silverman, "To Love to Work and to Work to Love – A Conversation about Passion," *Discourse* 15 (Spring 1993), p. 63. To give a concrete example, when the narrator said that "the artist met Johnnie Walker," this was not illustrated by that scene, but rather with the situation where Nakata (the Fool) meets Johnnie Walker.

V.

När jag beslutade mig för att föra samman de båda berättelserna – eller biografierna – om Johnnie Walker och Kumiko tänkte jag först att det antingen skulle kunna ske som ett test av hur mycket våld som skulle behövas för att få två så skilda berättelser om så skilda livsmodi att samexistera. Eller så kunde det ske som demonstrativ form eller modell för livsberättelsers och biografiers självtillräcklighet – rätten att föra samman dem närmast slumpmässigt, för att påminna om att livshistorier alltid har en parallell existens, och att livsbanor, även bortsett från det faktum att de ibland av outgrundliga anledningar konvergerar och korsar varandra, skulle kunna förenas utan några som helst krav på samröre, tendens eller psykologisk relevans. Den rumänske författaren Mircea Cărtărescu beskriver en sådan metod i sin roman *Orbitór: Vänstervinge* (2002): om man med en nål sticker ett hål genom en hopvikt karta förenas skilda, inkompatibla geografier.⁷¹

Inte minst Chris Marker hade i sina arbeten visat på en speciell möjlighet för den filmiska essän, en möjlighet som annars vanligen brukar associeras med konstrummet – men som egentligen härrör från det ryska filmavantgardets montage teknik – nämligen möjligheten att i ett sådant imaginärt eller reellt rum föra samman ett antal ämnen, objekt, fenomen, händelser eller berättelser som inte ser ut att ha någon som helst uppenbar relation till varandra annat än som en konsekvens av den konstnärliga sammanförandets och grupperandets gest.⁷²

Men väldigt lite våld och knappast någon demonstrativ gest behövdes. Livsberättelserna kom att länkas samman av ett antal övergångar. Dessa bryggor eller *omkopplingsstationer* uppstod genom Chris Markers gärningar, inte minst genom de geografiska platser i Tokyo som han approprierat genom sina filmessäer. På ett liknande sätt tjänade katter och hundar, Dären (the Fool) och *kawaii* (the Cute). I dialogen

71. Mircea Cărtărescu. *Orbitór: Vänstervinge*, Albert Bonniers Förlag 2002.

72. Harun Farocki talar i en intervju med Katja Silverman om de grundläggande skillnaderna mellan sovjetisk (ideologisk) film och amerikansk (underhållnings-) film. "Montage för sovjeterna betyder sammanställningen av idéer. För amerikanerna betyder det istället sammanställningen av narrativa komponenter. Sovjetiskt montage är helt omodernt nu för tiden. Enbart reklam och politisk film använder det." Harun Farocki och Katja Silverman, "To Love to Work and to Work to Love – A Conversation about Passion", *Discourse* 15, våren 1993, s. 63 (min övers. M.B.).

ween different time planes, between Paris and Tokyo, between image and text, it was possible to set into motion small eruptions of meaning contamination between the characters, a contagion that temporarily flourished in different places in the narrative and was constantly moved and acquired new points of reference: The Artist could be mistaken for the narrator who could get the role of “Kumiko,” who might resemble the Fool, who in turn might be exchanged with the Artist while the Fool was linked to the Cute, like school children and cats, and cats and Chris Marker’s pseudonym, and so on.⁷³

Human beings’ relationship to pets is no simple thing, as both Marker and Haruki Murakami have emphasized. Pets represent cuteness, but also the possibility of contact with another level of reality. We live near pets, and we feel connected to them, but the pets also live in another world that we don’t know. They are faithful but they keep quiet about their secrets (except to Nakata and Kumiko). Sometimes they function as mirrors. Kumiko says in *The Koumiko Mystery* that her shifts in mood, between tenderness and brutality, are reflected in a subtle way in cats’ eyes. Dogs and cats might be seen as antagonists, but they have one thing in common: a blend of cuteness, closeness, and silence. In this combination lies their mysterious attraction.

The city of Tokyo, with its architecture, offered certain symbolic switching narratives between the two biographies, as well as between the two cities, Paris and Tokyo, between which a standing signal was established when Marker arrived in Tokyo from Paris. At the end of my video, when today’s Kumiko protests against the content of her text from 1964, I filmed Tokyo’s copy of the Eiffel tower, a tower that is thirteen meters higher than the original yet has the original orange color that can be seen on paintings of the Eiffel Tower when it was just erected.

The fact that both Kumiko and Johnnie Walker turned out to have spent their early years in Harbin, Manchuria, and that both existed as characters in works by other artists (one in a novel, the other in a documentary) was actually of lesser importance. I realized that it was possible to switch between the two narratives so that they also colored each other and created a common question that rose above the individual level. The question would have to do with how a human being handles him- or

73. A concret example would be when the reader said that “the artist met Johnnie Walker” and this was not illustrated with a corresponding scene but instead with the situation where Nakata (the Fool) meets Johnnie Walker.

mellan olika tidsplan, mellan Paris och Tokyo, mellan bild och text fanns möjligheten att sätta igång små utbrott av betydelsesmitta mellan karaktärerna, en smitta som sedan tillfälligt grasserade på olika platser i berättelsen och hela tiden förflyttades och fick nya fästpunkter: ”konstnären” kunde misstas för berättaren som förstås som ”Kumiko” som kunde likna ”Dären” som i sin tur kunde förväxlas med ”konstnären” samtidigt som ”Dären” länkades till ”The Cute” eller till skolbarn och katter – katten som är Chris Markers signatur – och så vidare.⁷³

Människans relation till husdjur inte är någon enkel sak, vilket både Marker och Murakami har framhållit. Husdjuren representerar gullighet men också möjligheten till en kontakt med en annan verklighetsnivå. Vi lever nära husdjuren, vi känner oss förbundna med dem, men husdjuren lever också i en annan värld som vi inte känner. De är trogna men de tiger om sina hemligheter (utom för Nakata och Kumiko). Ibland fungerar de som speglar. I *Mysteriet Koumiko* säger Kumiko att hennes känslökiftningar mellan ömhet och grymhet på ett subtilt sätt reflekteras i katters ögon. Hundar och katter må ses som antagonister, men en sak har de gemensamt: det gul-liga, närheten och tigandet. I denna kombination finns deras mystiska lockelse.

Även Tokyos arkitektur erbjöd vissa symboliska omkopplingar med Paris. Mellan de båda städerna hade en pågående korrespondens upprättats allt sedan Marker anlände till Tokyo från Paris. I slutet av min video, då Kumiko för dagen protesterar mot innehållet i hennes text från 1964, filmade jag Tokyos kopia av Eiffeltornet, ett torn som är tretton meter högre än förlagan och har den ursprungliga orangea färg som man kan se på målningar av Eiffeltornet när det var nyuppfört.

Att både Kumiko och Johnnie Walker visade sig ha tillbringat sina första år i Harbin i Manchuriet och att båda existerade som karaktärer i verk av andra konstnärer (den ena i en roman, den andra i en dokumentär) var egentligen av mindre betydelse. Jag insåg att det gick att växla mellan de två berättelserna så att de också färgade in varandra och skapade en gemensam fråga som höjde sig över det individuella. Frågan skulle handla om hur man som människa hanterar sitt jag i förhållande till en sociala situation som man upplever som tryckande.

73. För att ge ett konkret exempel: när uppläsaren talade om att ”konstnären träffade Johnnie Walker” illustrerades inte detta med en sådan scen, utan istället befinner man sig i den situation där Nakata (Dären) träffar Johnnie Walker.

herself in relation to a social situation that is experienced as oppressive.

One could say that both of these persons were *maladjusted*, if it didn't sound so depressing (the word has such a ring of repressiveness). But both had apparently, in different ways, created their own ways to rise above their apparent determinations, to the extent that these could be presumed. These transgressions were what I wanted to allow to act in the video essay. I wanted to test if it was possible to represent them like analogies; through different attempts with connections between text and action; through performative actions and statements by the narrator, and by placing the two narratives in a parallel position. The question that arises from these manoeuvres is: How were Kumiko and Johnnie Walker, in a kind of act of resistance, each able, in his or her own way, to create an alternative voice, an alternative ideology?

Johnnie Walker might give the impression of being an eclectic, "postmodern" character. In Murakami's novel, he has temporarily established an alliance with the whisky symbol, something that has happened mainly by chance. It surprised me that he so eagerly absorbed the fictitious character that Murakami had invented for him, and that he wanted to make it his own.

Johnnie Walker describes himself as a parrot that is constantly imitating. If he stays somewhere for a few days, he can behave as if he had lived there half of his life. He uses a variety of epithets, and official and unofficial titles.⁷⁴ Many people believe he is an American because of his accent and his American slang. I assumed that he had been in the United States a great deal (his mother and two siblings live there). But when I asked him, he replied that he hates the United States and has only been there for a few short periods. Later I realized that he has learned his American accent by imitating the American military base's radio station that he always listens to in the car.

As an older man (Johnnie Walker is always unclear about his age) he lives alone. He has no interest in gay culture. He says that he values friendship more highly. But even if he never calls himself gay, he has always been drawn to young men. He says it is a relationship that he has grown up with, and that it has to do with a relationship to the servants. In his life there have always been servants – and a dog.

74. Johnnie Walker is, among other things, Tokyo's representative for the Tate Modern Britain, director of A.R.T. (Artist Residence Tokyo). He calls himself "Queen," "Cannibal Queen," "Jewish mother," and "Servant"

Man skulle kunna säga att båda dessa personer var *missanpassade*, om det inte lät så deprimerande (ordet har en tydlig klang av repression). Men båda hade uppenbarligen på olika sätt, uppfunnit sina egna medel för att överskrida sina förmodade bestämmelser. Det var sådana överskridanden som jag ville låta agera i videoessän. Jag ville pröva om det gick att representera dem som analogier, genom olika försök med förbindelser mellan text och handling, genom performativa handlingar och utsagor med berättaren som subjekt och genom att parallellställa de två berättelserna. Den fråga som framträder ur dessa manövrar är: hur lyckades Kumiko och Johnnie Walker, i en form av motståndshandling, var och en på sitt sätt skapa en alternativ röst, ett alternativt språk, en alternativ ideologi åt sig själva?

Johnnie Walker ger kanske intrycket av att vara en eklektiskt sammansatt, post-modern karaktär. I Murakamis roman har han tillfälligt bildat allians med whisky-symbolen, något som mest tycks ha skett av en slump, och det förvånade mig att han så girigt sög åt sig av den fiktiva karaktär som Murakami uppfunnit åt honom – att han ville göra den till sin.

Själv beskriver sig Johnnie Walker som en papegoja som hela tiden härmar. Om han befinner sig på en plats några dagar kan han uppträda som om han bott där halva sitt liv. Han rör sig både med en mängd epitet och officiella och inofficiella titlar.⁷⁴ Många tror att han är amerikan på grund av hans accent och hans amerikanska slang. Jag tog för givet att han hade varit i USA en hel del (hans mor och två syskon bor där). Men när jag frågade svarade han att han avskyr USA och varit där enbart under några korta perioder. Efterhand förstod jag att hans amerikanska accent är imiterad från den amerikanska militärbasens radiostation som han alltid lyssnar på i bilen.

Som äldre man (Johnnie Walker uttrycker sig alltid oklart om sin ålder) lever han ensam. Han har inget intresse av gaykulturen. Han säger att han värdesätter vänskap högre. Men även om han aldrig kallar sig själv gay har han alltid dragits till unga män. Han säger att det är en relation som följt honom sedan uppväxten och att det handlar om en relation till tjänarna (the servants). I hans liv har det alltid funnits tjänare och en hund.

74. Johnnie Walker är bland annat Tokyos representant för Tate Modern Britain, chef för A.R.T. (Artist Residence Tokyo). Förutom "Queen" kallar han sig även för "Cannibal Queen", "Jewish mother" och "Servant".

“When I was growing up, I slept in the same bed with the servants and I have continued to do so all of my life, with the difference that now I’m the one who is a servant.” He sees such a relationship as a “Master servant’s” relationship to the other servants. Johnnie Walker returns to this; he himself is a “Jewish mother” and his (real) name means “the one who serves” (*jo-ni*). He refers to the Jewish myth that says that fate is inscribed in a proper noun.⁷⁵

Johnnie Walker’s identity seems not to fit into (or to float above) the society in which he lives. But is he really more eclectic than others? We all work with a number of different relational selves and have a repertory of voices in different versions. We all fabricate our life narratives. And presumably we all have an underlying self that makes itself known as a substratum under those voices we try on, something that doesn’t change in the play with identity and that can be called a person’s “charisma.” As a character, Johnnie Walker is very distinct. He imitates his surroundings, but mainly to caricature them and confront them. He is probably the least accommodating person I have met. In that sense he is much less postmodern than most of us. If Zelig, Woody Allen’s character from the film with the same name, is the most post-modern and relativistic individual the totally globalizing, liberal citizen who, like a chameleon, takes on the color of his surroundings in every situation, then Johnnie Walker is his opposite. Johnnie Walker invents his biography over and over again, he

75. Serving and homosexuality constantly recur in Johnnie Walker’s anecdotes. According to one of them, he was invited to an art institution in Vienna. A very correct curator had been asked to take care of the remarkable guest. The man wanted to show himself from his best side and immediately began to explain to Johnnie Walker what the genuinely Austrian culture consisted of, that is a café culture. He said that every day for the last fifteen years, he had visited the same elegant café and that the same waiter – Heinrich – always, without uttering a word, served him a cup of coffee along with the daily paper and then unfolded a linen napkin in his lap. Johnnie Walker then wondered whether it hadn’t occurred to the curator that the waiter Heinrich might have other reasons for these intimate gestures. The man first looked aghast but then gave Johnnie Walker a condescending glance and said: “My dear fellow, you don’t understand, and one could hardly expect you to. No one who hasn’t grown up here understands this culture.” The curator thought he was being polite when he summoned up the courage to take Johnnie Walker to a gay bar in the evening. He couldn’t know that Johnnie Walker is completely uninterested in such places. Johnnie Walker, for his part, didn’t want to embarrass the man but pretended to be grateful. When they left the place after a quick drink, they saw the back of an older man with his arm around a young leather-clad gay man in the entryway. The curator had forgotten his umbrella and went back into the bar. Johnnie Walker waited outside. Johnnie Walker saw the curator come out of the bar and how the older man, who stood tenderly leaning toward the leather-clad one, turned around and met the curator’s glance. The curator stumbled out of the bar, chalk-white in the face; he came up to Johnnie Walker and hissed: “My God, that was Heinrich!”

”När jag växte upp sov jag i samma säng som tjänarna och det har jag fortsatt med livet igenom, med den skillnaden att nu är det jag som är tjänare.” En sådan relation ser han som en ”mästertjänares” relation till tjänarna. Johnnie Walker återkommer till detta; han själv är en ”Jewish mother” och hans (riktiga) namn betyder ”den som tjänar” [*jo-ni*]. Han hänvisar till den judiska myt som säger att ödet finns inskrivet i egenamnet.⁷⁵

Johnnie Walkers identitet tycks inte passa in i (eller flyta ovanpå) det samhälle han lever i. Men är han egentligen mer eklektiskt sammansatt än andra? Vi laborerar alla med ett antal olika relationella jag och håller oss med en röst i flera utföranden. Vi fabricerar alla våra livsberättelser. Och vi har förmodligen alla ett underliggande jag, som ger sig till känna som ett substrat under rösterna som vi prövar, något som inte förändras i identitesspelet och kallas för ”en människas utstrålning”. Som karaktär är Johnnie Walker också ytterst distinkt. Han härmar omgivningen, men mest för att karikera och konfrontera den. Han är antagligen den minst anpassliga människa som jag har träffat. I den meningen är han mycket mindre postmodern än de flesta av oss. Om Zelig, Woody Allens karaktär från filmen med samma namn, är den mest postmoderne och relativiserande individen jag kan tänka mig – den totalt globaliserade, liberale medborgaren som likt en kameleont antar omgivningens färg i varje situation – så är Johnnie Walker i det närmaste hans motsats. Johnnie Walker uppfinnar visserligen sin biografi om och om igen, härmar främlingar och verkar inte höra

75 Tjänandet och homosexualiteten återkommer ständigt i Johnnie Walkers anekdoter. Enligt en av dem hade han blivit inbjuden till en konstinstitution i Wien. En mycket korrekt intendent hade blivit ombedd att ta hand om den märkliga gästen. Mannen ville visa sig från sin bästa sida och gav sig genast i kast med att förklara för Johnnie Walker varför det genuint österrikiska bestod, nämligen kafékulturen. Han berättade att han varje dag i femton års tid besökt ett och samma eleganta kafé och att samme kypare – Heinrich – alltid, utan att yttra ett ord, ställde fram kaffekoppen tillsammans med dagstidningen och sedan vek upp en linneservett i hans knä. Johnnie Walker undrade då om intendenten möjligen inte tänkt på att servitören Heinrich kunde ha andra skäl för dessa intima gester. Mannen såg först förskräckt ut men gav sedan Johnnie Walker en överseende blick och sa: ”Käre du, du förstår inte, och det kan man knappast begära. Ingen som inte växt upp här förstår denna kultur.” Intendenten trodde att han var artig när han uppbadade mod för att ta Johnnie Walker till en gaybar på kvällen. Han kunde inte veta att Johnnie Walker är helt ointresserad av sådana ställen. Johnnie Walker ville å sin sida inte genera mannen utan spelade tacksam. När de lämnade stället efter en snabb drink såg de i entrén ryggtaflan av en äldre man med armen om en ung läderbög. Intendenten hade glömt sitt paraply och gick tillbaka in i baren. Johnnie Walker väntade utanför. Johnnie Walker såg intendenten komma ut ur baren och hur den äldre mannen, som stod ömt lutad mot läderbögen vände sig om och mötte intendentens blick. Intendenten snubblade ut ur baren, kritvit i ansiktet, han kom fram till Johnnie Walker och väste: ”Herregud, det var ju Heinrich!”

imitates strangers and doesn't seem to belong anywhere, but he meets everyone with the same rough, diva-like manner. Wherever he goes, there is the same penetrating voice and loud laugh, the same sandals and cap, the same sudden exclamations and dramatic gestures, the same dirty jokes and self-enhancing anecdotes, the same lack of tact and manners.

Nietzsche saw a pluralisation of the narrative patterns that earlier were considered binding as a form of value destruction. The genre of modern man is comedy, he said. It makes life “/.../ a carnival in great style, spiritual masquerade laughter and pride, it swings life to the transcendental heights of maximum weak-mindedness and the aristophanic world mockery.”⁷⁶ It becomes impossible for the actor to talk about his and others' lives in an authentic way.⁷⁷

But one can hardly talk about the roles, the “masks,” as false anymore; rather they are more-or-less well integrated and convincing. They are part of a set of tools (and protections) that a person uses in order to survive as a social being, and they are created from memories and experiences in negotiation with the surroundings. As constructions they are just as artificial or genuine as the various components of one's own biography, life narrative – or, to be more exact here the narrative that the Danish philosopher Peter Kemp calls the *founding narrative*, which has an ethical dimension since it is ultimately about a person's idea of the good life. Such a narrative must be seen as an answer to the context to which one belongs and to which one tries to relate. Socialization and finding oneself also involve, of course, becoming a stranger to oneself. When one tells the story about oneself, one also becomes another who looks at the self. If, like Johnnie Walker, one is always considered a “person from outside,” it must also be difficult to understand the binding, authentic patterns of which one is supposed to be a historical part, especially if one has also become distanced from one's family.

Kumiko, for her part, has her roots in a land that doesn't exist (Manchukuo), and in a way never existed, except as a proclamation. “The state of brothers” that rested on “The Harmony of the Five Races” (*Gozoku Kyowa*) included cosmopolitan, mixed

76. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Kritische Studienausgabe*, Vol 5 V, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, Gruyter 1988, p. 157. Cited in Zagorka Živković, “Etik som reflektion och avgörande,” *Divan* no. 3, November 1991, p. 37.

77. Zagorka Živković, *ibid.*

hemma någonstans, men han bemöter alla med samma burdusa, diviga manér. Var han kommer är det samma genomträngande röst och bullriga skratt, samma sandaler och keps, samma plötsliga utrop och yviga gester, samma snuskiga skämt och självhävdande anekdoter, samma brist på takt och fason.

Nietzsche såg pluraliseringen av de narrativa mönster som tidigare uppfattats som bindande som en form av värdeförstörelse. Den moderna människans genre är komedin, menade han. Den gör livet till ”en karneval i stor stil, andligt maskeradskrätt och övermod, den svingar livet till den maximala svagsinnetens och det aristofaniska världshånets transcendentala höjder.”⁷⁶ Det blir omöjligt för skådespelaren att berätta om sitt och andras liv på ett autentiskt sätt.⁷⁷

Men man kan knappast längre tala om rollerna, ”maskerna” som falska, däremot mer eller mindre välintegrerade och övertygande. De ingår i en uppsättning verktyg (och skydd) som en människa använder sig av för att överleva som social varelse och de skapas utifrån minnen och erfarenheter i förhandling med omgivningen. Såsom konstruktioner är de lika artificiella eller äkta som de olika komponenterna i den egna biografien, livsberättelsen – eller för att vara mer exakt – den berättelse som den danske filosofen Peter Kemp benämner *grundberättelsen*, vilken har en etisk dimension då den ytterst handlar om en människas föreställning om det goda livet. En sådan berättelse måste ses som ett svar på det sammanhang man är en del av och som man försöker förhålla sig till. Socialisering och självförverkligande, innebär också förstås självförfrämmande. När man berättar (historien) om sig själv blir man också en annan som iakttar sig själv. Om man som Johnnie Walker för alltid betraktas som ”person utifrån” måste man dessutom ha svårt att uppfatta de bindande, autentiska mönster som man skulle vara en historisk del av, inte minst om man dessutom skurits av från sin familj.

Kumiko har å sin sida sina rötter i ett land som inte finns (Manchukuo) och på sätt och vis aldrig funnits annat än som proklamation. ”Förbrödringens stat” som vilade på ”De Fem Rasernas Harmoni” [*Gozoku Kyowa*] rymde kosmopolitiska, blandade

76. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Kritische Studienausgabe*, Hrsg. Colli/Montinari, *Band V*, red. Giorgio Colli och Mazzino Montinari, Gruyter 1988, s. 157. Citerad i Zagorka Živković, ”Etik som reflektion och avgörande”, *Divan* nr. 3, november 1991, s. 37.

77. Zagorka Živković, *ibid*.

cities like Harbin with masses of co-existing cultures, but was simultaneously a cruel colony with oppression and slavery. In Japan, she could never adapt and find an acceptable role. Kumiko told me that she now considers herself mainly a Frenchwoman. It has to do with the language and the voice, she explained. When she speaks Japanese, she becomes reserved and speaks with a light voice, more quietly. Her French voice, on the other hand, is deep and resonant, her gestures are different.

The reading, and along with that, the role of the narrator and the narrative voice in the video essay, became a crucial act that is connected to these roles and assumption of roles. Both Kumiko and Johnnie Walker appear as readers and speak from their “selves.”⁷⁸ But the most important reader is the anonymous reader whose face is never completely visible in the picture, an older woman who turns pages and moves forward in the text, sometimes with a certain hesitation but always with feeling. It is a voice with an Australian-Japanese accent that relates statements about “the text,” “I,” “we,” “the Artist,” Chris Marker, and the characters of the narratives. She stresses that she is only helping, that she is a medium, that it is ‘the Artist’ who is responsible for the text.

The reader was a woman named Tomoko Nakayama. It was the first time she read for a film, and I found that her voice had a fantastic intonation. Johnnie Walker was very excited when he realized who the reader was – a reader who also writes the title of the work (the names) on her arm. Tomoko Nakayama belongs to one of the wealthiest families in Tokyo, and Johnnie Walker considers the Nakayama family to be aristocratic. To write text on the body, like tattooing, is taboo within the aristocracy, according to Johnnie Walker. (I didn’t know about this taboo, I just wanted the title, with the names, to be present during the film, as a reminder.)

But even if the reader is only a medium, I wanted her to appear and give a body to the usually anonymous narrator. She can be seen as a synthesis of the puppeteer and the narrator in a bunraku performance. One acts openly on the stage during the performance and presents the story, but keeps his face hidden; the other sits (also visible)

78. In Johnnie Walker’s case, a self that was given to him by a famous author; in Kumiko’s case, an “historical self” as well as a self that she herself inscribes into the narrative through her reading (but over which I, as the author of the work, still exert control).

städer som Harbin med mängder av samexisterande kulturer, men var samtidigt en grym koloni med förtryck och slaveri. I Japan kunde hon aldrig anpassa sig och finna en acceptabel roll. Kumiko berättade för mig att hon nu ser sig främst som fransyska. Det har med språket och rösten att göra, förklarade hon. När hon talar japanska blir hon återhållen och talar med ljus röst, tystare. Hennes franska röst däremot är djup och full av resonans, hennes gester är annorlunda. Den franska rösten är inte sannare men lättare och friare.

En avgörande handling, som hör ihop med dessa roller och rollövertaganden, blev läsandet och därmed berättarens och berättarröstens roll i videoessän. Både Kumiko och Johnnie Walker framträder som läsare och talar utifrån sina ”jag”.⁷⁸ Men den viktigaste läsaren är den anonyma berättare vars ansikte aldrig helt syns i bild, en äldre kvinna som vänder blad och rör sig framåt i texten, ibland med en viss tveksamhet men alltid med inlevelse. Det är en röst med australiensisk-japansk brytning som framför utsagor om ”texten”, ”jag”, ”vi”, ”konstnären”, ”Chris Marker” och berättelsernas karaktärer. Hon poängterar att hon bara hjälper till, att hon är ett medium, att det är ”konstnären” som är ansvarig för texten.

Uppläsaren var en kvinna vid namn Tomoko Nakayama. Det var första gången hon gjorde en läsning för en film och jag fann att hennes röst hade en fantastisk intonation. Johnnie Walker blev eld och lågor när han förstod vem uppläsaren var, en uppläsare som dessutom skriver verkets titel (namnen) på sin arm. Tomoko Nakayama tillhör en av de rikaste familjerna i Tokyo och Johnnie Walker betraktar Nakayamafamiljen som aristokratisk. Att skriva text på kroppen är, i likhet med tatuering, ett tabu inom aristokratin, enligt Johnnie Walker. (Jag kände inte till det här tabut, jag ville bara att titeln med sina namn skulle vara närvarande under filmen, som en påminnelse.)

Men även om uppläsaren bara är ett medel ville jag att hon skulle framträda och ge kropp åt den vanligtvis anonyma berättaren. Hon kan ses som en syntes av dockspelaren och uppläsaren i en *bunraku*-föreställning. Den ene agerar öppet på scenen under föreställningen och framställer berättelsen, men behåller sitt ansikte

78. I Johnnie Walkers fall ett jag som skänkts honom av en berömd författare, i Kumikos fall ett ”historiskt jag” samt ett jag som hon själv skriver in i berättelsen genom sin textuppläsning (men som jag som verkets upphovsman ändå utövar kontroll över).

at a podium at the side of the stage, reads and turns pages in the text, and functions as a medium for the story. But in contrast to the puppeteer and the narrator in bunraku performance, she has also been given a subject in my video essay – a “self,” even if it is vague and unstable and moves between time periods.

Since the narrator constantly quotes Kumiko’s answers to Chris Marker, she risks losing her self and becoming one with Kumiko. It is a fusion that increases as the video essay continues. At the end, it is barely possible to separate her self from Kumiko, when she completely devotes herself to repeating Kumiko’s words from 1964. She reads up to the point where today’s Kumiko in Paris protests against the content of the text.

The reason why I wanted to point out this (unfinished) story of tension and pain was that it was actualized by Johnnie Walker’s and Kumiko’s movements between different voices. Here was also the question of an assault that has certain potential resonances with the story.

VI

In a space between Kumiko and Johnnie Walker, a third character arose, more generic in nature. I called it the *Cute*. The *Cute* (*kawaii* in Japanese) is crystallized as a result and an aspect of relationships in the story. The Cute seemed to speak to the story from different directions: for example, the cats at the temple that Bacon looks at, drooling; Kumiko’s kittens; the old Nakata in Haruki Murakami’s tale; the school-children on the commuter trains, the girls with stuffed animals who parade around at Harajuku, and the cute elements in the city image.

The Cute here acquired several open meanings. Several of them can be linked to the discussions sociologist Carl Cassegård has carried on about the culture of cuteness in Japan. Cuteness – and here he refers to the art critic Noi Savaragi – can be seen as a defensive behaviour in animals and children, but also in older people. “The same cuteness could be seen in Emperor Hiroito when he lay on his deathbed.”⁷⁹ The emperor had nothing left of his “divine power” but he was still popular, and this popularity was based on “/.../ his defencelessness, the disarming cuteness that often

79. Cassegård, “Från gullighetskult till nationalism.” He is referring to: Noi Sawaragi, “Dangerously Cute: Noi Sawaragi and Fumio Nanjo Discuss Contemporary Japanese Culture,” *Flash Art*, no. 163, Mar.–Apr. 1992.

dolt, den andre sitter (också synlig) på ett podium vid sidan av scenen och läser och vänder blad i texten och fungerar som medium för berättelsen. Men till skillnad från dockspelaren och uppläsaren i *bunraku*-föreställningen har hon i min videoessä även försetts med ett subjekt i berättelsen – ett ”jag”, även om det är vagt och instabilt och rör sig mellan tidsperioder.

Eftersom berättaren ideligen citerar Kumikos svar till Chris Marker riskerar hon att förlora sitt jag och bli ett med ”Kumiko”. Det är en fusionering som ökar i takt med att videoessän fortgår. I slutet går det knappast längre skilja hennes jag från ”Kumiko”, då hon helt kommit att upprepa Kumikos ord från 1964. Hon läser till den punkt då dagens Kumiko i Paris protesterar mot innehållet i texten.

Skälet till att jag ville påminna om denna (oavslutade) historia av spänning och kval var att den aktualiserades av Johnnie Walkers och Kumikos förflyttningar mellan olika röster. Här fanns också en fråga om ett övergrepp som har vissa möjliga resonanser med berättelsen.

VI

I ett utrymme mellan Kumiko och Johnnie Walker uppstod en tredje karaktär, mer generisk till sin natur – jag kallade den *The Cute*. *The Cute* (*kawaii* på japanska) utkristalliserades som en konsekvens och en aspekt av relationer i berättelsen. *The Cute* tycktes tala till berättelsen från olika håll: katterna vid templet som Bacon iakttar dreglande, Kumikos kattungar, den gamle Nakata i Haruki Murakamis berättelse, skolbarnen på pendeltågen, flickorna med gosedjur som visar upp sig vid Harajuku och de gulliga elementen i stadsbilden.

The Cute får här flera, öppna betydelser. Flera av dem kan länkas till de diskussioner som sociologen Carl Cassegård för om gullighetskulturen i Japan. Gullighet – och här hänvisar han till konstkritikern Noi Sawaragi – kan ses som ett försvarsbeetende hos djur och barn men även hos äldre människor. ”Samma gullighet kunde ses hos kejsare Hiroito då denne låg på sin dödsbädd”.⁷⁹ Kejsaren hade inget kvar av sin ”gudomliga makt” men ändå var han populär och denna popularitet grundades i ”/.../ hans försvarslöshet, i den avväpnande ’gullighet’ som ofta utmärker äldre

79. Cassegård, ”Från gullighetskult till nationalism”. Han refererar till Noi Sawaragi, ”Dangerously Cute: Noi Sawaragi and Fumio Nanjo Discuss Contemporary Japanese Culture”, *Flash Art*, nr. 163, Mar.–Apr. 1992.

defines older people.”⁸⁰ The pictures that circulated of the emperor as a cute little man smelling flowers in his garden were well liked. The image of the withering emperor among budding flowers also encompasses a classic Japanese aesthetic that is about love of the transitory (*mono no aware*), according to Cassegård. The cuteness, paired with love of the transitory, made the memory of the emperor’s militarism and cruel war dissolve in a conciliatory mist.

Savaragi argues that the cuteness cult exists on all levels. In Japan, “even the motorcycle gangs carry cute little dolls.”⁸¹ And this cuteness cult can be linked to the hatred of strangers and lack of openness, an absence of exteriority, according to him. As a countermove, he sees Japanese pop art in the spirit of Takashi Murakami (Yoshimoto Nara, Chiho Aoshima, Yukinori Yanagi), which creates a possibility of self-reflection by bringing an “evil intention.” The cuteness is transposed by these artists through “evil elements” which create a satire of cuteness.⁸²

The Cute has roots in the nursery, but in its present shape in Japan stems rather from the teenage room. One could say that it is intimately connected to the visual and mental aspects of the teenage room. The walls of the teenage room are covered with posters, stickers, private photographs, concert tickets, pennants, flags, clippings, schedules, drawings, pictures of idols, autographs, scribbles, postcards, poems, aphorisms... Part is added to part, the collection is expanded, changes, and forms a kind of map of the imagined self. This ability to communicate via objects hardly disappears in adults; rather it is developed and, in certain cases, refined – yet this space has to be considered a unique zone (“whoever crosses this line will die”). It is a separate room to which one retreats. Only the computer upholds the connection to the outside world.⁸³

In Japan, there is a name for someone who should have left the teenage room but

80. Ibid.

81. Ibid.

82. Murakami’s works, which follow his *Superflat Manifesto*, are usually completely transparent in relation to their originals in the manga and *otaku* culture – it is hard to find a critical distance. Murakami’s sculptures may seem to be luxury versions of figures (mass produced and in smaller format) that can be bought in shops like Mandarake and Kiddyland. The other Japanese pop art scene (which dominates the contemporary scene) is also, on the surface, more decorative than political.

83. See Magnus Bårtås and Fredrik Ekman; “The Mental Teenage Room,” *Index magazine*, no. 2 1996.

människor”.⁸⁰ Fotografierna som spreds av kejsaren som en liten gullig gubbe som luktade på blommor i sin trädgård var mycket omtyckta. Bilden av den vissnande kejsaren bland knoppande blommor rymmer också en klassisk japansk estetik som handlar om kärlek till det förgängliga (*mono no aware*), menar Cassegård. Gulligheten parad med kärleken till det förgängliga fick minnet av kejsarens militarism och grymma krig att upplösas i ett försonande dis.

Sawaragi menar att gullighetskulten finns på alla nivåer. I Japan ”bär till och med mc-gängen på små söta dockor”.⁸¹ Och denna gullighetskult kan kopplas till främlingsfientlighet och brist på öppenhet, en frånvaro av exterioritet, menar han. Som ett motdrag ser han den japanska popkonst i Takashi Murakamis anda (Yoshimoto Nara, Chiho Aoshima, Yukinori Yanagi) som genom att tillföra en ”elak intention” skapar en möjlighet till självreflektion. Gulligheten förskjuts av dessa konstnärer med hjälp av ”onda element” vilket kan resultera i en satir över gulligheten.⁸²

The Cute har sin rot i barnkammaren men utgår, i sin nuvarande skepnad i Japan, snarare från tonårsrummet. Man kan säga att den är intimt förbunden med tonårsrummets visuella och mentala aspekter. Tonårsrummets väggar är täckta av affischer, klistermärken, privata fotografier, konsertbiljetter, vimplar, flaggor, urklipp, scheman, teckningar, idolbilder, autografer, klotter, vykort, dikter, aforismer... Del läggs till del, samlingen byggs ut, förändras och bildar en sorts kartbild över det tänkta jaget. Denna förmåga att kommunicera via tingen försvinner ju knappast hos vuxna, snarare utvecklas den och, i vissa fall, förfinas – ändå måste detta rum betraktas som en helt egen zon (”den som träder över denna linje ska döden dö”). Det är ett avskilt rum där man drar sig undan. Enbart datorn upprättar förbindelsen med omvärlden.⁸³

I Japan gavs ett namn åt den som borde ha stigit ut ur tonårsrummet men av

80. Ibid.

81. Ibid.

82. Murakamis arbeten, som lyder under hans *Superflat Manifesto*, är oftast helt transparenta i förhållande till sina förlagor i manga- och *otaku*-kulturen och det är svårt att uppfatta en kritisk distans. Murakamis skulpturer kan framstå för som lyxversioner av figurer (massproducerade och i mindre format) som man kan köpa i affärer som Mandarake och Kiddyland. Även den övriga japanska popkonstscenen (vilken dominerar samtidsscenen) är på ytan mer dekorativ än politisk.

83. Se Magnus Bårtås & Fredrik Ekman, "Det mentala tonårsrummet", *Tidskriften Index*, nr 2 1996.

for some reason has remained there: *otaku*. The otaku-word is used as a polite way to address someone whose social position towards you you do not yet know. The etymological meaning of the word is partly “you” and partly “someone’s home.” According to the Japanese author Nakamori, otaku became the name of a new type of human being who grew up during the bubble economy in Japan of the 1980s. “They let themselves be captured by the information society.”⁸⁴

An otaku has, according to Nakamori, relinquished social conscience and devotes himself or herself to his or her interests fulltime. What separates the otaku from the usual hobbyist or collector is that the interest in a certain specific thing or phenomenon overshadows everything else; the interest is, quite simply, the otaku’s life. An otaku might, for example, devote all of his or her waking time to worshipping some of the pop idols that flood the music market in Japan, or devote him- or herself exclusively to computer games, collecting manga serials, or building models.

In Jean-Jacques Beineix’s and Jackie Bastide’s documentary *Otaku* from 1993, we meet a man who dropped out of his medical studies at the university in order to completely devote himself to building model airplanes. Every day he begins by putting on his white coat, taking out a new building-set box and sitting down at his work table to assemble yet another airplane. His travels into the landscape of childhood are, he says, mainly a way of escaping from society’s expectations of the individual, the demands for fitting in, of growing up. All of his friends have left him, he has become a recluse; the only one who follows him on his solitary journey is his wife, who stoically accepts his choice of life path.

In the film, a young man is interviewed who compensates for his lack of contact with the opposite sex by socializing exclusively with dolls. The dolls are precious, minutely executed copies of female amateur models, often schoolgirls in their young teens. We follow the photographing of a teenage girl in a bikini and the finished result in the form of a doll. The young man has more than two hundred dolls in his collection and talks about them as if they were living creatures. He says that even if they can’t answer him, he can imagine that they talk to him. He escapes the emotional weight of being hurt, of being rejected; something that a real woman is able to do. His favourite doll is a copy of the heroine of an animated film. She is the favourite

84. Interview in Jean-Jacques Beineix and Jackie Bastide’s documentary *Otaku* from 1993.

något skäl blivit kvar: *otaku*. Otaku-ordet används som ett artigt sätt att tilltala någon vars sociala position man ännu är osäker på men har nu också fått en ny betydelse. Ordets etymologiska betydelse är dels ”ni” och dels ”någons hem”. Otaku blev, enligt den japanske författaren Akio Nakamori, benämningen på en ny människotyp som växte fram under bubbelekonomin i åttiotalets Japan. ”De lät sig liksom fångslas av informationssamhället”.⁸⁴

En otaku har enligt Nakamori av sagt sig sitt samhällsansvar och ägnar sig åt sina intressen på heltid. Det som skiljer otakun från den vanlige hobbyutövaren eller samlaren, är att intresset för en viss sak eller företeelse överskuggar allt annat: intresset är helt enkelt otakuns liv. En otaku kan exempelvis ägna all sin vakna tid åt att dyrka någon av de popidoler som översvämmar musikmarknaden i Japan, att uteslutande ägna sig åt datorspel, samla på manga-serietidningar eller bygga modeller.

I Jean-Jacques Beineix’ och Jackie Bastides dokumentär *Otaku* från 1993, får vi möta en man som hoppat av sina universitetsstudier i medicin i syfte att helt kunna ägna sig åt att bygga flygplansmodeller. Varje dag inleds med att han sätter på sig sin vita rock, tar fram en ny byggsatskartong och slå sig ner vid arbetsbordet för att sätta ihop ännu ett flygplan. Hans resa in i barndomens landskap är enligt honom själv främst ett sätt att undandra sig samhällets förväntningar på individen; kraven att man ska inordna sig, bli vuxen. Alla hans vänner har lämnat honom, han har blivit en enstöring; den enda som följer honom på hans ensamma vandring är hans fru, som stoiskt accepterar hans livsväg.

I filmen intervjuas också en ung man som ersätter sin brist på kontakt med det motsatta könet genom att umgås uteslutande med dockor. Dockorna är dyrbara, minutiöst utförda kopior av kvinnliga amatörmodeller, ofta skolflickor i de yngre tonåren. Man får följa fotograferingen av en tonårsflicka i bikini och det färdiga resultatet i dockform. Den unge mannen har över tvåhundra dockor i sin samling och talar om dem som om de vore levande varelser. Han säger att även om de inte kan svara honom, kan han föreställa sig i sitt inre att de talar till honom. Han slipper den känslomässiga tyngden av att bli sårad, att avvisas; något en verklig kvinna har förmåga att göra. Hans favoritdocka är en kopia av hjältinnan i en tecknad film. Hon är favorit av det skälet att hon tycks, som han säger, vilja bli omhändertagen; hon är

84. Intervju i Jean-Jacques Beineix och Jackie Bastides dokumentär *Otaku* från 1993.

because she seems, as he says, to want to be taken care of; she needs a caretaker.

The otaku has shut the door behind him and lives in a layer of technology, alone among his dreams and desires. But the otaku says, “I’m alone but not lonely.”⁸⁵ If, in the documentary from 1993, he is presented at times as a freak and at times as an unfathomable dreamer, today he – or nowadays just as often *she* – is part of a mass movement.

When the Japanese artist Takashi Murakami makes his breakthrough in the middle of the 1990s, most people have become aware of the commercial potential of the otaku. The otaku is now no longer a passive consumer, but also a producer of the *soft power* that is conquering the world.

Takashi Murakami crowned himself the “king of *otakus* – *Otaking*” and with his business, Kaikai Kiki, has two gigantic studios with a multitude of assistants who symbolically link East and West; one in Tokyo and one in New York. Murakami creates inflatable sculptures and paintings of the same figures, designs handbags for Luis Vuitton, and manufactures his luxury versions of stuffed animals. He does not add anything to this culture; he copies it, makes it more expensive, and inflates its scale. Murakami talks about scientific investigations that show that big heads and eyes, small noses and mouths are a pattern that unite the offspring of many animal species. His cute sculptures and paintings appeal to our parental instincts.⁸⁶ He says that his figures are generic portraits of a specific mentality. About his Mr. DOB figure, a Mickey Mouse look-a-like, he says: “He is cute but doesn’t mean anything. He doesn’t understand anything about life, sexuality, and reality.”⁸⁷

The Cute manifests itself everywhere in Tokyo – in advertising, clothes, costumes, objects that people carry with them, informational signs, vehicles, and architecture. The cuteness both attracted and repelled me. I was also confused by the unclear boundaries between the soft/cute and the hard. Prohibition signs and power symbols

85. Volker Grassmuck, “I’m Alone, But Not Lonely’, Japanese *Otaku*-kids colonize the Realm of Information and Media, A Tale of Sex and Crime from a Faraway Place,” 1990, <http://waste.informatik.hu-berlin.de/grassmuck/texts/otaku.e.html>, (15/2 2010).

86. Interview with Andrea Bellini and Chiara Leoni, “Takashi Murakami. A Japanese Character,” *FlashArt* No. 249 2006. http://www.flashartonline.com/OnWeb/TAKASHI_MURAKAMI.htm

87. Monty DiPietro, “Takashi Murakami at Parco Gallery,” <http://www.assemblylanguage.com/reviews/Murakami.html> (1/10 2009).

i behov av en vårdare.

Otakun har stängt dörren om sig och lever i ett schakt av teknik, ensam bland sina drömmar och lidelser. Men otakun säger ”I’m alone but not lonely”.⁸⁵ Om han i dokumentären från 1993 framställs som ömsom freak, ömsom outgrundlig drömmare är han –numera lika ofta en hon – idag en del av en massrörelse.

När den japanske konstnären Takashi Murakami slår igenom i mitten på 1990-talet har de flesta blivit varse otakuns kommersiella potential. Otakun är inte längre en passiv konsument utan nu också en producent av *soft power* som erövrar världen.

Takashi Murakami krönte sig till ”king of *otakus* – *Otaking*” och har med sitt företag Kaikai Kiki två jättelika ateljéer med mängder av assistenter som symboliskt förbinder öst och väst; en i Tokyo och en i New York. Murakami skapar uppblåsbara skulpturer, målningar av samma figurer, designar väskor för Luis Vuitton och framställer sina lyxvarianter av gosedjur. Han lägger inte till något till denna kultur, han kopierar den, fördyrar den och blåser upp den i skala. Murakami talar om vetenskapliga undersökningar som visar att stora huvuden och ögon, små näsor och munnar är ett mönster som förenar avkomman hos en mängd djurarter. Hans gulliga skulpturer och målningar vädjar till föräldrainsikten.⁸⁶ Han säger att hans figurer är generiska porträtt av en specifik mentalitet. Om sin Musse Pigg-liknande Mr. DOB-figur säger han: ”Han är gullig men har ingen betydelse. Han förstår inget av livet, sexualiteten och verkligheten.”⁸⁷

Det gulliga manifesterar sig överallt i Tokyo: i reklam, kläder, dräkter, föremål som människor bär med sig, informationsskyltar, fordon, arkitektur. Gulligheten både attraherade och repellerade mig. Jag blev också förvirrad över de otydliga gränserna mellan det mjuka/gulliga och det hårda. Förbudsskyltar och symboler för makt har gulliga figurer. Överbrygningar sker också helt öppet mellan gullighet och sexu-

85. Volker Grassmuck, "I'm Alone, But Not Lonely, Japanese *Otaku*-kids Colonize the Realm of Information and Media, A Tale of Sex and Crime from a Faraway Place", 1990, <http://waste.informatik.hu-berlin.de/grassmuck/texts/otaku.e.html>

86. Intervju med Andrea Bellini och Chiara Leoni, "Takashi Murakami. A Japanese Character", *FlashArt* nr. 249 2006. http://www.flashartonline.com/OnWeb/TAKASHI_MURAKAMI.htm

87. Monty DiPietro, "Takashi Murakami at Parco Gallery", <http://www.assemblylanguage.com/reviews/Murakami.html>

have cute figures. There is also a quite open bridging between cuteness and sexuality. In regular Japanese newspapers, there are pictures of naked little girls that would immediately be seen as paedophilic in Sweden. Within the manga culture, the sexualised cute little girls form an established genre called *lolicon* (sometimes *rorikon* or *loli*). The synthesis is demonstrated by Takashi Murakami's sculptures of underage girls with doll-like faces and enormous breasts (*Miss Ko*).⁸⁸

The otaku's assumption of power can be experienced in Tokyo Tower, a building that is a fixed point in the megacity's topography, which is otherwise constantly undergoing changes. Tokyo Tower was important as a symbol of Japan's expansion during the post-war period and of the country's willingness to open itself to the West. Considerable amounts of the steel in the building were taken from demolished American armored cars from the Korean War.

The present owner, Mr. Gen Fujita, has established a wax museum on the third floor. What seems at first to be an ordinary wax museum with the typical parade of politicians and celebrities (possibly with a predominance of revolutionary politicians), develops in the final rooms into a private cult place dedicated to Fujita's heroes from his teenage years. It is not mainstream heroes that are honored, but a narrow selection of krautrock stars and symphony rockers: among others, Faust, Neu, Manuel Göttsching from Ash Ra Temple, Robert Fripp, Brian Eno, and Jethro Tull's Ian Anderson (as his typical Fagin-like figure standing on one leg playing the flute). When I visited, I stood staring, surprised, at the pale, stringy-haired wax figures in their display cases surrounded by memorabilia – old concert tickets, maps, toys, souvenirs, posters...

When I left this last room, I ended up in a bizarre little museum shop with records and stickers with sexist jokes. The pile of records turned out to contain only records by Ash Ra Temple, Ashra and Manuel Göttsching – music that is considered obscure by most people, even fans of krautrock.

On the way out, at the counter, posted clippings from American gossip magazines

88. The sculptures refer to a manga style called *bakunyu*. It should be said that it is not evident that *gothic lolita* [*gothloli*, *gosurori*] as a fashion entails sexualization. As street fashion and cosplay dress, gothic lolita can refer to Victorian porcelain dolls and have an asexual emanation. There is a range of variations, for instance *sweet lolita*, *kuro lolita* (all in black), *shiro lolita* (all in white) and *guro lolita* (a "wounded" lolita, often with a bandage or eye patch).

alitet. I vanliga japanska dagstidningar förekommer bilder på nakna småflickor som i Sverige tveklöst uppfattas som pedofila. Inom mangakulturen är de sexualiserade gulliga småflickorna en etablerad genre som kallas *lolicon* (ibland *rorikon* eller *loli*). Syntesen demonstreras av Takashi Murakamis skulpturer av minderåriga flickor med dockansikten och enorma bröst (*Miss Ko*).⁸⁸

En materialisering av *otakuns* maktövertagande kan upplevas i Tokyo Tower, en byggnad som är en fast punkt i megastadens topografi, vilken annars ideligen genomgår förvandlingar. Tokyo Tower var en viktig symbol för Japans expansion under efterkrigstiden och landets vilja att öppna sig mot väst. Ansenliga delar av stålet i byggnaden är hämtade från demolerade amerikanska stridsvagnar under Koreakriget.

Den nuvarande ägaren, Mr Gen Fujita har inrättat ett vaxmuseum på den tredje våningen. Vad som till en början verkar vara ett ordinärt vaxmuseum med den typiska paraden av politiker och kändisar (möjligen med en dominans av revolutionära politiker) utvecklar sig i de sista rummen till en kultplats tillägnad Fujitas hjältar från tonårstiden. Men det är inga mainstream-hjältar som hedras utan ett smalt urval krautrockstjärnor och symfonirockare: bland andra Faust, Neu, Manuel Göttsching från Ash Ra Tempel, Robert Fripp, Brian Eno och Jethro Tulls Ian Anderson (i den typiska Fagin-liknande uppenbarelsen, stående på ett ben spelande tvärflöjt). De bleka, striphåriga vaxfigurerna i sina vitriner är omgivna av memorabilia och paraferalia – gamla konsertbiljetter, kartor, leksaker, souvenirer, affischer...

När man lämnar denna sista sal hamnar man i en bisarr liten museishop med skivor och stickers med sexistiska skämt. Skivbacken visar sig enbart innehålla skivor med Ash Ra Tempel, Ashra och Manuel Göttsching, musik som anses obskyr av de flesta, till och med krautrocksfans. Här är det de privata lidelserna som styr.

På väg ut, vid disken, fastnar blicken på litet nonchalant uppsatta urklipp ur

88. Skulpturerna refererar till den mangastil som kallas *bakunyu*. Det ska sägas att det inte är självklart att *gothic lolita* (*gothloli*, *gosurori*) som mode innebär sexualisering. Som gatumode och cosplay-dräkt kan gothic lolita i högre grad referera till viktorianska porslinsdockor och kan också ha en asexuell utstrålning. Här finns en rad varianter t.ex. *sweet lolita*, *kuro lolita* (helt i svart), *shiro lolita* (helt i vitt) och *guro lolita* (en "skadad" lolita, ofta med bandage eller ögonlapp).

caught my eye. When I looked more closely, I discovered a common theme among the clippings: teenage blonde bombshells who had aged in an unattractive way. There were sordid articles about Goldie Hawn's double chin and Farah Fawcett's wrinkled skin.

The otaku had taken revenge on his unattainable fantasy objects. Mr. Fujita holds court in his worship museum high above Tokyo's skyline. The krautrock heroes are elevated, with their faces frozen in eternal youth. The objects of desire from teenage years are mocked in their decay.

In the 2008 edition of *Guinness Book of World Records*, there is mention of the biggest otaku group, the manga magazine collectors. In 2007, they spent 729 million dollars on their hobby.⁸⁹ The otaku phenomenon has spread all over the world, along with video games like *Final Fantasy* and *Grand Turismo*, boy bands from Johnny's agency (Johnny & Associates) in Tokyo, cosplay parades, and anime and manga. The very word itself inspires followers all over the world. In Romania, these followers call themselves otacis. And for young adopted Asian boys in the West, there exists, perhaps for the first time, an aesthetic ideal outside of competitive sports, a subject that has been blessed and elevated by popular culture.

For Johnnie Walker, however, cuteness is undoubtedly the great enemy. In theory, he seems to share Takashi Murakami's analysis, but puts the greatest blame on American influence. Cuteness has killed the avant-garde, according to Johnnie Walker (he often uses precisely the word *avant-garde*, when he wants to talk about art that he appreciates).⁹⁰

In "The Cuteness of the Avant-garde," Sianne Ngai questions this conflict and

89. *Guinness World Records 2008*, Forum 2008, p. 174.

90. Hito Steyerl presents a similar idea concerning the death of the Japanese avant-garde film: "The death of this type of filmmaking started as early as the mid-1970s, declining with the social and cultural movements of the 1960s it had been a part of. It was accelerated in the 1980s by a combination of banal television shows, rampant infantilization and cuteness cults, which killed off any possible interest in mainstream Japanese film production for a long time to come." Hito Steyerl, "Life in Film: Hito Steyerl," *Frieze Magazine*, Issue 114, April 2008.

amerikanska skvallermagasin. När man tittar närmare upptäcker man ett gemensamt tema för alla dessa urklipp: tonårstidens blonda sexbomber som åldrats på ett ofördelaktigt sätt. Här finns de slippriga artiklarna om Goldie Hawns dubbelhaka och Farah Fawcetts rynkiga hy.

Otakun har hämnats på sina ouppnåeliga fantasiobjekt. Mr Fujita tronar i sitt hyllningsmuseum högt över Tokyos skyline. Rockhjältarna upphöjs med sina nedfrusna ansikten i evig ungdom. Åtråns objekt hånas i sitt sönderfall.

I upplagan från 2008 av *Guinness Rekordbok* talas det om ”den största *otaku*-gruppen”, mangatidningssamlarna. 2007 spenderade de 729 miljoner dollar på sin hobby.⁸⁹ Otaku-fenomenet har spridit sig över världen tillsammans med tv-spel som Final Fantasy och Grand Turismo, pojkband från Johnnys agentur (Johnny & Associates) i Tokyo, cosplay-parader och anime och manga. Även själva ordet inspirerar efterföljare världen över. I Rumänien kallar sig dessa för *otacis*.⁹⁰ Och för unga adopterade asiatiska pojkar i västerlandet finns kanske för första gången ett estetiskt ideal utanför kampsporten, ett subjekt som välsignats och upphöjts av populärkulturen.

För Johnnie Walker däremot är gulligheten tveklöst den stora fienden. Han verkar i princip dela Takashi Murakamis analys, men skyller det mesta på det amerikanska inflytandet. Gulligheten har dödat avantgardet, enligt Johnnie Walker (han använder ofta just ordet *avantgarde*, när han talar om konst han uppskattar).⁹¹

I ”The Cuteness of the Avant-garde” ifrågasätter Sianne Ngai den här motsättningen

89. *Guinness World Records 2008*, Forum 2008, s. 174.

90. Se <http://www.omagju.com/>.

91. Hito Steyerl presenterar en liknande idé vad gäller den japanska avantgardefilmens död: ”Den här sortens filmskapande började att dö ut så tidigt som i mitten av 1970-talet, samtidigt med nedgången för de sociala och kulturella rörelser som den varit en del av. Dess försvinnande accelererade under 1980-talet genom en kombination av banala tv-shower, ohämmad infantilisering och gullighetsdyrkan, vilken utrotade allt intresse inom japansk mainstream-filmproduktion under för lång tid framöver.” Hito Steyerl, ”Life in Film: Hito Steyerl”, *Frieze Magazine*, nr. 114, april 2008 (min. övers. M.B.).

argues for a theoretical understanding of cuteness as an aesthetic category.⁹¹

.../ while prestigious aesthetic concepts like beautiful, sublime and ugly have generated multiple theories and philosophies of *art*, comparatively novel ones such as *cute*, *glamorous*, *whimsical*, *luscious*, *cosy*, or *wacky* seem far from doing anything of the sort, though ironically, in the close link between their emergence and the rise of consumer aesthetics, they seem all the more suited for the analysis of art's increasingly complex relation to market society in the twentieth century.⁹²

Ngai speaks about the longstanding embarrassment cuteness has posed to art (specifically poetry) and advocates that critics refused to acknowledge the “indecently cute” elements in Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons*.

If avant-garde is conventionally characterized by something sharp and pointy, something *cutting-edge*, cuteness is associated with the soft and round and with the

91. Sianne Ngai, “The Cuteness of the Avantgarde,” *Critical Inquiry*, Summer 2005. Carl Cassegård says that one should also be open to alternative readings of the Japanese cuteness, even considering it to be a challenge to the establishment, at least seen in an historical perspective. The sociologist Sharon Kinsella argues for this view and finds that the culture of cuteness that emerged in Japan around 1970 is not a break with the protest movement but a continuation, with its refusal to fall in with the strict norms and clear expectations of adult society. It is “infantile,” “feminine,” and has attracted the scorn of both conservatives and intellectuals. However, the latest phase in the official stance towards cuteness (which comprises manga and anime) takes the bite out of any possible rebellious potential: in March 2009 the foreign ministry of Japan installed three official *kawaii* ambassadors. Since Douglas McGray wrote the article “Japan's Gross National Cool” 2002 (www.douglasmcgray.com/grossnationalcool.pdf, 14/3 2010) and the neo-liberal term *soft power* became popular among economists, this culture has been re-evaluated by the conservatives and is now seen as a national resource. *Soft power*, coined by the American sociologist Joseph Nye, describes a country's ability to maintain its position not through military methods or via economic power but through its ability to create an attractive culture. (See Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, PublicAffairs 2004.) In Japan, soft power is nowadays seen as a diplomatic boon (especially since the war made contact with neighboring states rather infected) as well as an economic and political resource. It is not that one wants to use popular culture to propagate political messages, but rather that one sees its potential on a meta-level. Instead of expressing themselves through it, this medium of popular culture is identified as a tool or weapon, while at the same time it is hoped that it will be “innocently” enjoyed for its own sake by neighboring countries (Cassegård). Behind such a strategy we can also glimpse a view of the political power of (fictional and documentary) mainstream narratives where the individualisation of the people that occurs can mythologize a country and its places and offer the possibility of identification with individual human lives. In this process, the “other” becomes a possible, complete individual. Any politician with an ounce of far-sightedness and a feeling for soft power can identify this value in the national film industry: the possibility of launching narratives that communicate that our nation is made up of individuals that suffer, love and win.”

92. Sianne Ngai, “The Cuteness of the Avant-garde.”

och argumenterar för en teoretisk förståelse av gullighet som estetisk kategori.⁹²

!...! när prestigefyllda estetiska koncept som skön, sublim och ful har genererat mängder av teori och filosofi om *konst*, verkar jämförelsebara nymodigheter som *gullig*, *glamorös*, *egendomlig*, *läcker*, *mysig* eller *knäpp* knappast ge någonting i den riktningen, trots att de, ironiskt nog genom den starka förbindelsen mellan deras uppdykande och uppkomsten av konsumtionsetetik, ter sig betydligt bättre lämpade för analysen av konstens relation till marknadssamhället i det tjugonde århundradet.⁹³

Ngai talar om den långvariga genans gulligheten har orsakat konsten (i synnerhet poesin) och menar att kritiker vägrade erkänna de ”otillständigt gulliga” elementen i Gertrude Steins *Ömma knappar*.

Om avantgarde konventionellt karaktäriseras som något skarpt och spetsigt, något som är *cutting edge*, associeras gullighet i stället med det runda och mjuka och

92. Sianne Ngai, "The Cuteness of the Avantgarde", *Critical Inquiry*, Vol.31, no. 4 2005. Carl Cassegård menar att man också måste vara öppen för andra läsningar av den japanska gulligheten, även som en utmaning mot etablissemangent, åtminstone i ett historiskt perspektiv. Sociologen Sharon Kinsella argumenterar för en sådan syn och menar att den gullighetskultur som slår igenom i Japan runt år 1970 är en fortsättning på proteströrelsen och dess vägran att infoga sig i vuxensamhällets strikta normer och tydliga förväntningar. Den är "infantil", "kvinnlig" och drog på sig både de konservativas och de intellektuella förakt. Den senaste fasen i den officiella hållningen till gulligheten (som inbegriper manga och anime) tar ändå udden av dess eventuella upproriska potential: i mars 2009 inrättade det japanska utrikesministeriet tre officiella gullighetsministrar. Sedan Douglas McGray skrev artikeln "Japan's Gross National Cool" 2002 (www.douglasmcgray.com/grossnationalcool.pdf, 14/3 2010) och det nyliberala begreppet *Soft Power* slog igenom bland nationalekonomer har denna kultur omvärderats av de konservativa och uppfattas numera som en nationell resurs. *Soft power*, myntat av den amerikanske sociologen Joseph Nye, betecknar ett lands förmåga att hävda sin ställning inte med militära medel eller ekonomisk styrka utan genom sin förmåga att frambringa en attraktiv kultur. (Se Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, PublicAffairs 2004.) *Soft Power* ses nu i Japan som både en diplomatisk resurs (inte minst i den allt sedan kriget infekterade kontakten med grannländerna) och en ekonomisk och politisk resurs. Det är inte så att man vill använda populärkulturen till att föra ut politiska meddelanden, snarare ser man möjligheten på en metanivå. "Istället för att uttrycka sig i det populärkulturella mediet lyfts den fram som ett verktyg eller vapen, samtidigt som man hoppas att den 'oskuldligt' ska avnjutas just för sin egen skull i grannländerna." Bakom en sådan strategi kan man också ana synen på (fiktiva och dokumentära) mainstreamberättelsers politiska makt där de individualiseringar av människor som skapas både kan mytologisera ett land och dess platser och erbjuda identifikationsmöjligheter med enskilda människor. Den andre förvandlas i en sådan process till en möjlig, fullvärdig individ. Varje någorlunda framsynt politiker med känsla för soft power ser detta värde i den nationella filmindustrin; möjligheten att lansera berättelser som meddelar att "vårt folk består av människor som lider, älskar och vinner."

93. Sianne Ngai, "The Cuteness of the Avant-garde" (min övers. M.B.).

infantile and feminine. The cute aesthetics depends on softness that invites physical touching, or as Ngai writes, “fondling.” It seems to be a primitivism in its own right. Realist verisimilitude and precision are excluded in the making of cute objects, which have simple contours and little or no ornamentation or detail. The smaller and less formally articulated or more blob-like the object, the cuter it becomes – in part because smallness and blobbiness suggest greater malleability and thus a greater capacity for being handled.”⁹³

Here lies the violent aspect of cute aesthetics: the cute, diminutive object is not only formed but also *de*-formed under the pressure of the subject’s feeling or attitude towards it: “/.../ in its exaggerated passivity and vulnerability, the cute object is as often intended to excite a consumer’s sadistic desires for mastery and control as much as his or her desire to cuddle.”⁹⁴

In the poem “The Potato,” by Francis Ponge (known for his phenomenological approach and slight defamiliarizing gaze on everyday objects) Ngai observes how a crucial aspect of cuteness is underscored – the potato is tamed by the boiling water:

It trashes around angrily, steaming, oozing, sizzling, pfutt tsitt;
in short, terribly agitated on the red-hot grate.
My potatoes, submerged down there, are shaken up,
knocked around, abused, drenched to the marrow.
The water’s fury probably has nothing to do with them,
but they suffer the consequences – unable to get out of this situation,
they find themselves profoundly changed by it.⁹⁵

This is “/.../ the ability of the object to withstand the violence its very passivity seems to solicit.”⁹⁶ Ngai argues that anthropomorphism, and other strategies of rhetorical personification of objects, can mean acts of humiliation, or even mutilation. But also: when a nonhuman thing is given human features, the reverse is implied – humans can be reified, made things.

93. Ibid.

94. Ibid.

95. Quotation from: Francis Ponge, *The Voice of Things*, McGraw-Hill 1972, p. 147.

96. Sianne Ngai, “The Cuteness of the Avant-garde.”

med det infantila och feminina. Gullighetsetetiken står i förbindelse med en mjukhet som bjuder in till fysisk beröring, eller som Ngai skriver – ”ompysslande”. Den verkar vara ”/.../ en primitivism i sin egen rätt. Realistisk prägel och precision är uteslutna i tillverkningen av gulliga objekt, vilka snarare har enkla konturer och få eller inga utsmyckningar eller detaljer. Ju mindre till storleken och ju mindre formmässigt uttalade eller mer blob-liknande objektet är, desto gulligare blir det – delvis därför att litenhet och blobbighet ger en större formbarhet och därmed en större hanterbarhet.”⁹⁴

Här finns den våldsamma aspekten av gullighetsetetiken: det gulliga, diminutiva objektet inte bara formas utan även deformeras under trycket av subjektets känslor eller attityder gentemot det: ”/.../ genom sin överdrivna passivitet och utsatthet finns det gulliga objektet ofta i lika hög grad till för att hetsa upp konsumentens sadistiska önsksningar om övertag och kontroll som för hans eller hennes vilja att kramas.”⁹⁵

I dikten ”Potatisen” av Francis Ponge (känd för sitt fenomenologiska närmande av och lätt förfrämligande blick på vardagsföremål) observerar Ngai hur en avgörande aspekt av gullighet lyfts fram: potatisen tämjs av det kokande vattnet:

Rasande går det upp i ånga, fradgar, sveder sig omedelbart, pffottar, tsittar:
nåja, det är åtminstone ytterst upprört på sina glödande kol.
Potatisarna som jag lagt ned i vattnet ruskas om och hoppar till,
trängs och törnar mot, utskällda upp över öronen, indränkta ända till mörgen.
Visserligen är det inte mot dem som vattnets ilska är riktad, men det är i alla händelser de som får ta konsekvenserna: utan möjlighet att göra sig kvitt omgivningens inflytande utsätts de för en djupgående modifikation...⁹⁶

Detta är ”/.../ objektets förmåga att uthärda det våld som dess passivitet enträget verkar be om.”⁹⁷ Ngai hävdar att antropomorfism och andra strategier för personifiering av objekt kan innebära förnedrande händelser eller till och med stympning. Men också: när en icke-mänsklig sak ges mänskliga uttryck impliceras det motsatta – att människor kan förtingligas, bli saker.

94. Ibid (min övers. M.B.).

95. Ibid (min övers. M.B.).

96. Citat ur Francis Ponge, *Ur tingens synpunkt*, René Coeckelbergs förlag 1976.

97. Sianne Ngai, "The Cuteness of the Avant-garde" (min övers. M.B.).

Interestingly enough, Sianne Ngai, via Ponge's potato and Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons*, puts the cute aesthetic in connection with politics. She asks why a certain aesthetic, organized around a diminutive, helpless, pitiful and defenseless object "*/.../ that foregrounds the violence in its production as such /.../*"⁹⁷ is more prevalent in one nation than another. She has no answer to that, but she claims that this aesthetic has been mobilized repeatedly by the avant-garde in times of war or social crisis. Art is ineffectual with regard to instrumental action, she says. Art, like the aesthetic of cuteness, is "weak" and powerless, in spite of the aggression involved in its production (which sometimes also involves a feeling of pleasure).

The discussion of inefficaciousness in art from the standpoint of instrumental rationality she finds in the classical works on aesthetics by Theodor Adorno. Adorno defends this ineffectuality and weakness of the autonomous (high modernist) artwork and claims that art can have a social meaning only by means of its nonsociality and lack of agency. This position has a social origin that Adorno traces to the phase when art was becoming autonomous by becoming bourgeois, and simultaneously increasingly reflexive and preoccupied with the notion of itself: "*/.../ the project of autonomous art begins to resemble a masochistic one: an incessant, guilt-driven meditation on its own social impotence.*"⁹⁸ Ngai mentions that the American word "cute" never appears in Adorno's writing on aesthetics, but even it is evident that the aesthetics of cuteness (focusing on the mouthless, mute, easily deformed) is strangely transparent in relation to Adorno's descriptions of how the artwork in a commodity society is by necessity condemned to be "powerless," "mute" and "wounds of society."⁹⁹ That is, in Adorno's eyes, the price art has to pay for its autonomous position.

Inside of the soft and cute there is a hard kernel, says Johnnie Walker, and to understand what kind of hardness he is talking about, he recommended that I go to a special place in Tokyo. It is a place that for many other people has the reputation of embodying the most stubborn kind of Japanese chauvinism and unwillingness to come to terms with its colonial history: the Yasukuni shrine, one of the most politi-

97. Ibid.

98. Ibid.

99. See Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiederman, Continuum 1997, for instance, pp. 198, 279 and 298.

Intressant nog sätter Sianne Ngai gullighetsetetiken, via Ponges potatis och Gertrude Steins *Ömma knappar*, i förbindelse med politik. Hon frågar: varför är en speciell estetik som är organiserad runt det diminutiva, hjälplösa, ömkansvärda och försvarslösa objektet – ”/.../ som lyfter fram våldet i själva produktionen /.../”⁹⁸ – mer förekommande i en nation än en annan? Hon har inget svar på det men hävdar att denna estetik återkommande har mobiliserats av avantgardet i tider av krig och sociala kriser. Konst är ineffektiv var det gäller instrumentellt handlande, säger hon. Konsten liksom gullighetsetetiken är ”vek” och maktlös trots aggressionen förbunden med dess produktion (vilken också ibland involverar en känsla av njutning).

Diskussionen om konstens ineffektivitet avseende den instrumentella rationaliteten hittar hon i Theodor Adornos klassiska arbeten om estetik. Adorno försvarar denna ineffektivitet samt ”vekheten” hos det autonoma (högmodernistiska) konstverket och hävdar att konst kan ha en social betydelse enbart genom sin asociala kvalitet och brist på verkan. Denna position har sitt sociala ursprung i en fas då konsten höll på att få sin självständighet genom att bli borgerlig och samtidigt allt mer reflexiv och upptagen av den egna betydelsen: ”/.../den autonoma konstens projekt började likna ett masochistiskt projekt: en av skuld driven, oupphörlig meditation över den egna sociala impotensen.”⁹⁹ Ngai nämner att det amerikanska ordet cute aldrig förekommer i Adornos texter om estetik, men likafullt är det uppenbart att gullighetens estetik (som riktar in sig på det munlösa, stumma, lätt deformerade) är märkligt transparent i förhållande till Adornos beskrivningar av hur konstverk i varusamhället med nödvändighet är dömda till en ”maktlös”, ”stum” tillvaro och till att vara ”samhällets sår.”¹⁰⁰ I Adornos ögon är det priset konsten måste betala för sin autonoma position.

Innanför det gulliga och mjuka i Japan finns en hård kärna, säger Johnnie Walker och för att förstå vilken sorts hårdhet han talade om rekommenderade han mig att bege mig till en speciell plats i Tokyo. Det är en plats som för många har rykte om sig att förkroppsliga det mest hårdnackade i den japanska chauvinismen och oviljan att göra upp med den koloniala historien: Yasukuni-helgedomen, en av de mest politiskt

98. Ibid (min övers. M.B.).

99. Ibid (min övers. M.B.).

100. Se Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiederman, Continuum 1997, t.ex. sidorna 198, 279 och 298.

cally charged places in East Asia.

The temple functions as a memorial for war victims. Japan's neighbors, South Korea, North Korea, and China, officially consider the place an affront because it also contains monuments to a number of Japanese war criminals (so-called Class A criminals). Every time a Japanese prime minister visits the place, there is an acute political crisis, with blocked international relations and raging street protests (especially in South Korea).

For many Japanese people, on the other hand, the place is not at all hard or notorious. Yasushi Watanabe, professor at the School of Media and Governance at Keio University, claims that on the contrary, for many Japanese – at least conservative ones – the Yasukuni shrine represents soft power.¹⁰⁰

I visited Yasukuni temple several times and filmed there for my video essay (often turned away by the guards), but it was hard for me to understand the meaning of the place. On the outside, it is a regular Shinto temple where people go to show their respect; they bow, clap their hands, and throw a few coins. At the back, there is a little garden where you can feed the carp in the dam (the huge, gleaming red carp emit a repulsive sound from their mouths as they crowd at the water's surface to snatch up the fish food). What differentiates the temple from others is a pair of uniformed guards at the front and a couple of visitors dressed in the puffy, shiny pants with wide belts that mark extreme nationalists of Japan.

It was only when I visited the Yasukuni shrine's neighboring building – The War Memorial Museum – that I understood the political meaning of the place. Here historical revisionism and war propaganda exist quite undisguised. You can look at heroic paintings of battalions and great panoramas with models of kamikaze planes flying toward the rising sun. In the historical overview of the events of the 20th century, words like “colony” are never used, only “protectorate.” The holocaust is not mentioned at all. The Nanjin massacre in China in 1937, when the Japanese army killed between 100 000 and 300 000 soldiers and civilians and carried out mass rapes, is called an “incident” that was caused by the fact that the Chinese commander was

100. He bases this on what the editorial columnist at the daily paper *Sankei Shimbun* writes. See Yasushi Watanabe, “Revisiting Soft Power,” *Wochi Kochi* (a quarterly magazine published by The Japan Foundation) October/November 2006, pp. 64-68.29/11 2006, originally published as “Sofuto pawa ron saiho.”

laddade platserna i Östasien. Templet fungerar som en minnesplats för krigsoffer.

Japans grannar Sydkorea, Nordkorea och Kina, betraktar officiellt platsen som en skymf eftersom man här också har minnesmärken för ett antal japanska krigsförbrytare (så kallade klass A-förbrytare). Varje gång en japansk premiärminister besöker platsen uppstår en akut politisk kris med låsta internationella relationer och rasande gatudemonstrationer (framför allt i Sydkorea).

För många japaner, däremot, är platsen inte alls hård eller ökad. Yasushi Watanabe, professor i School of Media and Governance vid Keio University menar att Yasukuni-helgedomen för många japaner, åtminstone de konservativa, tvärtom representerar soft power.¹⁰¹

Jag besökte Yasukuni-templet upprepade gånger och filmade där för min videosäsa (men blev ofta avvisad av vakterna) men jag hade svårt att förstå platsens innebörd. Det är till det yttre ett vanligt shinto-tempel dit människor går för att visa sin vördnad, man bugar, klappar i händerna och kastar några mynt. På baksidan finns en liten trädgård där man kan mata karparna i dammen (de enorma rödglänsande karparna ger ifrån sig ett vedervärdigt ljud från munnarna när de trängs vid vattenytan för att snappa åt sig av fiskmaten). Det som skiljer templet från andra är ett par uniformerade vakter på framsidan och en och annan besökare klädd i de pösiga, glansiga byxor med breda bälten som utmärker Japans extrema nationalister.

Det var först när jag besökte Yasukuni-helgedomens grannbyggnad – The War Memorial Museum – som jag förstod platsens politiska innebörd. Här är historierevisionismen och krigspropagandan helt oförblommerad. Man kan beskåda heroiserande bataljmålningar och stora panoramor med modeller av kamikaze-plan som flyger mot den uppgående solen. I den historiska översikten av 1900-talets händelser används aldrig ord som ”koloni” utan ”protektorat”. Förintelsen nämns inte med ett ord. Nanjingmassakern i Kina 1937, då den japanska armén dödade mellan 100 000 och 300 000 soldater och civila och utförde massvåldtäkter, omtalas som en ”incident” som berodde på att den kinesiske befälhavaren var så halsstarrig att han inte

101. Han stöder sig på vad den redaktionella skribenten på dagstidningen *Sankei Shimbun* skriver. Se Yasushi Watanabe, ”Revisiting Soft Power”, *Wochi Kochi* (ett kvartalsmagasin utgivet av The Japan Foundation), October/November 2006, s. 64-68, 29/11 2006, ursprungligen publicerad som ”Sofuto pawa ron saiho”.

so stubborn that he didn't want to negotiate with the Japanese army. Once Nanjing had been occupied and things had been put in order, the people there could finally live in freedom, the text explains.

In the museum shop at the War Memorial Museum, you could buy different colored plastic folders, ashtrays, and chocolate boxes with stylish motifs of kamikaze planes and Japanese armored cars from World War II.

VII

Johnnie Walker had lost his job as broker in the stock market after a disastrous event in Dakar in Senegal. He had been imprisoned, accused of paedophilia and spent four months in jail under horrible conditions before being released. The event had left deep traces, physically and mentally. He was on his way to the Dakar Biennial and was to get a guided tour from a professor. For some reason the professor couldn't come, and a young man was sent to be his guide instead. Johnnie Walker was attracted by the young man and flirted with him. According to his own version of events, they sat down at a café and ordered coffee. That is the last thing he remembers before being knocked on the back of the head and waking up in jail.

For four months he found himself in a cell that was so overcrowded it was impossible to lie down. If he managed to fall asleep for a moment, he might wake up with someone's hands in his mouth, another prisoner who was trying to pull out his gold teeth. He regularly witnessed torture and prisoners being killed by the guards, something that could happen in sudden eruptions of violence, as if by chance. On one occasion when he was relieving himself, he felt a cockroach come out of his own body.

The same day that he appeared before the judge, a demonstration was taking place outside of the courthouse. The young man, who turned out to be a Burundian who was staying in Senegal illegally without a passport, was testifying on Johnnie Walker's behalf. He was not underage but 17 years old, he said, and Johnnie Walker had never touched him at all. It was the café owner who had called the police when she had imagined an immoral situation.

When Johnnie Walker's sentence was to be delivered, the demonstrations outside escalated and a window was shattered by a tear gas bomb. The hall had to be evacua-

ville förhandla med den japanska armén. När man väl intagit Nanjing och ställt saker och ting tillrätta kunde sedan folket äntligen leva i frihet, förklarar texten.

I museishopen på War Memorial Museum kan man köpa olikfärgade plastmappar, askfat och chokladaskar med prydliga motiv av kamikaze-plan och japanska pansarkryssare från andra världskriget.

VII

Johnnie Walker hade förlorat sitt arbete som mäklare på penningmarknaden efter en fatal händelse i Dakar i Senegal. Han hade fångslats anklagad för pedofili och suttit fyra månader i fängelse under fruktansvärda förhållanden innan han frigavs. Händelsen hade satt djupa spår, fysiskt och psykiskt. Han var på väg till Dakar-biennalen och skulle få en rundvisning av en professor. Av någon anledning kunde inte professorn komma och istället skickades en ung man för att fungera som guide. Johnnie Walker blev attraherad av den unge mannen och flirtade med honom. Enligt hans egen version av händelserna satte de sig på ett café och beställde kaffe. Det är det sista han minns; han fick ett slag i bakhuvudet och vaknade upp i fångelset.

I fyra månader befann han sig i en cell som var så överfull att det var omöjligt att ligga ner. Om han lyckades somna en stund stående kunde han vakna med någons händer inne i sin mun, någon annan fånge som försökte dra ut hans guldtänder. Han bevittnade regelmässig tortyr och hur fångar dödades av vakterna, något som kunde ske i plötsliga eruptioner av våld, som av en händelse. Vid ett tillfälle när han utträtade sina behov kände han en kackerlacka komma ut ur sin egen kropp.

Samma dag som han stod inför domstolen pågick en demonstration utanför domstolsbyggnaden. Den unge mannen, som visade sig vara en burundier som vistades i Senegal illegalt och utan pass, vittnade till Johnnie Walkers fördel. Han var inte minderårig, utan 17 år påstod han, och Johnnie Walker hade överhuvudtaget aldrig vidrört honom. Det var caféägarinnan som hade kallat på polisen då hon fått för sig att det handlade om en omoralisk situation.

När Johnnie Walkers dom skulle meddelas eskalerade demonstrationerna utanför och ett fönster krossades av en tårgaspatron. Salen fick utrymmas samtidigt som do-

ted while the judge shouted and pointed at Johnnie Walker: “Take him out of the country; I never want to see him again!”

So Johnnie Walker was able to leave Senegal. Johnnie Walker says that he survived all this but that he really isn't alive anymore.

Half a year after the events, Johnnie Walker got a call from Senegal. It was a nun who explained that a young man had taken refuge in the church where she worked. He had escaped from his village and his family, accused of being homosexual. His life was threatened. The young man had talked about a Johnnie Walker in Tokyo and through various contacts the nun had gotten hold of his number. They could now speak to each other on the phone and Johnnie Walker gave him a nickname: Kafka. During my time in Tokyo, Johnnie Walker sent him a postcard every day and called him a couple of times a week.

I don't know what is true in these stories except for Johnnie Walker's time in jail in Dakar, which many can corroborate, but I saw Johnnie Walker mail his postcards and heard him making calls to Senegal. However, it was clear that many of his earlier friends and financial contacts had turned their backs on him after the event. He now had basically no money. He was temperamental and unstable; he might suddenly stop his car, parking it in a crazy way, in order to rush to a lottery stand to buy a ticket. His superstitious bent made him believe in a miracle. His house still functioned as a residence but life there was not very comfortable. Two French artists fled after a couple of days. They could bear the fact that there wasn't any hot water in the house and that things were not that clean and tidy, but they had not realised what it meant to take care of Bacon, which was one of the obligations of anyone who wanted to live there, especially on account of Johnnie Walker's constant travels, which often happened on short notice.¹⁰¹ There is nothing you can do against Bacon's immense muscle power unless you are able to establish a mental mastery. The droppings he leaves behind on the street are like a horse's excrement. Philip Samartzis and his wife Madelynne adjusted well, however. They lived there for almost half a year,

101. On one of the few occasions when I took care of Bacon, he refused to budge from the place (a street crossing in Ginza). I stood there with him for close to an hour. Bacon was immobile, like an oversized dog statue, and I had my hands full trying to prevent all the curious people from patting him on the head. The crossing was the place where Johnnie had snuck away and like the dog Hachiko, he chose to wait at the spot where he had last seen his master.

maren skrek och pekade på Johnnie Walker: ta ut honom ur landet, jag vill aldrig se honom mer!

Så kunde Johnnie Walker lämna Senegal. Johnnie Walker säger att han överlevde allt detta men att han egentligen inte är levande längre.

Ett halvår efter händelserna fick Johnnie Walker ett samtal från Senegal. Det var en nunna som berättade att en ung man tagit sin tillflykt till kyrkan där hon verkade. Han hade flytt från sin by och sin familj anklagad för att vara homosexuell. Han var hotad till livet. Den unge mannen hade talat om en Johnnie Walker i Tokyo och genom olika led hade nunnan fått tag på hans nummer. De kunde nu tala med varandra i telefon och Johnnie Walker gav honom ett smeknamn: Kafka. Under min tid i Tokyo skickade Johnnie Walker honom dagliga vykort och ringde ett par gånger varje vecka.

Jag vet inte vad som är sant i dessa berättelser förutom Johnnie Walkers tid i fängelset i Dakar, som många kan intyga, men jag såg Johnnie Walker posta sina vykort och hörde honom ringa sina samtal till Senegal. Men det var tydligt att många av hans tidigare vänner och finansiärer vänt honom ryggen efter händelsen. Han hade nu i stort sett inga pengar. Han var lynnig och oberäknelig, han kunde när som helst stanna sin bil, parkera den på ett orimligt sätt och rusa ut till ett lotteristånd för att köpa en lott. Hans vidskeplighet fick honom att tro på ett mirakel. Hans hus fungerade fortfarande som residency men livet där var inte så bekvämt. Två franska konstnärer flydde efter ett par dagar. De kunde stå ut med att det inte fanns något varmvatten i huset och att allt inte var så rent och prydligt, men de hade inte insett vad det innebar att ta hand om Bacon, vilket var en av förpliktelserna för den som ville bo där, inte minst på grund av Johnnie Walkers ständiga resor som ofta annonserades med kort varsel.¹⁰² Mot Bacons enorma muskelkraft har man inget att sätta emot om man inte lyckas upprätta ett mentalt övertag. Vad han lämnar efter sig på gatan motsvarar vad en häst skiter. Philip Samartzis och hans fru Madelynne anpassade sig däremot bra. De bodde där nästan ett halvår, vilket innebar att Madelynne

102. Vid ett av de få tillfällen som jag själv hade hand om Bacon vägrade han lämna platsen (en gatukorsning i Ginza). Jag stod där med honom närmare en timme. Bacon var orörlig som en överdimensionerad hundstaty och jag hade fullt upp med att hindra alla de nyfikna från att klappa honom på huvudet. Korsningen var den plats där Johnnie smitit iväg och likt hunden Hachiko valde han att vänta på den plats där han sett sin husse sist.

which meant that Madelynne took Bacon for a walk every day, that they showered in cold water, and that during the coldest months they wore their coats indoors. In the evenings, Johnnie Walker usually had guests in the house, and then he would light a fire in the open fireplace. It was in this room that I filmed Johnnie Walker's readings of Murakami's text.

Johnnie Walker had his salons and his dinners. High up in Jean Nouvel's 52-story building in Shiodome, at the Italian restaurant Bice, with a magnificent view over Tokyo, he would invite a group for dinner once a week and pay for it. He had an agreement with the owner, an agreement based on a long family history of mutual loyalty. Sometimes there were large gatherings, buffets for 200 guests, sometimes it was ten people. It was here that Johnnie Walker made his improvised speeches, told stories, and performed his kirigami about the Catholic priest who went to a bordello.

When my video essay was finished in April 2007, and I returned to Tokyo to show it, I also lived with Johnnie Walker for an extended period for the first time.¹⁰² On many occasions, during the course of the work, I had tried to explain my method of joining the two narratives, but Johnnie Walker had never really listened. He constantly came up with suggestions for titles for my piece; he was full of suggestions about scenes, and I ended up using some of these suggestions in different situations. But he had seen it as a portrait exclusively of him and Bacon.

Still, he had had remarkable intuition. For example, he himself had suggested that, dressed in the black hood, he would walk around Asakusa Temple, the place in *The Koumiko Mystery* where Kumiko breathes in "the holy smoke" from an altar for long sequences. It was here that Bacon would meet different animals: a monkey who became very frightened and a cat who displayed its supreme indifference to Bacon's open, drooling jaws with the ferocious teeth only a few meters away.¹⁰³

Johnnie Walker was so different from Kumiko, and had been uninterested in her existence, but now for the first time he listened intently as I told him about the meeting in Paris and about Chris Marker's deeds. One evening he asked me for her phone

102. In early April 2007 at a solo show at the Swedish Embassy as well as the group show *Happy Hour*, at ZAIM in Yokohama, both exhibits curated by Hatch Art (an independent group of curators including Mutsumi Shinohara and Shingo Francis, among others).

103. If dog and cat are antagonists in Western tradition, dog and monkey are the greatest of enemies in Asian (Chinese) folk belief.

varje dag rastade Bacon, att de duschade i kallvatten och att de under de kallaste månaderna gick omkring i ytterkläderna inomhus. På kvällarna har Johnnie Walker för det mesta gäster i huset och då tände han en brasa i den öppna eldstaden. Det var i det här rummet jag filmade Johnnie Walkers uppläsningar av Murakamis text.

Johnnie Walker hade sina salonger och sina middagar. Högst upp i Jean Nouvels 52-våningsbyggnad i Shiodome, på den italienska restaurangen Bice, med magnifik utsikt över Tokyo, kunde han en gång i veckan helt gratis bjuda ett sällskap på middag. Han hade ett avtal med ägaren, som grundade sig på en lång familjehistoria av inbördes lojalitet. Ibland var det stora sällskap, bufféer för tvåhundra gäster, ibland var det tio personer. Det var här Johnnie Walker höll sina improviserade tal, berättade historier och uppförde sin kirigami om den katolske prästen som gick på bordell.

När min videoessä var klar i april 2007 och jag kom tillbaka till Tokyo för att visa den bodde jag också för första gången en sammanhängande tid hos Johnnie Walker.¹⁰³ Jag hade vid många tillfällen, under arbetets gång, försökt förklara min metod att föra samman de två berättelserna, men Johnnie Walker hade aldrig riktigt lyssnat. Han kom ideligen med förslag om titlar till mitt verk, han var full av förslag på scener, och några av dessa förslag hade jag ju i olika förhandlingssituationer anammat. Men han hade sett det som ett porträtt uteslutande av honom och Bacon.

Ändå hade han haft en märklig intuition. Han hade till exempel själv föreslagit att han iklädd den svarta huven skulle vandra runt Asakusa-templet, vilket är den plats i *Mysteriet Koumiko* där Kumiko under långa sekvenser inandas ”den heliga röken” från ett altare. Det var här Bacon kom att ha möten med olika djur: en apa som blev väldigt rädd och en katt som uppvisade suverän likgiltighet inför Bacons öppna, dreglande käft med de fruktansvärda tänderna bara några meter bort.¹⁰⁴

Johnnie Walker var så olik Kumiko, och hade varit ointresserad av hennes existens, men nu lyssnade han för första gången när jag berättade om mötet i Paris och om Chris Markers gärningar. En kväll bad han mig om Kumikos telefonnummer.

103. Den visades i början av april 2007 på en separatutställning på svenska ambassaden samt på grupputställningen *Happy Hour*, på ZAIM i Yokohama. Båda utställningarna curerades av Hatch Art (en fristående curatorgrupp med bl.a. Mutsumi Shinohara och Shingo Francis).

104. Om hund och katt är antagonister i västerländsk tradition är hunden och apan de största av fiender i asiatisk (kinesisk) folketro.

number, he called her and began to speak in Japanese. Afterwards Johnnie Walker and Kumiko told me about the conversation. “So you’re from Harbin,” Johnnie Walker had begun without introducing himself. He had named places in Harbin, hotels and cafés, and asked if she had been there recently. He had asked her about this or that family. They had talked to each other as if they had known each other for a long time. Kumiko had talked about Harbin in her quiet way, without asking who he was, though finally he had introduced himself and explained the connection.¹⁰⁴

VIII

Writing the text for the video essay that was to be narrated became an attempt to write a rhythmical, scaled-down text with a certain simplicity. Of course it also needed a dramatic structure. I knew that a narrative situation, combined with a flow of images, creates such a complex stream of messages that it is very difficult to follow a line of reasoning or a plot. *Sans soleil*, for example, is a video essay that hovers close to the edge of over-saturation. One should really both read the text separately and see the film in several rounds.¹⁰⁵

The text would be written as a blend of reading, lecture and storytelling. I also introduced a visual instance of handwriting of texts in the video – which is the simplest materialization of text that one can imagine.¹⁰⁶ I let the reader, after the prologue, write down the title of the video essay directly on her arm. I wanted to embody the text in a naïve way, but also point out the names of the three characters, when the text constantly existed on her arm during the rest of the reading (action). One part was filmed while I myself was writing on a whiteboard like a lecturer, and I wrote one question with crayon on cardboard. To let the viewer see the text grow forth in the act of writing, in this way, is a way to test whether it is possible to make the viewer actually read the text (and internalize it) and simultaneously be drawn into a

104. A few months later, Kumiko traveled to Tokyo. Along with Tomoyo, the owner of La Jetée bar, she met Johnnie Walker.

105. The text is available at <http://www.markertext.com>.

106. I had been captivated by a black and white picture where Kumiko holds up a sign with the word “PLIS” [WRINKLES] in front of her face. It was an aid in their communication while working on the film; when the meaning of a word was unclear Chris Marker wrote it on a slip of paper. The picture is not included in the film but is published in Chris Marker’s book version of *Le mystère Koumiko* (along with *Soy Mexico* and *Si j’avais quatre dromedaires*): Chris Marker, *Commentaires 2*, Editions du Seuil 1967.

Han ringde upp henne och började tala japanska. Efteråt berättade Johnnie Walker och Kumiko om samtalet. ”Så du är från Harbin” hade Johnnie Walker inlett utan att presentera sig. Han hade räknat upp platser i Harbin, hotell och caféer och frågade om hon varit där nyligen. Han hade frågat henne om den ena eller andra familjen. De hade pratade med varandra som om de känt varandra sedan länge. Kumiko hade pratade om Harbin på sitt stillsamma sätt utan att fråga vem hon talade med, även om Johnnie Walker till slut hade presenterat sig och förklarat sammanhanget.¹⁰⁵

VIII

Att skriva videoessäns text för läsning blev ett försök att skriva en rytmisk, text med en viss enkelhet. Den skulle givetvis också ha en dramatisk struktur. Jag visste att uppläsningssituationen i kombination med ett bildflöde skapar en sådan komplex ström av meddelanden att det är mycket svårt att följa ett resonemang eller en handling. *Sans soleil* är till exempel en videoessä som rör sig nära övermättnadens gräns. Man bör egentligen både läsa texten separat och se filmen i omgångar.¹⁰⁶

Texten skulle skrivas som en blandning av uppläsning, föreläsning och historieberättande. Jag införde också ett visuellt moment av (hand)skrivande av texter i videon – vilket är den enklaste materialisering av text man kan tänka sig.¹⁰⁷ Jag lät uppläsaren, efter prologen, skriva ner videoessäns titel direkt på armen. Jag ville på ett naivt sätt förkroppsliga texten men också påminna om de tre karaktärernas namn, då texten ständigt fanns på hennes arm under resten av läsningen (handlingen). Ett parti filmades när jag själv skrev som en föredragshållare på en presentationstavla och en fråga skrev jag med krita på kartong. Att på detta sätt låta betraktaren se texten växa fram under skrivakten är ett sätt att prova om det går att få denne att verkligen läsa ut

105. Några månader senare reste Kumiko till Tokyo. Tillsammans med Tomoyo, ägaren av La Jetée bar, sammanstrålade hon med Johnnie Walker.

106. Texten finns tillgänglig på <http://www.markertext.com>.

107. Jag hade fastnat för en svartvit bild där Kumiko håller upp en skylt med texten "PLIS" [RYNKOR] framför sitt ansikte. Det var en hjälp i deras kommunikation under filmarbetet; när betydelsen av ett ord var oklart skrev Chris Marker ner det på en lapp. Bilden finns inte med i filmen utan är publicerad i Chris Markers bokversion av *Le mystère Koumiko* (tillsammans med *Soy Mexico* och *Si j'avais quatre dromedaires*): Chris Marker, *Commentaires 2*, Editions du Seuil 1987.

temporal moment.

If walking is the visual leitmotif in *The Koumiko Mystery*, I let train riding be my leitmotif in *Kumiko, Johnnie Walker & the Cute*. The narrative of the video essay could be framed by the following simple event: children board the subway train in Yukigaya Otsuka; most of them get off, but one of them remains until the last station, Gotanda. Many trips and other stretches are incorporated into this journey (toward the end, people are traveling by monorail, like in *The Koumiko Mystery*), but the narrative movement is still this journey, even if it is not drawn in a linear way, but is broken into repetitive fragments. The schoolchildren are waved to by a Fool (Nakata) who wears a red baseball cap on which he has written texts by hand; with gestures he makes it clear that he observes the children (he points to his eyes while the narrative voice says that it is the Artist who observes the children); the children wear school uniforms with their fantastic round hats and short pants, the girls wearing short skirts.

The children are cute, the cuteness transcends into beauty (Christ Marker: “How do you perceive the beauty of the Japanese? And the kids?” Kumiko: “It is strange how fiercely the others inspire beauty.”)¹⁰⁷ The schoolchildren carry the characteristic black backpacks that have such an appealing, defined form. One has tenderly placed an arm over a friend’s shoulder, one walks along, weighed down and staggering as if the backpack were filled with stones and the walk up to the train station were the road to Calvary.

On the platform, scenes full of subtlety are enacted. A boy drinks water from a drinking fountain and his friend studies how the water creates a soft pressure against his lips. While waiting for the train, different games and playing are initiated, and the activities continue without interruption on the train. They challenge each other with complicated variants of stone, paper, scissors. They argue and tease each other, they tell each other secrets; one can see admiration and ill will in their eyes. All of this is completely unconcealed. The grownups, on the other hand, guard their inscrutability. The adults are encapsulated and refuse to let their gaze mix with other people. Most of them are actually sleeping; many are in deep sleep. Sometimes, in their sleep, they unknowingly cross the boundary where integrity turns into its opposite. The people then become defenceless. The facial muscles relax, drool collects at the corners

107. Marker, *The Koumiko Mystery*.

texten (och internalisera den) och samtidigt dras in i ett temporalt skeende.

Om vandrandet är det bildmässiga ledmotivet i *Mysteriet Koumiko* lät jag tågresandet bli mitt ledmotiv i *Kumiko, Johnnie Walker & The Cute*. Videoessäns berättelse skulle kunna ramas in av följande enkla händelse: barnen stiger på tunnelbanetåget i Yukigaya Otsuka, de flesta stiger av men en av dem bli kvar till slutstationen Gotanda. I denna resa ingår många resor och andra sträckor (mot slutet färdas man på monorail, som i *Mysteriet Koumiko*), men den narrativa rörelsen är ändå denna resa, även om den inte dras upp linjärt, utan är sönderhackad i repetitiva fragment: Skolbarnen vinkas av av en Däre ("Nakata") som bär en röd baseballkeps på vilken han skrivit texter för hand; med gester gör han klart att han observerar barnen (han pekar på sina ögon samtidigt som berättarrösten säger att det är "konstnären" som observerar barnen); barnen bär skoluniform; de fantastiska runda hattarna och kortbyxorna, flickorna har de små kjolarna.

Barnen är gulliga, gulligheten förvandlas till skönhet (Chris Marker: "Hur ser du den japanska skönheten? Och barnen?" Kumiko: "Det är märkligt hur våldsamt de andra inspirerar skönheten").¹⁰⁸ Skolbarnen bär de karakteristiska svarta ryggsäckarna, som har en sådan tilltalande, definierad form. Någon har ömt lagt armen över sin kamrats axlar, någon går ensam, nertyngd och stapplande som om ryggsäcken var fylld av sten och vandrigen fram till tågstationen en golgatavandring.

På perrongen utspelas scener fulla av subtilitet. En pojke dricker vatten från drickfontänen och hans kamrat studerar hur vattnet skapar ett mjukt tryck mot hans läppar. I väntan på tåget inleds olika spel och lekar och aktiviteterna följer utan avbrott med in på tåget. De utmanar varandra på komplicerade varianter av sten, sax, påse. De bråkar med varandra och retas, de inviger varandra i hemligheter, man kan se beundran och illvilja i deras ögon. Allt detta är helt oförtäckt. De vuxna människorna däremot vaktar sin outgrundlighet. De vuxna är inkapslade och vägrar med sina blickar att beblanda sig med andra människor. De flesta sover i själva verket, många befinner sig i djup sömn. Ibland går de i sömnen ovetande över den gräns där integriteten vänds till sin motsats. Människorna blir då skyddslosa. Ansiktsmuskula-

108. Marker, *Mysteriet Koumiko*.

of the mouth, someone sits with wide-open mouth in a strange position. Not even the Fools who travel by train show such unguarded faces. The Fools seem to travel ritually, they have voluntarily assumed the role of controlling the train times, they move regularly on the platform following the markings, sometimes they imitate the sound and movements of the train.

The camera focuses on the boy who travels to the end station, Gotanda, every day. We can study the quick movements of his pupils he is like a representative of the city landscape. Sometimes the gaze lets go, turns off. He goes into other worlds. Finally, in the last scene, he sees the camera. A smile breaks across his face, as in agreement. Soon he becomes a little embarrassed – perhaps thoughtful – and, he tries to return to his thoughts and his inner time.

In *The Koumiko Mystery*, a game is created with Kumiko's gaze, where different barriers of distance are broken down to the point where Kumiko seems to use the camera as a mirror or instrument for her own gaze. In *Sans soleil*, Marker pursues gazes; he stares at people with the camera and wants to get them to stare back. He seeks that moment where the object ends up in an egalitarian situation of gazing, where both proportionally acknowledge the other's existence.¹⁰⁸ The game goes back to Dziga Vertov's experiment with gazes. Vertov's film group was called Kino-eye (Kinoglaz) and was founded in the late 1910s in the Soviet Union.¹⁰⁹ Kino-eye experimented with film methods and production and distribution techniques that all had political and symbolic meanings. They wanted to create a new subjectivity, a gaze for the proletariat that would strengthen the feeling of class; the possibility of looking together, looking at each other, and at the world around them.

Kino-eye declared that life is *that which doesn't know it is being filmed* and therefore cannot pose. Vertov discovered methods for getting his objects to stare at something to the side of his camera so that they could be filmed with their guard down, unaware. This unawareness of the camera would be driven to the point where the object discovers the camera and responds. This moment a revolutionary moment captu-

108. In 2007, Chris Marker created the exhibit "Staring Back" at Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, USA. The exhibition, together with a book (*Staring Back*, MIT Press 2006), toured around museums in the United States and Europe. The image material was taken from Marker's film, video and stills production, and emphasized clashes between social movements and the police: protest movements, riots and demonstrations.

109. Dziga Vertov (1896–1954) is also a pseudonym (for Denis Abelevich Kaufma).

turen släpper, saliven rinner i mungipan, man sitter med vidöppen mun i en märklig kroppsställning. Inte ens Dårarna som reser med tågen visar upp sådana skyddslösa ansikten. Dårarna verkar resa rituellt; de har frivilligt tagit på sig rollen att kontrollera tågtiderna, på perrongerna rör de sig schematiskt utmed markeringar, ibland härmar de tågets ljud och rörelser.

Kameran riktar in sig på pojken som varje dag reser till slutstationen Gotanda. Man kan studera hans pupillers snabba rörelser, han är som ett ombud för stadslandskapet. Ibland släpper blicken, stängs av. Han går in i andra världar. Till slut, i sista scenen, ser han kameran. Ett leende spricker upp i hans ansikte, som i samförstånd. Men snart blir han lite generad eller eftertänksam, han försöker återgå till sina tankar och sin inre tid.

I *Mysteriet Koumiko* skapas en lek med Kumikos blick, där olika barriärer av distans bryts ner till den punkt då Kumiko tycks använda kameran som en spegel eller ett instrument för sin egen blick. I *Sans soleil* jagar Marker blickar, han stirrar med kameran på människor och vill få dem att stirra tillbaka. Han söker det moment där objektet hamnar i en jämlik situation av stirrande, där båda proportionerligt erkänner den andres existens.¹⁰⁹ Spelet går tillbaka på Dziga Vertovs experiment med blickar. Vertovs filmgrupp kallades Kino-öga [Kinoglaz] och grundades under slutet av 1910-talet i Sovjetunionen.¹¹⁰ Kino-öga experimenterade med filmmeter och produktions- och distributionstekniker vilka alla hade politiska och symboliska betydelser. Man ville skapa en ny subjektivitet; en blick för proletariatet som skulle stärka klasskänslan; möjligheten att titta tillsammans, titta på varandra och världen runt omkring sig.

Kino-öga menade att livet är *det som inte vet att det blir filmat* och därför inte kan ägna sig åt posering. Vertov uppfann metoder för att få sina objekt att stirra på något vid sidan av kameran för att därmed filmas med sänkt gard, ovetandes. Denna omedvetenhet om kameran skulle drivas till den punkt då objektet upptäcker kame-

109. 2007 gjorde Chris Marker utställningen "Staring Back" på Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, USA. Utställningen, som åtföljdes av en bok (*Staring Back*, MIT Press 2006) turnerade på museer i USA och Europa. Bildmaterialet var hämtat från Markers filmer, videor och fotografier och betonar sammandrabbningar mellan sociala rörelser och polis: proteströrelser, upplopp och demonstrationer.

110. Även Dziga Vertov (1896–1954) är en pseudonym (för Denis Abelevich Kaufma).

res the instant “/.../ when life ceases to be life and is transformed into something completely different: a filmic consciousness and the joy of creating film. Here life is transformed into something that it was not originally; the unconscious life thereby reaches its end and what is begun instead is an exciting game of consciousness, a game of mutual recognition between life and camera – a game that engages them both in a collaboration to construct a shared field of vision and action /.../”¹¹⁰

In the folder notes for the DVD edition of *Sans soleil* and *La Jetée*, Chris Marker writes that he created both films under very simple conditions. *Sans soleil* was made with a silent 16-mm Beaulieu camera. The film does not contain a single sound synchronization; all environmental sounds were recorded on a simple cassette player. *La Jetée* was made with a Pentax minicam (aside from the only moving scene, which was made with a 35-mm movie camera that had been borrowed for an hour). The simple production of these films arose more from necessity than choice, but Marker says it provides hope for today’s filmmakers, who want to be mobile and independent and devote themselves to their projects without regard to unpredictable producers and fat budgets. The possibilities of today, when one can make a relatively technically advanced film with a cheap DV camera and a computer, he calls an “unintentional homage to Dziga Vertov.” Apparently he is here alluding to Kino-eye’s vision of a self-created subjectivity where the camera becomes the medium for seeing and being seen.

One must criticize the view of “the revolutionary moment” for disregarding the context in which the gazing back occurs, that it is the artist/filmmaker who places this event in his/her own statement, where all the parts play against each other and are given a connection, and that the artist thereby has the final power over the object and his/her gaze. The situation itself, staring into the camera, still seems, after 150 years, to contain a considerable element of fear; the fear of loss of self, the fear of narcissism, the eruption of narcissism, the feeling of theft and violence. The gaze of the camera eye triggers many crises, sometimes even fear of death, and Kumiko expressed such experiences in her conversation and her newly written text. Only when

110. Irina Sandomirskaja, “One Sixth of the World: Avant-garde Film, the Revolution of the Vision, and the Colonization of the Periphery in the USSR during the 1920s (Towards a Postcolonial Deconstruction of Soviet Hegemony),” unpublished manuscript.

ran och responderar. Detta moment – ett revolutionärt moment – fångar ögonblicket ”/.../ när liv upphör att vara liv och transformeras till något helt annat: en filmisk medvetenhet samt filmskapandets glädje. Här transformeras livet till något som det ursprungligen inte är; det omedvetna livet når därmed sitt slut och vad som istället inleds är ett spännande medvetenhetsspel, ett spel av ömsesidigt erkännande mellan liv och kamera – ett spel som engagerar dem båda i ett samarbete för att konstruera ett synens och handlandets gemensamt fält /.../.¹¹¹

Chris Marker berättar i foldern till dvd-utgåvan av *Sans soleil* och *La Jetée* att han gjort de båda filmerna under mycket enkla förhållanden. *Sans soleil* gjordes med en tyst 16-mm Beaulieu-kamera. Filmen innehåller inte en enda ljudsynk, alla miljö-ljud spelades in med en simpel kassetbandspelare. *La Jetée* gjordes med en Pentax småbildskamera (förutom den enda rörliga scenen som gjordes med en 35-mm:s filmkamera som lånades in för en timme). Den enkla produktionen av dessa filmer var sprungen mer ur omständigheter än val, men det ger hopp åt dagens filmare, menar Marker, som vill vara rörliga och oberoende och hänge sig åt sina projekt utan hänsyn till oförutsägbara producenter och feta budgetar. Dagens möjligheter, då man kan göra en förhållandevis tekniskt avancerad film med en billig dv-kamera och en dator, omnämner han som en ej avsedd hyllning till Dziga Vertov. Uppenbarligen syftar han här på Kino-ögas vision om en självskapad subjektivitet där kameran blir medlet för att se och bli sedd.

Man måste kritisera Kino-ögas framhållande av ”det revolutionära ögonblicket” för att bortse från det sammanhang i vilket tillbakastirrandet sker, att det är konstnären/filmaren som placerar denna händelse i sin egen utsaga, där alla delarna spelar mot varandra och ges ett sammanhang och att konstnären därmed ytterst har makten över objektet och dennes blick. Dessutom tycks själva situationen, stirrandet in i kameran, fortfarande efter 150 år ha kvar ett anseeligt moment av fruktan; rädsla för jagförlust, för narcissism och känslan av stöld och övergrepp. Kameraögats blick utlöser många kriser, ibland till och med dödsskräck, och Kumiko gav uttryck för sådana upplevelser i sitt samtal och i sin nyskrivna text. Först när alla människor har en

111. Irina Sandomirskaja, "One Sixth of the World: Avant-garde Film, the Revolution of the Vision, and the Colonization of the Periphery in the USSR during the 1920s (Towards a Postcolonial Deconstruction of Soviet Hegemony)", opublicerat manuskript (min övers. M.B.).

all people have a camera and constantly film each other – a Vertovian situation that Marker envisions – might perhaps such a dread disappear.

In my own filming using the HD camera on the trains and subways of Tokyo, I found it strange to be close to the faces of strangers, to be able to film them with such richness of detail without having them gaze back at the camera.¹¹¹ Many of them were sleeping, but the adults almost always ignored the camera. Meetings with gazes were also very unusual in the subway, even without a camera. The people of Tokyo create a barrier around their selves, like a bubble. This extreme integrity makes no outward acknowledgment of other people's existence, and it was in this social space without gazes that the filming progressed, with the camera as a provocateur that never succeeded in provoking. Here my own cowardice also played in. I must admit that I was content not to get gazes in return at the camera. If it ever happened, it felt as if I got a shock. An older man grimaced quickly at the sight of the camera lens; he squinted his eyes as if in pain and I turned off the camera immediately. In my cowardice, I focused on the sleeping people whose faces I stole quite shamelessly. Only in the sequence with the boy on his way from Yukigaya Otsuka to the end station Gotanda, did a breakthrough happen when the camera gaze was returned. It was the boy's smile that made me dare to continue the film during this sequence.

As text and narrative, the journey is a stretch that leads to another stretch, another narrative. It forms a coherent time and is structured by this notion of time with datings (stations). Paul Ricœur discusses two concepts of time as the foundations of two different conceptions of the world, which constantly seem to exclude each other: the scientific world view and the phenomenological one.¹¹² The scientific view stems from a cosmic infinite time, which is an external time, while the phenomenological one deals with an inner time that is a subjectively experienced time. Between the internal and external times there is historical time, with its *calendar time*, its *generational shifts*, and its *traces* (documents and monuments) that form the “/.../ bridge that

111. HD (High Definition) technology destroys, or at least confuses – through its high definition – some of the codes that have characterized the documentary genre, such as the feeling of distance to the unknowing object and the status of the poorer image quality as a guarantee of authenticity. This confusion is of course only temporary; with the change in technology, these codes within the dichotomy of documentary/fiction also change.

112. See Peter Kemp's and Bengt Kristensson-Uggla's introduction to *Från text till handling*, Ricœur, “Den berättande tiden” also in *Från text till handling*, Brutus Östlings Bokförlag Symposion 1993, p. 26.

kamera och ständigt filmar varandra – en vertovsk situation som Marker ser framför sig – skulle möjligen en sådan skräck kunna försvinna.

I mitt eget filmande med hd-kameran på tågen och tunnelbanan i Tokyo fann jag det märkligt att befinna mig så nära de främmande ansiktena, att kunna filma dem med sådan detaljrikedom utan att få en blick tillbaka i kameran.¹¹² Många sov visserligen, men de vuxna nonchalerade i stort sett alltid kameran. Möten med blickar var också väldigt ovanliga i tunnelbanan även utan kamera. Människorna i Tokyo skapar en avskärmning runt sin individ, likt en bubbla. Denna extrema integritet ger inget yttre erkännande till andra människors existens, och det var i detta sociala rum utan blickar som filmandet försiggick, med kameran som en provokatör som aldrig lyckades provocera. Här spelade också min egen feghet in. Det ska erkännas att jag var nöjd med att inte få blickar i retur mot kameran. Om det någon gång hände kändes det som om jag fick en stöt. En äldre man grimaserade helt hastigt vid anblicken av kameraögat, han knep ihop ögonen som av smärta och jag stängde genast av. I min feghet fokuserade jag på de sovande vars ansikten jag stal helt skamlöst. Först i sekvensen med pojken på väg från Yukigaya Otsuka till slutstationen Gotanda skedde ett (enda) genombrott då kamerablicken återgäldades. Det var pojkens leende som fick mig att fortsätta filma under denna sekvens.

Som text och berättelse är resan en sträcka som leder till en annan sträcka, en annan berättelse. Den bildar en sammanhållen tid och struktureras av denna tidsuppfattning med hjälp av dateringar (stationer). Paul Ricœur talar om två tidsbegrepp som grundvalarna för två uppfattningar om världen, vilka ideligen tycks utestänga varandra: den vetenskapliga världsbilden och den fenomenologiska.¹¹³ Den vetenskapliga bilden utgår från en kosmisk, oändlig tid, vilken är en yttre tid medan den fenomenologiska räknar med en inre tid som är en subjektivt upplevd tid. Mellan den inre och den yttre tiden finns den historiska tiden med sin *kalendertid*, sina *generationsskiften* och sina *spår* (dokument och monument) som bildar den *"/.../* bro

112. HD-tekniken (High Definition) förstör eller åtminstone förvirrar – genom sin höga upplösning – några av de koder som präglat den dokumentära genren, såsom känslan av avstånd till det ovetande objektet och den lägre bildkvalitets status som garanti för autenticitet. Denna förvirring är förstås bara temporär; med teknologins förändring förändras också dessa koder inom dikotomin dokumentär – fiktion.

113. Se Peter Kemps och Bengt Kristenssons inledning till *Från text till handling*, Brutus Östlings Bokförlag Symposion 1993, s. 26.

has been built across the abyss separating cosmic time from experienced time.”¹¹³ The train trip makes clear how the dating (the train timetable) forms a bridge between the two time planes and worldviews; it unites people in a knowledge of when the train began and when it last stopped. But their experience of the time of the train trip is individual and belongs to inner time. The dreaming boy moves in his time zone; the sleeping, half-sleeping, and awake people in completely different ones. The Fool controls calendar time. And each of the wide awake, sleeping, and half-sleeping people create their own experiences of time. For the boy, time seems infinite. But any of them could do what the Fool did: look at the clock and state that the train will arrive at the station “on time.” The train stops, like calendar time, can be seen as “institutions in the political sense”; they carry out “/.../ a *reinscription* of experienced time as individual fate and common destiny in cosmic time.”¹¹⁴ Ricœur argues that such moments of reinscription are crucial for narrative structures; they make up *narrative time*. The choice of using train travel as a foundation did not come from Ricœur’s theories (I only became acquainted with Ricœur’s theories afterwards), but they clarified for me the way in which narrative structures manage time concepts.¹¹⁵

Seeking out the locations of Marker’s films provided a conceptual frame for the depiction of the city in my video essay. Marker had from the beginning also established a dialogue with the other city, Paris. I could represent this relationship with an image of Tokyo Tower, the copy of the Eiffel Tower, but also with sequences from the Paris metro. The return to the Olympic Stadium in Tokyo happened partially through the filming of a model of the stadium that I found at Tobu World, outside of Tokyo (Nikka), a theme park where several famous buildings from around the world have been erected on a scale of 1:12. (Since the dinosaur park that Marker filmed no

113. *Ibid.*, p. 216.

114. *Ibid.*, p. 217.

115. Particularly in Ricœur’s analysis (in *Time and Narrative*, Vol 2, The University of Chicago Press 1985) of Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway*, where the unity of place and time direction in the narrative creates a bridge between the streams of consciousness of the various characters – “/.../ a reverberation of an internal discourse in another person” (p. 105). The power of fiction here is a matter of “/.../ weaving together the world of action and that of introspection, of mixing together the sense of everydayness and that of the inner self” (p. 104). In this narrative, it is the regular chimes of Big Ben and a number of church bells that represent “monumental time,” which in this case is related to the Empire’s authority and power, while its time markers simultaneously carry the action forward within the time frame for the day that frames the story.

som slagits över klyftan som skiljer den kosmiska tiden från den upplevda tiden.”¹¹⁴ Tågresan tydliggör hur dateringen (tågtidtabellen) bildar en brygga mellan de två tidsplanen och världsbilderna, den förenar människorna i en vetskap om när tåget startade och när det sist stannade. Men deras upplevelse av tågresans tid är individuell, den tillhör den inre tiden. Den drömmande pojken rör sig i sin tidzon, de sovande, de halvsovande och de klarvakna i helt andra. Dären kontrollerar kalendertiden. Och var och en av de klarvakna, hel- och halvsovande gör sig sina egna upplevelser av tiden. För pojken tycks tiden oändlig. Men vem som helst av dem kan göra som Dären; titta på klockan och konstatera att tåget anländer till stationen i ”rätt tid”. Tågstoppen, liksom kalendertiden kan ses som ”institutioner i politisk bemärkelse”, de utför ”/.../ en återinskrivning av den upplevda tiden – som enskilt livsöde och gemensam bestämmelse – i den kosmiska tiden.”¹¹⁵ Ricœur menar att sådana moment av återinskrivningar är bärande för narrativa strukturer, de utgör den *berättande tiden*. Valet att använda tågresandet som en grund kom visserligen inte ur Ricœurs teorier (Ricouers teorier tog jag del av först i efterhand) men de tydliggjorde för mig de narrativa strukturernas hantering av tidsbegrepp.¹¹⁶

Att söka upp platserna för Markers filmer gav en konceptuell ram för skildringen av staden i min videoessä. Marker hade från första början också etablerat en dialog med den andra staden, Paris. Jag kunde representera relationen med en bild av Tokyo Tower, kopian av Eiffeltornet, men även med sekvenser från Paris tunnelbana. Återvändandet till den olympiastadion i Tokyo skedde delvis genom filmandet av en modell av stadion som jag hittade på Tobu world utanför Tokyo (Nikka), en temapark där man minutiöst uppfört en mängd kända byggnader från hela världen i skala 1:12. (Då inte den dinosauriepark som Chris Marker filmade fanns kvar fick

114. Ibid., s. 216.

115. Ibid., s. 217.

116. Inte minst i Ricœurs analys (i *Time and Narrative* Vol 2, The University of Chicago Press 1985) av Virginia Woolfs *Mrs Dalloway* där enheten i plats och tidsriktning i berättelsen skapar en brygga mellan karaktärernas medvetandeströmmar – ”/.../ett genljudande av en inre diskurs hos en annan människa” (s. 105). Fiktionens kraft handlar här om att ”/.../ väva samman handlingens värld med introspektionens, att blanda samman vardaglighetens betydelse med det inre jagets mening” (s. 104). I denna berättelse är det de regelbundna slagen av Big Bens klocka och ett antal kyrkklockor som står för ”monumental tid”, vilket i detta fall hör ihop med imperiets auktoritet och makt, samtidigt som dess tidsmarkörer för handlingen framåt inom tidrymden för den dag som ramar in berättelsen. (min övers. M.B.)

longer remained, Tobu World had to function as a stand-in.) On location at the real Olympic Stadium in Tokyo, I was struck by details: relief figures depicting athletes and the well-worn pavement where Kumiko must have walked, a pavement that in my eyes resembled a Roman road.

But above all, it is the repetition of Kumiko's text, now read by someone else (whose existence possibly could coincide with Kumiko's), that connects the time planes in my video essay. By letting Kumiko's words comment on today's Tokyo – a boy on the way to the subway, Johnnie Walker's bunraku-walk, the antagonistic encounters between animals – the text was performed again in a new context, even if Kumiko finally burst out *protestement* when her words about violence came up.

Ricoeur calls the creation of a *reenactment* “a bringing up of the past in the present.”¹¹⁶ The reenactment is a task of “re-thinking” (*re-penser*) and not of re-experiencing (*revivre*). Someone or something acts in such a situation as a *substitute* for the past. For the substitute (a stand-in), *one's self performs as another*, an action that releases the self for a moment but also provides a fundamental opportunity for knowledge and insight.

Pilgrimage and walking in the footsteps of the text is not a resuscitation of the text. Here is a belief in the idea that a place is also something of a document that establishes a standing signal to the past, and that the place thereby constantly re-establishes itself. Resuscitation is possibly linked to the act of reading, where a dead text “receives life.”

A video essay has the potential to combine the act of reading/the performance of text with “the bringing up of the past in the present” through the representation of places and individuals who belong to parallel time planes. In relationship to reading, *reenactment* involves creating new tracks next to the old ones, embarking on the process of re-thinking.

*

116. Paul Ricoeur, “Den berättande tiden,” p. 223.

Tobu world fungera som *stand in*). På plats i den riktiga olympiastadion i Tokyo fastnade jag för detaljer: relieffigurer som avbildade idrottsmän och den blankslitna stenläggningen där Kumiko måste ha gått, en stenläggning som i mina ögon liknade en romersk väg.

Men främst är det i min videoessä upprepningen av Kumikos text, nu uppläst av en annan (vars existens möjligen kunde sammanfalla med Kumikos), som binder ihop tidsplanen. Genom att låta Kumikos ord kommentera dagens Tokyo – en pojke på väg till tunnelbanan, Johnnie Walkers bunraku-vandring, antagonistiska möten mellan djur – återuppfördes texten i ett nytt sammanhang även om Kumiko till slut utbrast *protestement* när hennes ord om våld aktualiserades.

Att skapa en *reenactment* kallar Ricoeur för ”en återaffektivering av det förflutna i nuet”.¹¹⁷ Återuppförandet är en uppgift att om-tänka [re-penser] och inte att återuppleva [revivre]. Någon eller något agerar i en sådan situation *ställföreträdare* för det förflutna. Hos ställföreträdaren (en *stand in*) uppträder *en själv som en annan*, en handling som lösgör jaget för en stund men också erbjuder en fundamental möjlighet för kunskap och inlevelse.

Vallfärden och vandrandet i textens fortspår är inget återupplivande av (den förflutna) texten. Här finns visserligen en tro på att en plats också är något av ett dokument som upprättar en stående signal till det förflutna, och att platsen därmed ständigt återuppför sig själv. Återupplivandet hör möjligen ihop med läsakten, där en död text ”får liv”.

En videoessä har möjligheten att kombinera läsakten/textframförandet med ”återeffektivering av det förflutna i nuet” genom representationen av platser och individer som tillhör parallella tidsplan. *Reenactment* innebär, i förhållande till läsningen, att skapa nya hjulspår intill de gamla, att ge sig in i om-tänkandets process.

*

117. Paul Ricoeur, ”Den berättande tiden”, s. 223.

Kumiko, Johnnie Walker & The Cute

(the voice-over text from the video essay)

Johnnie Walker, listing names: "...Takashi Murakami, Nara, Tracey Emin, Gilbert & George..."

Here is the text.

It's all there is.

All is in here.

All texts are dead.

They are dead and like dead human souls they are thirsty.

They are thirsty like the dry palm tree.

To read is to water the souls.

To water the palm tree.

The text comes alive for a short moment, like the double of a dead.

Don't bother about mistakes and errors in this text. They are not due to my inability.

The one to blame is the artist – the one who wrote this text.

I'm just the medium.

These are not my words.

I admit that this is my voice.
Or rather – I'm inventing this voice right now in front of you.
Voices are nothing natural, you know, everyday we have to invent them.
Every morning we have to sing up for ourselves.

It's a miracle it works every day.
That we are able to call forth possible, acceptable voices everyday.

The artist spoke to me about voices and reading.
But they are not his ideas.
He found them in a book.
He found out that in ancient Greece reading was slave labor.
It was even worse than that.

The critical issue was to subordinate to the text, to become the medium.
One was reading another person's words, the text didn't belong to oneself.
Reading was an act of abuse.
One was actually raped by the text.

The artist says that you can find very explicit comments on that.

No wonder nobody wanted to read aloud, yet reading aloud was the only form of
reading, otherwise the text was not alive, it didn't exist.

Do I mind?
I'm just reading this text.
The words don't belong to me.
I'm helping out.

KOUMIKO JOHNNIE WALKER

THE CUTE

(writing the names on the arm)

*

The French filmmaker Chris Marker went to Tokyo during the Olympics in 1964. He was supposed to film the events at the stadium.

1964.

The Japanese mafia – the yakuza – has canceled all activities during the games.

Khrushchev is resigning.

The Pope goes to Bombay. It's the first time a Pope goes to Asia.

2006. Forty-two years have passed.

The Pope goes to Turkey. It's the first time a Pope goes to a Muslim country.

People around the world wonder if the new Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe will pay a visit to the Yazukuni shrine.

Chris Marker isn't so interested in the games, it seems. France doesn't win a single gold medal. He turns the camera towards the audience and finds a young woman.

Koumiko Muraoka. A student at the French-Japanese Institute in Tokyo.

He will name the film after her.

He calls it *The Koumiko Mystery*.

Together with Kumiko Chris Marker breezes through the streets of Tokyo.

He says she is not typical Japanese, if such a creature exists.

She is not a model, class or race.

She doesn't resemble any other woman.

She is unaware of herself.

She is surprised to be in a film that carries her name.

She doesn't belong to history – she is history, like you, me, Mao Zedong, the Pope.

He asks her:

– *Are you completely Japanese?*

– *In terms of race I'm Japanese.*

– *And your mind?*

– *All too mixed up.*

– *How come? Is it your Manchurian background?*

– *In a way, yes.*

– *How old were you when you first came to Japan?*

– *Ten – a real stranger.*

– *So now you are not a stranger?*

– *Now I should be Japanese.*

*

Information regarding Chris Marker is scarce and contradictory.

His name is a pseudonym and it's said to be taken from the Magic Marker pen.

He is most likely born in 1921, not in Mongolia as some people state, but in France.

His favourite animals are the cat and the owl.

Some people have asserted he's from another planet, some say he comes from the future.

The artist says that Chris Marker developed the theory and practice of staring.
To stare at each other with equality.

A bar in Shinjuku is named after his film *La Jetée*.
It's a tiny place, a place of its own, a heterotopia.
It has its own time.

*

Jonhnie Walker shouting:

"I gonna send you to fucking Norway!"

"I'm sorry."

"Can someone take some tape and wrap around his mouth..."

"No, I was so happy about the performance... I couldn't help..."

"Well, you fucked it up."

*

Johnnie Walker is not a pseudonym, it's a homonym. His Japanese name is Joni Waka.

Actually his life is full of homonymous conditions. In Haruki Murakami's novel *Kafka on the Shore* the character "Johnnie Walker" is a reference to him. And, homonymously, the cruel cat-killer of the novel is dressed like the figure on the whisky bottle.

Reading from the book of Murakami:

My name is Johnnie Walker. Johnnie Walker. Almost everyone knows who I am. Not to boast but I'm famous the world over. I'm not the real Johnnie Walker, mind you. I have nothing to do with the British distilling company. I've just borrowed his appearance and name. A person's got to have an appearance and name, don't you think?

Silence descended on the room. Nakata had no idea what the man was talking about, though he did catch the name Johnnie Walker. "Are you a foreigner, Mr Johnnie Walker?" Johnnie inclined his head. "Well if that helps you understand me, feel free to think so. Or not. Because both are true."

Nakata was lost. He might as well be talking to Kawamura, the cat. "So you're a foreigner, but also not a foreigner. Is that what you mean?"

"That is correct."

*

The other day two policemen knocked on Johnnie Walker's door. They excused themselves and said that he, as a stranger, is probably not aware of the rules and laws of Japan. He cannot possibly know that it's actually not allowed to keep a bear within the city-limits of Tokyo.

What one of the neighbors had reported as a bear is a gigantic Irish wolfhound named Bacon, after Francis Bacon.

When the artist first met Johnnie he had another dog called Elton, after Elton John. A bullterrier.

Elton jumped out of the terrace trying to catch a cat and killed himself. Elton was a normal-sized dog.

But Bacon is a huge dog. Like Johnnie this dog is raised strictly on vegetarian kosher food.

It's an impressive creature, but it's not cute.

The question is if it's a pet at all.

Actually, it exceeds the notions of a pet.

*

The artist met Johnnie Walker in Tokyo 1998. Together with a friend he was visiting the galleries in Tokyo. When he asked questions people would say: "You'd better speak to Johnnie Walker."

"You'd better speak to Johnnie Walker" – after some days he thought this was a proverb, or saying – a phrase you use when you want to get rid of someone.

But then there was a gallery where they, besides the "you'd better speak to Johnnie Walker," gave the artist his card.

It's an unusual thing to do – giving away another person's card.

The artist decided to phone the number and there was a firm voice on the other end

telling – or rather ordering – him to show up in a certain gallery the next day at a specific time.

There was an opening at the gallery, it was crowded. The artist doubted it would be possible to recognise anyone who hadn't described himself.

When smoking a cigarette he noted a bald man wearing glasses with red frames, speaking in a loud and piercing voice. Bald except for two black symmetrical strands at the back of his head. The man approached him, took the cigarette from his hand, put it in his own nose, held out his hand and said: "Hello, my name is Johnnie Walker."

Johnnie Walker was at the time a trader of options at the Dresdner Bank in Tokyo.

In the evenings he was driving around to different openings and parties. He never stayed long at any place.

In the elevator of Hyatt Park Hotel in Tokyo the interior decorator has made an homage to Johnnie Walker. There are three figures in bronze: the face of Johnnie, the servant and the dog.

The artist has tried to understand his biography, but many things are obscure. More than eight years have passed since the artist first met him. At that time he said he was 53 years old. He still says he's 53.

Johnnie Walker comes from a family of Sephardic Jews. They are Japanese citizens, maybe four generations back.

Like Kumiko he spent his first years in Manchuria.
When he was three years old the family moved to Osaka.

When he was six he was sent to a boarding school in India.

He grew up with the servants and a dog.

He says this is the story of his life.

*

The artist travels almost every day from the metro station Yukigaya Otsuka.

He observes the kids going home from school.

The kids are spreading all over the platform.

They are full of energy.

Their little hands have so many needs, they are all-over and everywhere, grasping, clutching, snatching, tickling, holding...

They are playing, teasing, bullying...

They know all the methods, and they make up new ones, they are full of inventions. Everything is open.

One by one the schoolchildren get off the train.

Only one of them goes all the way to the terminal Gotanda. It's just a few stops more.

It's nothing and it's an eternity.

*

Writing on the whiteboard:

the Fool

Today we have a different diagnosis for these individuals.
We say they are not fools but different.

Adding on the whiteboard in front of “the Fool”:

The Cute and

They are similar.
But they are not the same.

He or she – it doesn't matter.

Here or there – it doesn't matter.

Age has some relevance.

The Cute is either very young or very old.
The Fool is a late bloomer.
The Fool is able to take care of himself.
The Cute seeks assistance.

The Fool runs his own business.
But has no profession.

The Cute gives us a meaning.
Because the Cute is helpless.

The Fool doesn't charge money.
And therefore he tells the truth.

The Cute has no thoughts
which can be scrutinized or changed.

Not because they are incorrect
or give her anxiety.

The Fool is not a stranger.
The Fool is different.

The Cute is halfway
between humans and animals.

The Fool is not necessarily cute.
But very old people are cute.

The emperor of Japan
used to wear a Mickey Mouse watch.

When he was old
he protected his deeds
with cuteness.

The Cute has a Soft Power.

Sofuto pawa.

*

It's not me speaking.

It's the text starting to find my voice.

According to the Greeks, again, reading wasn't a widespread, accepted activity among descent people until one was able to invent a situation where the reader became both the object and the subject.

Acceptance came when one was able to "read to oneself" or "utter to oneself."

But still the text was considered dead.

It was a grave or graveyard.

It was a dead cicada, killed by ants.

Ants are black as ink and are moving in a linear way.

The ants are the alphabetic letters.

They march graphically and they collect things, they create an economy.

But under the ground their paths are not linear. It's a labyrinth, like the buildings of the Egyptians. The Greeks thought the ants were the only insects that buried their dead, deep down in the labyrinth.

*

Halfway through the film *The Koumiko Mystery* Chris Marker goes back to France. He sends Kumiko a list of questions. She answers on tape.

Why are there beckoning cats?

Koumiko says:

I don't know for myself, so I asked one.

And the cat replied: I haven't seen anyone.

Text: Do you like animals?

I never hate animals. I get along well with the smaller ones.

Dogs are all too faithful. I prefer cats, especially to look into the eyes of a cat.

He looks suspicious.

When my heart oscillates between kindness and maliciousness – I see the same subtle reflections in his eyes.

I once had two kittens.

A hare and blue-eyed, white kittens.

They ran after me in the garden.

In the night they were screaming. Sad to be divorced from me.

The hare was sleeping with me.

They fully trust me. I loved them too much.

One morning the kittens had died in the cold of the night.

The little hare died under my weight.

I don't want to live with animals again.

Even so animals strike on me.

A black cat sometimes visits me, sometimes it's thirsty. Sometimes hungry.

One day I met a skinny dog.

I miaowed – and he answered.

*

Chris Marker sent questions to Kumiko in Tokyo.

The artist is here in Tokyo sending questions to Kumiko in Paris.

The artist found out that she has been there for more than 30 years.

She became a writer and translator.

Kumiko writes about her childhood in Manchuria.

When she was about four years old she began to have a camera-eye that sees and records.

She had instantaneous images with solidness, depth, duration.
They were luminous images in the shape of the present.
She was there, inside them.

*

They say it's fatal to loose your face in this city.
That you would do anything to avoid it.
At any costs. But we fall asleep in trains and metros.

In Chris Marker's *Sans Soleil* it says that the trains in Tokyo inhabited by sleeping people put together all the fragments of dreams, make a single film of them – the ultimate film.

We reach the state of deep sleep.
You may think our faces are unprotected.
But we are not in a space where you relate to others.
We are by ourselves.
We listen to ourselves.
We hear voices.

The Cute has a thin voice.

The one they called a Fool imitates other voices, as well as cars,
motorbikes and trains.

He is very good at that.

You might think that the Cute is powerless.

But cuteness is a natural method of defence for children and animals.

The Cute is half animal, half child.

The Cute builds the Soft Power.

*

Johnnie Walker says that he grew up with servants and dogs and that he himself is a servant.

His first name means: "the one who serves."

He arranges parties for artists. Sometimes there are 200 guests, everything is for free. And Johnnie Walker stands talking, making *kirigami*. He tells stories.

Johnnie Walker is the only servant in Tokyo that holds the principal part. He is aware of that.

He says he's a Jewish mother.

He is also obsessed with fame, nobilities, royalties...

He says: "The Queen has to know about the king."

In the Murakami novel Johnnie Walker is a Mephisto-like character.

He meets Nakata, who is a Fool.

Like Koumiko Nakata is blessed with the skill to speak with cats.

Nakata cannot read and think in an abstract way, but he speaks with cats.

Reading from the book:

My name is Johnnie Walker. Johnnie Walker. Almost everyone knows who I am. Not to boast but I'm famous the world over. I'm not the real Johnnie Walker, mind you. I have nothing to do with the British distilling company. I've just borrowed his appearance and name. A person's got to have an appearance and name, don't you think?

Silence descended on the room. Nakata had no idea what the man was talking about, though he did catch the name Johnnie Walker. "Are you a foreigner, Mr Johnnie Walker?"

Johnnie inclined his head. "Well if that helps you understand me, feel free to think so. Or not. Because both are true."

Nakata was lost. He might as well be talking to Kawamura, the cat. "So you're a foreigner, but also not a foreigner. Is that what you mean?"

"That is correct."

Johnnie Walker says that he hates to be seen as a foreigner.

He's a Japanese Jew.

He has lived in Tokyo for a long time, maybe for thirty years. He knows artists, writers, gallery owners, collectors, rich people... In the hotels he knows the managers, barmen, receptionists...

He likes when they lose their face.

He needs all their puzzled gazes.

He is able to insult people in twelve languages.

He says he hates the Cute.

*

Now the politicians say Soft Power is a Japanese national resource.

But there is no limit between soft and hard power in Japan.

And there is no limit between the Cute and the sexy.

In Tokyo even machines, vehicles and instructions are cute.

In Tokyo even the motorcycle gangs have little cute dolls.

Go to the War Memorial Museum, next to the Yasukuni shrine.
They have very cute souvenirs in the museum shop.

*

Writing:

How do you perceive the beauty of the Japanese?

And the kids?

It is strange how fiercely the others inspire the beauty.

And I cannot understand how you see the children or the beauty here.

*

When Johnnie Walker is traveling the neighbors and some guest artists staying in his house take care of Bacon.

Elie, a 78-year-old Israeli ex-businessman, usually drives Bacon to a French restaurant. Johnnie Walker says Elie drives like Mr Magoo. That he sometimes bumps into other cars.

At the restaurant Bacon gets beer and a steady meal.

When Johnnie Walker was in Dakar in Senegal he was thrown into prison, accused of sexual abuse of an under-aged. He was later acquitted.

He spent four months in a tiny cell with two hundred people.

He says he saw 72 people dying there.

That they were tortured or just spontaneously killed by the guards.

He says he never lay down sleeping during the four months in the cell.

He just occasionally slept some minutes, standing upright.

Violence is for me something easy, something uncomplicated.

Violence was born with mankind.

It's fundamentally connected to human life.

It's a force of nature, there is no need for effort for violence.

I'm never afraid.

Confronted with violence I'm never offended.

I'm simply dying, or living.

Always, all days, nights, mornings.

There is always something happening.

To me there are events every morning, thrown into me.

When I was a child

I lived of the sensation of talk or the sensual pleasure of scent.

Exactly then humans started to suffer.

They started war, were imprisoned, yielding.

They resisted, cried. Their bodies were torn apart.

When I now know,

I'm surprised I didn't know before.

Every morning I'm surprised, understanding nothing, unable to comment on anything.

But soon they will come – the results of the events.

It's like a wave, an earthquake, an accident far away.

The wave is coming closer and closer – at the end all the way to me.

*

Conversation:

"...*protestement*, it's not... it's not exactly..."

"There was a lot of pain?"

"It's not... just *commencer*... it's just *début*... *commencer*...beginning of the pain.
It was too much."

"Already in the beginning?"

"In the beginning. And I understand... if someone torture me...ok?"

"You would confess?"

"Everything!"

"So this is something... you cannot..."

"...approve."

"...approve any longer?"

"I'm very... ashamed... J'avais honte."

"Ashamed... for that sentence?"

"Mmm..."

The voice of Kumiko:

Une fois, j'ai affirmé que je n'avais pas peur de la violence. Je ne savais rien de la violence. Je n'y avais jamais réfléchi. Plus tard j'ai regretté d'avoir dit cela. J'avais honte. J'ai espéré que cette phrase soit passée inaperçue, sinon qu'elle fut oubliée. J'ai décidé de l'oublier moi-même.

[I once said I wasn't afraid of violence. I didn't know anything about violence. I'd never thought about it. Later I regretted having said so. I was ashamed. I hoped that what I'd said would go unnoticed, or at least be forgotten. I decided to forget it myself.]

Aujourd'hui, je sens que je suis moi-même, et je suis en accord avec moi-même. Je sais que je suis à mon endroit. Je suis à l'aise dans ce monde. Je suis heureuse d'être là.

[Nowadays, I feel I am myself, and that I am in harmony with myself. I know that I am in the right place. I am at ease in this world. I am happy to be here.]

Je ne me déteste pas. Le matin, je me regarde dans la glace amicalement, et brièvement. Je suis satisfaite de la coupe de mes cheveux. Parfois on me demande l'adresse de mon coiffeur. Mais je ne peux pas la donner. Mon coiffeur c'est moi-même, et je ne sais pas couper les cheveux des autres. Après le bonjour dans la glace, je choisis un de mes vêtements. Ils ont toujours des tons gris et je sais que cela me va. Parfois, on me fait des compliments. Alors je mets ce même vêtement plusieurs jours de suite.

Mais un jour, si on me propose ou me demande de me filmer ou de me photographier, la lampe en veilleuse s'allume, elle clignote, siffle, hurle comme la sirène d'un pompier ou d'une ambulance. Affolée, je me vois, je m'examine, je me jauge. Je pose maintenant sur moi un regard impénétrable et froid, très professionnel, de responsable d'un casting pour une production de cinéma Hollywoodien. Je me regarde de la tête aux pieds, des pieds à la tête, et encore une fois, de la tête aux pieds. Tout mon « être », mon extérieur est traversé, irradié par cette lumière assassine. Je suis l'extérieur, la surface, infiniment extérieur, infiniment surface, mon extérieur se met à fumer. Il faut voir maintenant l'intérieur. L'intérieur aussi joue pour la beauté de l'extérieur. Il faut penser à quelque chose de beau, quelque chose de... Mon corps, mon esprit et mes pensées se tortillent douloureusement tant j'espère être à la hauteur. Une crise aiguë de narcissisme. Cette vanité d'esprit. Pire que moi dans la jeunesse. La jeunesse insouciante, nonchalante, insolente et joyeusement narcissique, un peu bête, plus qu'un peu. Ah, vraiment je ne veux plus être narcissique. Et pourtant... Alors je me demande un peu de retenue, au moins.

Je penche légèrement la tête. En silence. Je suis en train de décliner comme une grande dame la proposition d'un photographe.

Et puis encore: « ... Non... Je ne crois pas... Je ne crois pas pouvoir faire ça..., presque inaudible mais je m'entends, non, je ne veux pas être filmée... ».

Déchirée, désespérée, ma tête penche de plus en plus. C'est un drame. Je regrette. Je souffre, je gémis. Je veux tellement être intelligente, belle et gracieuse comme dans la dernière photo de Virginia Woolf quelques jours avant son suicide.

[I don't hate myself. In the morning I look in the mirror in a friendly manner, briefly. I am satisfied with my hairstyle. Sometimes people ask me for my hairdresser's address. But I can't give it to them. I am my own hairdresser and I don't know how to cut other people's hair. After saying good morning in the mirror, I choose my clothes. They are all in grey tones and I know that suits me. Sometimes people compliment me on my dress. So I wear the same clothes several days in a row.

But if one day someone proposes or asks to film or photograph me, the warning light goes on, blinks, whistles, howls like a fire engine or an ambulance. Panic-stricken, I see myself, examine, evaluate. I look at myself with the cold and inscrutable, very professional eye of a Hollywood casting director. I look at myself from top to toe, from toe to top, and from top to toe again. My whole "being", my outward appearance is pierced, irradiated, by this crushing light. I am exterior, surface, infinitely exterior, and infinitely surface, my outside begins to give off smoke. I should look on the inside. It influences outward beauty too. I must think of something lovely, something that... My body, my mind and my thoughts whirl in pain, hoping so much to be equal to the task. An acute narcissistic crisis. That vanity of the mind. Worse than in my youth. That carefree, nonchalant, insolent and joyfully narcissistic youth, a bit silly, more than a bit. Oh, I really don't want to be narcissistic any more. And yet... Well I could show a little restraint, at least.

I bow my head a little. Silently. I am, like a great lady, declining a photographer's offer.

Then further: "... No... I don't think so... I don't think I could do that..." nearly inaudible, but I can hear myself: "No, I don't want to be filmed..."

Torn and distressed, my head falls further and further forward. It's a drama. I feel sorry for myself. I suffer, moan. I do so want to be intelligent, beautiful and graceful like in the final photo of Virginia Woolf a few days before her suicide.]

*

Johnnie Walker's voice:

"Hello!

This is the Cannibal Queen. Yes, that's right, the Cannibal Queen, the one with the big nose ring. Correct, the one who fell in love with the hula boy, that's right, and swam across that open bay every night by the permeable light and hugged and kissed that poor little boy underneath the coconut tree. And every night by permeable light it sounded like this to me: Aramp, aramp, aramp badiadoey! Aramp, aramp, aramp badiadoey! Oh, the Cannibal Queen with the big nose ring fell in love with the hula boy and every night by the permeable light..."

Madame & Little Boy

(the voice-over text from the video essay)

You cross the Golden Gate bridge.
You see Alcatraz on the right.
This is the story about Madame Choi,
and the Little Boy.

Over the mountain.
On the way to the coast.
All monsters must die.

These buildings were built for the military.
These eucalyptus trees were planted as camouflage.
Now they say they're going to cut them down.

Now these buildings are for artists.
We have dinners in the mess hall
and we look at things.

Look at the fog that's coming.
There's a rainbow inside the fog.

And here's the Nike missile site.
We scrutinize a face
in a transition
and in a film.
This is a story
that could be told by picture cards.

This is Choi Eun-hee.
The South Korean actress and director Madame Choi.
She's 77 years old.
She told the story in a hotel lobby in Seoul.
Her voice is deep and tender.

A virtuous housewife, a sad princess, a flirtatious prostitute.
Look at the dusty streets between the wooden barracks
outside the army base.
Madame Choi,
the most photographed face
in Korean film history.

During the Korean War
Madame was kidnapped by the communists.
She was forced to entertain the military
performing in propaganda plays.
But she managed to escape.
When she arrived in Seoul she was immediately imprisoned,
accused of treason.
She was released on one condition:
That she agreed to entertain the South Korean military.

Little Boy
was the code name for the Hiroshima bomb.
The North Koreans got used to living life underground.
Any bomber could be carrying a Little Boy.
But instead they carried napalm and anthrax.

These missiles were meant to defend San Francisco Bay.
In 1969 people in San Francisco
people wore flowers in their hair.
They didn't know that a few miles away,
here at the Nike missile site,
there were nuclear bombs equivalent to 20 Little Boys.

They run six similar sites in South Korea.

The missiles reached only 90 miles.
The shock wave alone
would have blown San Francisco away.

Madame Choi married the director Shin Sang-ok.
They worked day and night.
They created Shin Studios
– modeled after the studio system of Hollywood –
and the first kiss ever in Korean cinema.

General Park, the South Korean dictator,
was supported by the Americans.
He was obsessed with one Shin film – *The Evergreen Tree*.
Madame played the teacher of the village school,
the idealistic soul who sacrifices everything.

Everything for children.

General Park said that *The Evergreen Tree*
was a national anthem.
An excellent piece of propaganda.

Madame and Shin became regular guests in General Park's palace
– the Blue House.
Shin played cards with the dictator.
He wore his scarf and his blazer.

In the mid-seventies
General Park shut down Shin studios.
The dictator was paranoid.
He thought Shin was conspiring against him.

Madame and Shin had nothing left.

1978, Hong Kong:
Madame was kidnapped for the second time in her life.
She was taken to a boat. They injected some sort of sedative.
After seven days she arrived at the North Korean harbor Nampo.
There was a man with a limousine, waiting.
"Thank you for coming. I'm Kim Jong Il", he said.
He was as happy as a child.

Madame had to leave her passport.
She was urged to dress in the traditional Korean *hanbok*.
Kim Jong Il took a picture and showed it to his father Kim Il Sung.
Kim Il Sung sent word that she was still beautiful and dressed well in *hanbok*.

She had to learn Marxist theory.
She had to watch revolutionary film.

One of the films was *The Evergreen Tree*,
the same film that General Park admired so highly.

Friday evenings Kim Jong Il threw parties.
The guests had to down a large glass of cognac upon their arrival.
There was a screening of films.
Kim was fanatical about films.
And there was a female combo band that played jazz and disco.

*Language plays life
like children playing war.
(Propaganda is in your head
and hegemony in your heart.)*

*What happens when you realize
the nature of the catastrophe
which you have suffered?*

*And the nature of the catastrophe
which you have escaped?*

The years passed and Madame had nothing to do.
She built sculptures of cranes and put them in the garden,
their beaks facing south.
Madame didn't know that Shin had also been kidnapped to North Korea,
that he had spent four years in a camp.

Then came the greatest party ever.

It was 1983.

There were fabulous flower arrangements and hundreds of guests.

Kim Jong Il held a speech and said that Madame was the Mother of Chosun.

Then Shin arrived surrounded by officials.

Madame just stared at her ex-husband.

"Why are you just standing there", Kim asked.

"Go ahead and hug each other".

Kim Jong Il wanted to reinforce the North Korean film industry.

He built a studio town for the couple,

provided them with a huge budget.

Madame and Shin went back to work, just like old times.

Shin made *Pulgasari*.

It was Kim Jong Il's idea.

The film is loosely based on a legend of the 14th century Koryo monarchy.

Pulgasari is a little, cute figure,

a creature that comes alive with the help of a drop of blood from the heroine.

The monster grows rapidly,

eating iron and leading the people's revolt against the king's fortress.

Thousands of North Korean military troops were mobilized and dressed up as extras.

Pulgasari was modeled after Godzilla.

They flew in a special effects team from Toho studios in Tokyo.

Inside the rubber suit was the same actor as in Godzilla.

Madame said Kim Jong Il was very knowledgeable about film.

Madame said he was on the same level as Shin.

He must have known about the meaning of Godzilla.

Godzilla was activated by radiation.

A warning about a new Little Boy.

The *kamishibai* of Japan –
a traveling storyteller.

Between the two World Wars he told stories with his picture cards.

If the children paid him a little they got stories and candy.

The *kamishibai* would enter a village on his bike,
dismount and loudly strike together two wooden clappers
or allow a lucky child to do so.

The sound was a signal for children to run from their homes
and gather around him for story time.

There were educational stories.

And propaganda.

But remember: propaganda is real.

Propaganda speaks through our minds and mouths.

And there were fairytales
and stories about monsters,
that all monsters must die.

Then came Little Boy.

And everything changed in the world.

After Little Boy came the American occupation.

And there was a new propaganda and a new censorship.

Even the harmless stories of the *kamishibai* were censored.

Today we're looking at things, together.

We see a caravan of cars beneath the wind farm.

We see leaves of grass.

Today we are looking at picture cards.

Here is Madame Choi.

And here is Little Boy.

*The Good Book says that the eye is the lamp of the body.
If then your eye is healthy,
your whole body will be full of light.*

Together with Shin, Madame managed to escape from North Korea.

En route to a film festival in Berlin in 1986

they fooled their bodyguards in Vienna.

They sought asylum in the American embassy.

They moved to the States.

Pulgasari was finished in North Korea in their absence.

At the end of the film the monster turns against his own people.

The people have conquered the feudal rulers
with the help of Pulgasari.

But they can't find enough iron for the monster,
the monster is too demanding.

Somewhere here, there must be a message from the dictator.

Does the monster represent the capitalist system
as some have suggested?

Or the atomic program of North Korea
that will help them to conquer their enemies
but ultimately turns against them?

Just like the shock wave
of the Nike missiles
would have blown San Francisco away.
So they have to kill the monster,
and it's up to the heroine,
the Mother of Chosun.
The monster is petrified by her blood.

Madame and Shin were free.
Shin died ten years later,
in South Korea,
suffering from the aftereffects of his time as a prisoner in North Korea.

When he was still in the US he put on a strange repetition.
He created a new version of *Pulgasari* for kids.
Galgameth.
He eats iron, but he's not dangerous,
he is cute.
Galgameth is the monster that doesn't have to die.

The reason for telling this story is to be found in the present.
The reason is the story told backwards.
Here is the Nike missile site.
A petrified monster.
Open for public, run by veterans
that used to work here.

Madame Choi says that she,
as an actress,
has lived the life of others.

In one of Shin's films she says:

"I'm complicated.

Sometimes I'm very happy,

sometimes I'm gloomy.

Sometimes I chirp like a lark.

Sometimes I don't want to talk at all."

*

Madame & Little Boy

(an extended work story)

Kumiko, Johnnie Walker & the Cute developed into a video essay with narrative elements. When I made *Madame & Little Boy* I wanted to create a narrative in the form of an essay. The story was well known. Every survey of Korean cinema that I know of deals with Choi Eun-hee and Shin Sang-ok. Shin is regarded as one of the most important directors in Korean film history, and Choi Eun-hee as one of the most active performers.¹ All the biographies mention their time as kidnapped filmmakers in North Korea. In guide books about Korea and in various historical treatments of the North-South conflict, the story turns up as a somewhat bizarre historical footnote; an illustration of Kim Jong Il's capriciousness and autocracy. Following their escape from North Korea they settled in the USA and what they could relate about Kim

1. After Shin's death in 2006 the Korean National Film Archive issued a box with five of his films (*Shin Sang-ok Gamdok Collection*).

Madame & Little Boy

(en utvidgad verkberättelse)

Kumiko, Johnnie Walker & the Cute utvecklades till en videoessä med inslag av berättande. När jag gjorde *Madame & Little Boy* ville jag skapa en berättelse med inslag av essä. Berättelsen var välkänd. I varje översikt över koreansk film som jag har sett behandlas Choi Eun-hee och Shin Sang-ok. Shin betraktas som en av de banbrytande regissörerna i den koreanska filmhistorien, Choi Eun-hee som en av de viktigaste och mest aktiva skådespelarna.¹ I alla biografier nämns deras sejour som kidnappade filmskapare i Nordkorea. I guideböcker om Korea och olika historieskrivningar över syd-nordkonflikten kommer berättelsen upp som en liten bisarr händelse i marginalen, som en illustration till Kim Jong IIs nyckfullhet och maktfullkomlighet. Efter flykten från Nordkorea då de bosatte sig i USA, blev deras berättelse om Kim Jong Il

1. Efter Shins död 2006 gav det nationella filmarkivet ut en box med fem av hans filmer (*Shin Sang-ok Gamdok Collection*).

Jong Il was some of the only testimony available concerning his psychology as a leader.² Both Shin Sang-ok and Choi Eun-hee have talked about the events. Shin's diary published as Choguk-un Chohanul Chomolli with his memories of the events was written at the behest of the CIA.³ They also jointly wrote a book entitled Uriui talchulun kkutnaji anatta [Our Escape Has Not Ended Yet]⁴ and they told their story to numerous newspapers and TV documentaries, while Choi Eun-hee's autobiography Gobaek was published in 2007.⁵ The story had already been told.

But in my view the story was of greater significance than merely a bizarre footnote or a passage in a printed history of the cinema. And I also wanted to go to North Korea to see the country with my own eyes. The idea of a separate system, a structure entirely its own and subject to completely different rules at a completely different level of reality attracted me. Peter Hyun, in his 1981 book entitled *Darkness at Dawn: a North Korean Diary*⁶ claims that the average North Korean knows nothing of the moon landing. Such an event would present the USA in far too positive a light. I imagined a country in which people live in a world of myth. But I ask myself what it really was that I saw on my visit to North Korea.

Several issues presented themselves during the course of my project and my travels. Some of them left their mark on the voice-over text that I wrote while others have demanded reflection at a later stage. One of these issues was concerned with how one sees or considers something seen. "Considering" and "seeing" are here related both to traveling and to the video-essay format and involve a number of temporal, technological, narrative and physical levels. The foundation of *Madame & Little Boy* is simple and reads: "Today we are looking at things". The starting point is a specific situation ("today") in which one (intensely or casually) looks at certain things. "We" is less definite and ambiguous. It can mean that it is the "artists" who are looking at things, when the place that is given is a place for artists and that working with visual

2. See Selig S. Harrison, *Korean Endgame, A Strategy for Reunification and U.S. Disengagement*, Princeton University Press 2002, p. 57.

3. The English version, entitled *The Kingdom of Kim Jong Il* was dated 30 November 1987. The Korean translation was published by Pacific Palisades, Calif.: Pacific Artists Corporation 1988.

4. Shin Sang-ok & Choi Eun-hee, *Uriui talchulun kkutnaji anatta*, Wolgan Joseeonsa 2001.

5. Choi Eun-hee, *Gobaek*, Random House Korea 2007.

6. Peter Hyun, *Darkness at Dawn: a North Korean Diary*, Hanjin Publishing Company 1981, p. 177.

en av de få vittnesberättelserna om Kim Jong Il och hans psykologi som ledare.² Både Shin Sang-ok och Choi Eun-hee har själva berättat om händelserna. Shins *Choguk-un Chohanul chomolli* [Moderlandet är bortom himlen, långt borta] med minnesbilder av händelserna skrevs på uppdrag för CIA.³ Dessutom skrev de gemensamt boken *Uriui talchulun kcutnaji anatta* [Vår flykt är inte över än]⁴ och de har berättat om händelserna i en mängd intervjuer i tidningar och tv-dokumentärer samt i Choi Eun-hees självbiografi *Gobaek* [Bekännelse], som publicerades 2007.⁵ Berättelsen var redan berättad.

Men jag tyckte att berättelsen hade större betydelse än en bisarr anteckning i marginalen eller en egendomlig passage i en filmhistorisk biografi. Dessutom ville jag resa till Nordkorea och se landet med egna ögon. Tanken på ett avskilt system, en egen struktur som lyder under helt andra lagar och på en helt annan verklighetsnivå, attraherade mig. I Peter Hyuns reportagebok från 1981 *Darkness at Dawn: a North Korean Diary*⁶ hävdas att vanliga nordkoreaner inte känner till månlandningen. En sådan händelse skulle framställa USA i alltför positiv dager. Jag föreställde mig en nation där människor lever i mytens värld. Men frågan är vad jag egentligen såg när jag väl kom till Nordkorea.

Flera frågor dök upp under arbetets och resornas gång. Vissa av dem gav avtryck i den text jag skrev för voice over-berättelsen, andra har framträtt som reflektioner. En fråga gällde betraktandet. Att ”betrakta” och ”se” är här relaterat både till resandet och till videoessäns form och inbegriper ett antal tidsmässiga, teknologiska, narrativa och fysiska nivåer. Grunden för *Madame & Little Boy* är enkel och lyder: ”Idag tittar vi på saker.” Utgångspunkten är alltså en specifik situation (”idag”) där man (intensivt eller förstrött) tittar på vissa saker. ”Vi” har en glidande och tvetydig betydelse. Det kan betyda att det är ”konstnärerna” som tittar på saker, då platsen som anges är en

2. Se Selig S. Harrison, *Korean Endgame, A Strategy for Reunification and U.S. Disengagement*, Princeton University Press 2002, s. 57.

3. Det engelskspråkiga manuset hade titeln *The Kingdom of Kim Jong Il* och var daterat 30 november 1987 (se ibid.) Den koreanska översättningen gavs ut på Pacific Palisades, Calif.: Pacific Artists Corporation 1988.

4. Shin Sang-ok och Choi Eun-hee, *Uriui talchulun kcutnaji anatta*, Wolgan Joseonsa 2001.

5. Choi Eun-hee, *Gobaek*, Random House Korea 2007.

6. Peter Hyun, *Darkness at Dawn: a North Korean Diary*, Hanjin Publishing Company 1981, p. 177.

perception is, historically, their *métier*. But it can also mean that the narrator and the beholder join forces and that we look together.

I asked the narrator, Will Oldham, to emphasize the word “look” in the sentence “Today we are looking at things.” Early in the film I stressed the fact that beholding or considering takes place in a specific place, namely in a studio at the former military base of Headlands, north of San Francisco. There is a silver screen in the middle of the studio and a number of picture cards as well as various instruments and some recording equipment. We are looking at pictures from a large number of sources: picture cards that the narrator holds up and comments on while sitting in an armchair in the room, sequences from Shin Sang-ok and Choi Eun-hee’s films, archival footage, sequences from North Korean government-run TV, my own film sequences from North and South Korea and the landscape surrounding the studio including a former missile base which one can survey outside the studio. The montage was rhythmical and generally involved soft transitions to link together the excerpts from the diverse sources with their geographical and temporal leaps. Using the narration I also wanted to smooth out the various representational levels. “Look at the fog that’s coming. There’s a rainbow inside the fog” was likened to a sequence from one of Shin Sang-ok’s films: “Look at the dusty streets between the wooden barracks outside the army base.” In principle, every documentary film undertakes a similar operation: leading the viewer gently through various layers of representation, sources and units of time. This is, of course, something of the film’s signum, the ability to move us in time and space, but my intention was to make these functions very evident by constantly bringing the viewer back to the studio where the narrator was based with a number of simple picture cards and two wooden clappers that he struck from time to time. The narrator that I was working with was not identical with the author of the text, which, in documentaries, is generally the only reason for showing the narrator on the screen. If the narrator appears visually in a documentary he is normally expressing his own opinions and is concerned with commenting on and demonstrating reality. My narrator appeared rather like a Japanese kamishibai speaker. He announced the story with his wooden clappers (which also became part of the sound composition) and narrated to the images. Only at the end of the film did he (physically) leave the building. Yet this was a building for seeing on numerous levels.

plats för konstnärer och att arbetet med seendet historiskt har varit deras praktik. Men det kan också betyda att uppläsaren och betraktaren gör gemensam sak, att vi tittar tillsammans.

Vid läsningen av meningen ”Today we look at things” bad jag uppläsaren Will Oldham betona ordet ”look”. Tidigt i filmen betonade jag också att betraktandet sker utifrån en viss plats, nämligen en ateljé i en före detta militärbas i Headlands, norr om San Francisco. I ateljén finns en filmduk mitt i rummet samt ett antal bilder (picture cards), förutom olika instrument och en del inspelningsutrustning. Vi tittar på bilder från ett stort antal källor. Berättaren sitter i en fåtölj i rummet och håller upp och kommenterar bilderna (kortet): filmbilder ur Shin Sang-oks och Choi Eun-hees produktion, filmat arkivmaterial, sekvenser från den nordkoreanska statstelevisionen, egna filmade sekvenser från Nord- och Sydkorea samt från landskapet som omger ateljén, inklusive en före detta missilbas som man har översikt över när man kliver ut från ateljén. Montaget gjordes rytmiskt med i huvudsak mjuka övergångar för att länka samman alla dessa skilda källor och geografiska och tidsmässiga språng. Dessutom ville jag med texten jämna ut de olika representationsnivåerna. Att betrakta dimman i landskapet utanför ateljén (”Look at the fog that’s coming. There’s a rainbow inside the fog.”) likställdes med betraktandet av en sekvens från en Shin Sang-ok-film – som om det också var en existerande plats (”Look at the dusty streets between the wooden barracks outside the army base.”) I princip varje dokumentär genomför en liknande operation: betraktaren förs motståndslöst genom olika representationsnivåer, källor och temporalitetsskikt – denna förmåga att förflytta oss i tid och rum är förstås något av filmens signum överhuvudtaget – men min tanke var att också göra dessa funktioner tydliga genom att ideligen återföra betraktaren till den ateljé där berättaren befann sig, med ett antal kartonger med bilder samt två träklappor som han med jämna mellanrum slog ihop. Den berättare som jag arbetade med var inte identisk med textens upphovsman, vilket i dokumentären brukar vara det enda skälet att visa berättaren i bild. Om berättaren framträder i en dokumentär brukar han eller hon tala ”i egen sak” och ge sig ut för att kommentera och förevisa verkligheten. Min betraktare uppträdde i stället som en japansk kamishibai-berättare, han annonserade berättelsen med sina träklappor (vilket också blev en del av ljudkompositionen) och berättade till bilder. Först i slutet av filmen lämnade han (fysiskt) byggnaden. Ändå var detta en byggnad för seende på en mängd nivåer.

Another aspect of the visual consideration in a video essay is concerned with the process of filming. For the person who undertakes all the processes involved in filming and editing, the experiential and cognitive links to the technology are even stronger than they were for past generations of filmmakers who almost always worked as part of a team. What does a filmmaker see through the camera and how does he see it? How does he choose his camera angles? And how does he meet other people's gazes? Implicit in this is the matter of witnessing something. The filmmaker is limited but also "expanded" through being tied to the camera. The camera can destroy details and can clarify things that the eye does not catch at the same time that the filmmaker is governed by what he sees on the display.

The third aspect concerns the consideration of one's own material during editing. Assembling images involves the subjectivization of vision to yet another level in which each picture in a film can be said to comment on what has preceded it as well as what is to come.

Why did I really want to meet up with Choi Eun-hee and hear her own narrative of her experiences? She had, as we have noted, already told her story. A person narrating her memoirs finds herself in an insecure position. She searches her memory, trying to put her past into words. The story changes. Experts on witness psychology claim that people who speak the truth from the outset modify their stories, telling them in a different way on each new occasion while someone who is lying from the beginning decides on a version of their story and sticks rigidly to it.⁷ But the story becomes fossilized in due course even for the truthful witness. The story has achieved its ultimate form after a number of attempts. People's reactions to the story have directed its form, making it more effective. An efficient story has its dramaturgy and the historical events are subordinated to the form of the story and social, political and geographical situation of the narration.

How was Choi Eun-hee to be able to bring her story to life again? And what right had I to request this from her?

My hopes were partly based on the fact that people change all the time and that this changes their story; that she would not merely serve up a fossilized and ef-

7. See Lars Wallsten, "Anteckningar om spår," unpublished part of dissertation. He cites Per Anders Granhag and Sven-Åke Christiansson (eds), *Handbok i rättspsykologi*, Liber Förlag 2008.

En annan aspekt av betraktandet i en videoessä gäller själva filmandet. För den som själv genomför alla moment av filmning och redigering är den erfarenhetsmässiga och kognitiva bindningen till teknologin på sätt och vis ännu starkare än hos äldre tiders filmare som i stort sett alltid arbetade i team. Vad och hur ser en filmare genom kameran? Hur gör filmaren sina utsnitt? Och hur möter filmaren andra människors blickar? Implicit finns här också frågan om att bevittna. Filmaren är begränsad men också "expanderad" genom sin bundenhet vid kameran. Kameran kan förstora detaljer och tydliggöra saker som inte ögat uppfattar samtidigt som filmaren är styrd av sin blick på displayen.

Den tredje aspekten gäller betraktandet av det egna materialet vid redigeringen. I sammanställningen av bilder subjektiveras seendet till ytterligare en nivå då varje bild i en film kan sägas kommentera de föregående och efterföljande.

Varför var det viktigt för mig att söka upp Choi Eun-hee och höra henne berätta om sina erfarenheter? Hon hade ju, som sagt, redan berättat sin berättelse. Den som återberättar sina minnen befinner sig i ett osäkert stadium. Man söker i minnet och försöker formulera sig. Man ändrar sin berättelse. Vittnespsykologer menar att den som talar sanning alltid modifierar sin historia och berättar den på ett nytt sätt vid varje tillfälle, medan den som ljuger har fixerat en exakt berättelse som han eller hon envist upprepar.⁷ Men även för sanningsvittnet stelnar efter ett tag berättelsen. Berättelsen har fått sin form efter ett antal försök. Människors reaktioner har styrt och effektiviserat formen. En effektiv berättelse har sin dramaturgi och de historiska händelserna underkastas berättelsens form och berättandets sociala, politiska och geografiska situation.

Hur skulle nu Choi Eun-hee kunna gjuta liv i sin egen berättelse? Och vad hade jag egentligen för rätt att begära det av henne?

En förhoppning inför mötet var grundad i tanken om att en människa hela tiden ändrar sig och därför också ändrar sin berättelse, att hon därför inte bara serverar en

7. Se Lars Wallsten, "Anteckningar om spår", i ännu ej publicerad avhandling. Han hänvisar till Per Anders Granhag och Sven-Åke Christiansson (red.), *Handbok i rättspsykologi*, Liber förlag 2008.

ficient narrative. I also hoped that the act of meeting another person would generate a spark or friction causing the story to be told anew, thus revealing new layers, new emphasis and new aspects. That these hitherto unnoticed aspects might lead the story into new and uncharted waters.

But I also realized that the meeting was not just a matter of listening to Choi Eun-hee telling her own story in her own words but also of *seeing the one who had seen*. *The person who has seen* is an accepted literary figure, like a dispositional representation of the narrator's role. In China, Japan, Korea, the Ukraine, the Balkans and many other parts of the world, the storyteller traditionally was blind. And yet it was not uncommon for them to start their stories with the words "I saw..." In his book *Memory, History, Forgetting* Paul Ricœur writes: "It would be futile to seek a direct tie between the narrative form and events as they actually occurred; the tie can only be indirect by way of explanation and, short of this, by way of the documentary phase, which refers back in turn to testimony and the trust placed in the word of another."⁸ The blind storytellers emphasized, through their paradoxical representation of themselves as witnesses, that their stories were collective, that they belonged to everyone. The lived experience is represented by the body, that is a vessel for the story. Even if the organizing of memories is a social process (and results in a social product) where we construct the coherent narrative in an efficient way, against a backdrop of collective narratives, the notion of *the one who has seen* does not disappear.⁹

In this case – in the filmed portrayal – Madame Choi's eyes became more important than her voice.

Another question that occupied my mind while making this video essay was what words and names do to the myth. The actual treatment, the narration of myths, brings them to life while at the same time their foundation and their link to real events become all the more distant. Meaning is added and meaning is lost. At times, the imagery of myths shifts towards a more concrete content, for example when certain properties in a story are changed around through synonyms and similes. In his study of Aryan idols (a survey of scholarly treatments of Indo-European/Aryan myths

8. Paul Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, The University of Chicago Press 2004, p. 244.

9. In Paul Ricœur's *Memory, History, Forgetting* Maurice Halbwach's works on collective memory processes have a prominent place. See, for instance, Maurice Halbwach, *On Collective Memory*, The University of Chicago Press 1992.

stelnad och effektiv berättelse. Förhoppningen låg också i att själva mötet med en annan kan skapa den gnista eller friktion som innebär att berättelsen berättas på nytt, att andra lager kommer fram, andra betoningar och aspekter. Att man utifrån dessa kanske förbisedda aspekter kan leda in berättelsen på nya, okända spår.

Men jag insåg också att mötet inte bara handlade om att höra Choi Eun-hee berätta med egna ord utan också om att *se den som har sett*. *Den som har sett* är en vedertagen figur, likt en grundläggande dispositiv representation av berättarens roll. I Kina, Japan, Korea, Ukraina, på Balkan och många andra platser i världen var historieberättare av tradition blinda. Ändå var det inte ovanligt att de inledde sina berättelser med orden: ”Jag såg...”. Paul Ricœur skriver i *Minne, historia, glömska*: ”Man söker förgäves mellan ett direkt samband mellan den narrativa formen och händelserna som de faktiskt ägt rum: man kan bara finna ett indirekt samband, via förklaringen och via dokumentationsfasen, vilket i sin tur pekar tillbaka på vittnesmålet och tilltron till en annans ord.”⁸ De blinda berättarna betonade, genom att sitt paradoxala framställande av sig själva som vittnen, att berättelserna var kollektiva, att de tillhörde alla. Den levda erfarenheten, representeras av kroppen, som är en behållare för berättelsen. Även om organiseringen av minnen är en social process (och resulterar i en social produkt), där vi konstruerar den sammanhängande berättelsen på ett effektivt sätt – mot en fond av kollektiva berättelser – så försvinner inte betydelsen av *den som har sett*.⁹

I det här fallet – i den filmiska framställningen – blev Madame Chois ögon viktigare än hennes röst.

En annan fråga, som har upptagit mig i arbetet med videoessän, gäller vad ord och namngivning gör för myten. Själva handhavandet, överlämnandet (berättandet) av myter får dem att leva, samtidigt som deras grund och förbindelse med verkliga händelser blir allt mer avlägsen. Mening tillkommer och mening går förlorad. Ibland förskjuts det bildliga i myter mot en konkret innebörd, det händer till exempel att egenskaper med hjälp av synonymer och liknelser byter plats i berättelserna. Stefan Arvidsson skriver i sin avhandling *Ariska idoler* (som ger en översikt över de indo-

8. Paul Ricœur, *Minne, historia, glömska*, Daidalos 2005, s. 312.

9. I Paul Ricœurs *Minne, historia, glömska* har Maurice Halbwachs arbeten om kollektiva minnesprocesser en avgörande betydelse. Se tex Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, University of Chicago Press 1992.

and their political usage), Stefan Arvidsson writes “/.../ if both the lion and the sun were ‘powerful forces’, the sun soon acquired claws and a mane.”¹⁰ Observations of this type caused the linguist and historian Friedrich Max Müller (1823-1990) to look upon myths as a form of “linguistic infection.” Linguistic transfers based on formal similarities (homonyms for example) appear in Gnostic religions, esoteric thought and in various taboos.¹¹ And there is a similar (fatal) transference of meaning in Takashi Murakami’s interpretation of Little Boy.

Little Boy was the codename for the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima. According to Takashi Murakami, giving the bomb that name was an act of the devil. The name itself predestined Japan. The bomb castrated the nation, causing it to become infantilized. This resulted in Japan’s journey into a world of cuteness. When Murakami gave his exhibition that toured the USA in 2005 the same name – *Little Boy* – he wanted to shed light on a national trauma.¹² When the two atomic bombs were released and Japan finally lost the war, the links to the ancient Samurai ideals were severed. The new Japanese constitution was a carbon copy of the American con-

10. Stefan Arvidsson, *Ariska idoler. Den indoeuropeiska mytologin som ideologi och vetenskap*, Brutus Östlings Bokförlag Symposion 2000, p. 95.

11. Among the Yezidians, a Kurdish people, whose religion can be regarded as a Gnostic residue, every taboo has a whole range of explanations which, in turn, contain narratives. In his book *Yezidism – It’s Background, Observances and Textual Tradition* (The Edwin Mellen Press 1995) Philip G. Kreyenbroek explains that the taboos governing lettuces (*khas*) and cabbages (*lehane*) may stem from similar sounding words that have to do with curses. This also applies to similarities with words in other languages even where the meaning is very different. The Kurdish pronunciation of *lehane* is very similar to the Arabic *la’ana* meaning to curse someone. In order to be on the safe side, numerous other words connected with cursing and stoning are taboo among the Yezidians. In other Gnostic religions the pronunciation of words (*logos*) has magical properties and convey a creative force. The pronunciation is linked to the Creation analogously to the famous expression in Genesis: “Let there be light.” For the Mandaean scholars every letter had numerological and magical significance. Traditionally they made use of letters as talismans and they placed the alphabet under their pillows as protection against evil. Every letter of the alphabet was, to them, a “crown” and the 24 letters of their alphabet were supported by 24 kings who formed the light. Here the words act both institutionally and misrepresentationally. The Gnostic writings are often intimately linked with – and sometimes dependent upon – various actions. The letters are connected to the body. Within the Jewish Cabbala tradition there is a similar approach to the alphabet and its letters. The elements of the world are to be found in the ten original figures (1-10) known as *sefirot* and in the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. “In them dwell the secret forces through which, in their various combinations, the Creation comes into force. These are the 32 secret ways of wisdom by which God creates the whole of reality.” (Gershom Scholem, *Den judiska mystiken*, Brutus Östlings Bokförlag Symposion 1992, p. 101.)

12. *Little Boy: The Arts of Japan’s Exploding Subculture*, ed. Takashi Murakami. Japan Society of America with the Yale University Press 2005.

europiska/ariska myternas vetenskapliga diskurser och deras politiska användning): ”/.../ om både lejon och sol var ’mäktiga’ hade solen snart klor och man”.¹⁰ Det var sådana iakttagelser som fick religionshistorikern och språkforskaren Friedrich Max Müller (1823–1990) att se på myterna som en form av ”språklig smitta”. Språkliga överföringar grundade i formlikhet (till exempel homonymer) fanns i gnostiska religioner, i esoteriskt tänkande och i olika tabubegrepp¹¹ och en liknande överföring av (fatal) betydelse finns i Takashi Murakamis tolkning av Little Boy.

Kodnamnet för Hiroshimabomben var Little Boy. Enligt Takashi Murakami var det en djävulsk handling att ge bomben det namnet. Genom detta predestinerades Japan. Bomben innebar en kastration och landet kom att infantiliseras. Japans resa in i gullighetens värld blir resultatet. När Murakami 2005 gav sin turnerande utställning i USA samma namn – *Little Boy* – ville han belysa ett nationellt trauma.¹² När de två atombomberna föll och Japan slutgiltigt förlorade kriget kapades banden till de urgamla samurajidealerna. Den nya japanska författningen var en karbonkopia av den

10. Stefan Arvidsson, *Ariska idoler: den indoeuropeiska mytologin som ideologi och vetenskap*, Brutus Östlings Bokförlag Symposion 2000, s 95.

11. Hos den kurdiska minoriteten yezidierna (vars religion kan ses som en gnostisk kvarleva) för varje tabu med sig ett fång förklaringar som i sin tur innehåller berättelser. Traditionellt finns till exempel ett förbud mot att äta sallat och kål. I Philip G. Kreyenbroeks bok *Yezidism – It's Background, Observances and Textual Tradition* (The Edwin Mellen Press 1995) förklaras att tabut mot sallat (*khas*) och kål (*lehane*) skulle kunna härröra från likjudande ord som har med förbannelse att göra. Det gäller även likheten med ord i andra språk, även om betydelsen är fjärran. Det kurdiska uttalet av *lehane* är snarlikt arabiskans *la'ana* – ”att förbanna”. För att vara på den säkra sidan har även en mängd andra ord som förknippas med att förbanna och stena förbjudits bland yezidierna. Hos andra gnostiska religioner har uttalande av ord (*logos*) magiska betydelser och bär med sig kreativ kraft. Själva uttalandet hör ihop med Skapelsen i likhet med de berömda orden i första Moseboken: ”och varde ljus”. För mandéernas lärde hade varje bokstav nummerologiska och magiska betydelser. Traditionellt använde de bokstäver som talismaner och placerade alfabetet under kudden som ett skydd mot det onda. Varje bokstav i alfabetet var för dem en ”krona” och de tjugofyra bokstäverna i deras alfabet bars av tjugofyra kungar som formade ljuset. Orden verkar här både instiftande och förvrängande. Gnostiska texter är många gånger intimt förknippade med – ibland beroende av – olika handlingar. Bokstäverna står i förbindelse med kroppen. Inom den judiska kabbala-traditionen finns ett liknande synsätt på alfabetet och bokstäverna. Världens element kan sökas i de tio ursprungliga siffrorna (1–10), kallade *sefirot*, och i de 22 bokstäverna i det hebreiska alfabetet. ”I dem lever de hemliga krafter genom vilkas olika kombinationer skapelsen kommer tillstånd. Detta är ’vishetens trettio två hemliga vägar’ på vilka Gud frambringat allt verkligt”. (Gershom Scholem, *Den judiska mystiken*, Symposion 1992, s 101.)

12. *Little Boy: The Arts of Japan's Exploding Subculture*, red. Takeshi Murakami, Japan Society of America with the Yale University Press 2005.

stitution with a single exception: the famous article nine stipulated that Japan was never to arm itself again.

The poster for the *Little Boy* exhibition shows a decorative, flattened mushroom cloud that combines the atomic bomb with the flexibility of Barbapapa. The exhibition was a symphonic orchestration of all the objects and images of popular culture to be found in the realm of the otaku monarch: kawaii items, monster films, anime, manga and art.¹³ Among the toys, Godzilla has a prominent place in view of the monster's direct links with the atomic bombs. The five generations of Godzilla figures that were presented illustrated an unbroken permanence. In Murakami's world it is not just radioactivity that radiates and pollutes but, to a high degree, words themselves. As in the case of the Gnostic taboos and the logic of myth he finds the evidence in the similarity of forms. Even the mushroom (that can induce hallucinations and may be toxic) becomes "radioactive" on account of its formal similarity to the atomic explosion.¹⁴

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Arne Melberg argues in his book *Resa och skriva* [Travel and Write] that the principal political potential of the travel story lies in the concreteness, as opposed to the general view (which historically paves the way for mapping, conquest and exploitation).¹⁵ But as a visitor in North Korea, with so little knowledge and understanding of what life entails for the citizens, I had to cling to details, without knowing what they really meant. Beyond the national myths and their own history writing North Koreans have no information whatsoever.¹⁶ The ignorance (the exteriority, the uninformed gaze) that in other travels can be defended as the instance that produces difference, here became isolated from all dialogical situations. As a traveler I was completely detached from the life of the North Koreans.

13. See "Kumiko, Johnnie Walker & the Cute (an extended work story)."

14. The mushroom is a recurring element in Japanese art, manga and animation.

15. Arne Melberg, *Resa och skriva: En guide till den moderna reselitteraturen*, Daidalos 2005, pp. 18–23 and 224–226.

16. See e.g. Hyok Kang, *This is Paradise!: My North Korean Childhood*, Abacus 2009.

amerikanska, med ett enda undantag: den berömda artikel nio stipulerade att Japan aldrig igen skulle få beväpna sig.

Affischen till *Little Boy* visar en dekorativ, tillplattad svampmolnsform som fusionerar atombomben med Barbapappas formbarhet. Utställningen var en symfonisk orkestrering av alla de populärkulturella objekt och bilder som *otaku*-kungens¹³ rike härbärgerar: *kawaii*-objekt, monsterfilm, anime, manga och konst. Bland leksakerna hade Godzilla en prominent plats, med tanke på monstrets direkta koppling till bomben. De fem generationers Godzilla-figurer som presenterades visade på en obruten permanens. I Murakamis värld är det inte bara radioaktiviteten som strålar och smittar ner utan i lika hög grad orden. Bevisen finner han, likt de gnostiska tabu-föreställningarna och i mytbildningens logik, i formlighet. Även svampen (en framkallare av hallucinationer och förgiftning) blir ”radioaktiv” genom sin formlighet med kärnvapenexplosionen.¹⁴

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Arne Melberg menar i *Resa och skriva* att reseberättelsens främsta politiska potential ligger i konkretionen, i motsats till överblicken (som historiskt sett förbereder kartläggning, erövring och exploatering),¹⁵ Men som besökare i Nordkorea, med så lite kunskap och förståelse för vad livet för medborgarna innebär, fick jag oftast klamra mig fast vid detaljer utan att veta vad de egentligen betydde. Nordkoreaner har ingen som helst information bortom de nationella myterna och den egna historieskrivningen.¹⁶ Den oförståelse (den utomstående, den oinitierade blicken) som i många andra resor kan försvaras som den instans som producerar skillnad blev här helt isolerad från alla dialogiska situationer. Som resenär var jag helt avskild från nordkoreanernas liv.

13. Se ”Kumiko, Johnnie Walker & The Cute (en utvidgad verkberättelse)”.

14. Svampen är ett återkommande inslag i japansk konst, manga och animation.

15. Arne Melberg, *Resa och skriva: En guide till den moderna reselitteraturen*, Daidalos 2005, s. 18–23 och 224–226.

16. Se t.ex. Hyok Kang, *This is Paradise!: My North Korean Childhood*, Abacus 2009,

The question I ask myself is: what experiences form the basis of one's notions about the world? And: can one really see and talk about something that one does not already know or recognize and cannot name?

Several theorists of photography have pointed out that it is difficult to understand why the technical methods for producing a permanent image developed as late as the 1850s when both the technical conditions and knowledge of the camera obscura had been around for so long. It seems as if a society must be ready, or an accumulated history must exist, in order to be able to accept a certain type of idea. Scopic technologies can also be viewed as the American theorist Jonathan Crary does, as emblematic expressions of their epoch's way of thinking. According to Crary's theory the camera obscura is part of a radically different tradition from that of the camera and the stereoscope. Where the former is a metaphor for the 17th and 18th centuries' arbitrary and omniscient viewpoint, the latter expresses a view that has arisen within, and through, an apparatus, in a way divorced from vision. In this 19th and 20th century world the viewer is a *functionary* or an *observer*, taking active part in a "territory of consumption," if you agree with Crary.¹⁷ When observation with the help of the new scopic apparatus becomes part of society it also creates the conditions for observations that are more strongly linked to desire and sexuality, and to the psyche on the whole. Crary emphasizes the stereoscope as an example. The observer perceives two pictures, one with each eye but constructs them into one picture. It exists only within the observer.

In his meandering book *Landscape and Memory* the historian Simon Schama discusses how the view of nature and landscape is created from visual ideals that in turn are interconnected to more complicated superimposing of history, memory, myth and political ideas. The perception of landscape arises to as great an extent from concepts of nature as from nature itself. Or as, Schama puts it, ".../ it is our shaping perception that makes the difference between raw matter and landscape."¹⁸

For those who concern themselves with depiction (and research) it is always a matter of limitation and selective presence. The saying "you can't see the wood for the

17. See Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge MIT 1990.

18. Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, Harper Collins Publishing 1995, p. 10.

Vad jag frågar mig är: utifrån vilka erfarenheter skapar man sina föreställningar? Och: kan man egentligen se och berätta om något man inte redan känner igen eller kan benämna?

Flera fototeoretiker har påpekat att det är svårförståeligt att tekniska metoder för att skapa ett beständigt fotografi utvecklades så sent som på 1850-talet när både de tekniska förutsättningarna och kunskapen om camera obscura hade funnits så länge. Det verkar som om ett samhälle måste vara redo, eller ”historiskt ackumulerat”, för att kunna ta emot en viss idé. Man kan också, som den amerikanske teoretikern Jonathan Crary, se de skopiska teknikerna som emblematiska uttryck för sin tids sätt att tänka. I Crarys teori är då till exempel camera obscura inskriven i en radikalt annorlunda tradition än kameran och stereoskopet. När den förra är en metafor för 1600- och 1700-talets egenmäktiga, allvetande blick uttrycker de senare en blick som uppstått inom och genom en apparatur, på sätt och vis skild från seendet. I denna 1800- och 1900-talets värld är betraktaren *funktionär* eller *observatör*, verksam i en ”konsumtionsterräng”, om man följer Crarys resonemang.¹⁷ När seendet med hjälp av den nya skopiska apparaturen flyttar in i människan skapas också förutsättningarna för ett seende som är starkare kopplat till begär och sexualitet – till psyket överhuvudtaget. Crary framhåller stereoskopet som exempel. Observatören uppfattar två bilder, en med vardera öga, men uppfattar dem som en bild. En bild som endast existerar i observatörens medvetande.

Historikern Simon Schama diskuterar i sin vindlande bok *Skog: Landskap och minne* hur synen på naturen och landskapet har skapats utifrån visuella ideal som i sin tur är sammanlänkade med komplicerade överlagringar av historia, minnen, myter och politiska idéer. Uppfattningen om landskap är i lika hög grad sprungen ur föreställningar om naturen som ur naturen själv. Eller som Schama skriver: ”/ / det är vår formade perception som åstadkommer skillnaden mellan rå materia och landskap.”¹⁸

För den som ägnar sig åt avbildning (och forskning) är alltid frågan om begränsning och utsnitt närvarande. Talesättet att man inte kan se skogen för alla träd är

17. Se Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge MIT 1990.

18. Simon Schama, *Skog: Landskap och minne, en civilisationshistoria*, Gedin 1997, s. 30.

trees” is no joke for the landscape painter and the nature photographer but a genuine problem. Landscape painters and other landscape admirers in the 18th century developed methods of analysis and composition and gave advice on how and where one could by looking, frame off the most ideal landscape. The Claude glass was popular and used to capture motifs. The small portable convex mirror named after Claude Lorraine, the 17th century master of picturesque landscapes could moreover be fitted with filters of different colors in order to give the reflected picture a feeling of dawn, winter garb or glowing sunset.¹⁹

Even today’s amateur observers search for their own fraction. For many who wander freely in the forest, the absence of fixed viewing points conveys a feeling of chaos, that it cannot be surveyed. Everything and nothing calls attention to itself at the same time. This uncomfortable feeling, for many, does not loosen its grip until the nature trail or hiking path is reached. For today’s nature ramblers and tourists, there are bird towers, viewing platforms and well signposted, excellent places for taking photographs. We are guided by books with titles like *Worth seeing in the Swedish Landscape*. Others prefer the even more compressed and well-arranged selections provided by television’s nature programs.²⁰

By setting aside, preserving, protecting or creating nature (the difference is often mere hair-splitting) a border is drawn between inside and outside. Within the demarcated territory a place can be viewed with reference to other ideals, or typical pictures and models. Places are created where theater cannot be distinguished from life, where the boundaries between artifice and nature are fluid.

In nature this becomes evident. We look for what we already know and what has been confirmed by other images. The landscape has to adapt.

Are we really capable of looking beyond our ideology, our notions and our “formed perception”? In most cases not. For the tyrant who controls a people it is a matter of fencing in the people’s concepts and forming their perceptions.

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19. Artist Matts Leiderstam refers back to Claude Lorraine, for instance by constructing a telescope with Claude glass on the Hudson River where the beholder can seek out picturesque motifs but also by paraphrasing and copying copies of Lorraine’s paintings. See Matts Leiderstam’s dissertation *See and Seen, Seeing Landscape Through Artistic Practice*, Malmö Art Academy 2008.

20. See also Magnus Bärtås, “In the Midst of Nature” in *Björn Larsson*, Journal Förlag 2006.

inget skämt för landskapsmålaren och naturfotografen utan ett reellt problem. Landskapsmålare och andra landskapsbeundrare på 1700-talet utvecklade analyser och kompositionsmetoder och gav råd om hur och var man skulle finna och med blicken skärma av de mest ideala landskapen. Populär var den så kallade Claude Lorraine-spegeln som man använde för att fånga sina motiv. Den lilla bärbara, konvexa spegeln, döpt efter 1600-talsmästaren av pittoreska landskap, kunde dessutom förses med filter i olika färger för att ge spegelbilden en känsla av gryning, vinterskrud eller glödande solnedgång.¹⁹

Även dagens amatörbetraktare söker sina utsnitt. För många som vandrar fritt i skogen ger frånvaron av fixa betraktelsepunkter en känsla av kaos och oöverblickbarhet. Denna för många obehagliga känsla släpper inte sitt grepp förrän man når naturstigen eller vandringsleden. För dagens naturmänniskor och turister finns fågeltorn, utsiktspunkter och anvisade utmärkta fotograferingsplatser. Man låter sig guidas av böcker med titlar som *Värt att se i Sveriges natur*. Andra föredrar de ännu mer komprimerade utsnitt och den överskådlighet som TV:s naturprogram förmedlar.²⁰

Genom att avsätta, bevara, skydda eller tillverka natur (skillnaden är ofta hårfin) drar man en gräns mellan ett innanför och ett utanför. Inom det markerade territoriet kan en plats betraktas i förhållande till andra ideala, eller typiserade bilder och modeller. Man skapar platser där skådespel inte kan särskiljas från livet, där gränserna mellan artefakt och natur flyter.

I naturen blir det tydligt: vi vill se det vi redan vet och fått bekräftat utifrån andra bilder. Landskapet måste anpassa sig.

Kan vi överhuvudtaget se utöver eller bortom vår ideologi, våra föreställningar och vår ”formade perception”? I de flesta fall inte. För den tyrann som vill kontrollera ett folk gäller det då att inhägna folkets föreställningar och forma deras perception.

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19. Konstnären Matts Leiderstam har refererat till Claude Lorraine, bland annat genom att tillverka en kikare med Claude-glas vid Hudson-floden där betraktaren på så vis kan söka sina egna pittoreska motiv, men även genom att parafasera och kopiera kopior av Lorrains målningar. Se Matts Leiderstams avhandling *See and Seen, Seeing Landscape Through Artistic Practice*, Malmö Konstakademi 2008.

20. Se också Magnus Bårtås, "Mitt i naturen" i *Björn Larsson*, Journal Förlag 2006.

Gérard de Nerval's books investigated dreams and parallel states of consciousness. His *Aurélia* (1885) is a strange, hallucinatory text that starts with the words "Our dreams are a second life. I have never been able to penetrate without a shudder those ivory or horned gates which separate us from the invisible world."²¹ It is told that de Nerval refused to enter Palmyra because he was frightened that his ideas about the place might be upset,²² while Raymond Roussel (1877–1933) wrote most of his accounts of his travels, which took place in foreign parts, in his hotel room in Paris or in his specially constructed camper van with the blinds down. Roussel rejected direct observation as a method, presumably because there is too much to look at in the world. Whoever tries to see everything risks not only dissolving into his vision but also losing his language and his ability to name things. In a comment on Roussel, Michel Foucault wrote:

The identity of words – the simple, fundamental fact of language, that there are fewer terms of designation than there are things to designate – is itself a two-sided experience: it reveals words as the unexpected meeting place of the most distant figures of reality.²³

In Roussel's worlds, people entered into symbioses with strange machines and instruments. In his novel *Impressions d'Afrique* (1910)²⁴ he mixes musical terms, science, anthropology and theater. Human figures appear in bloody ceremonies, chemical experiments and futuristic mechanics turning the book into a forecast of Franz Kafka's *In the Penal Colony* which was published nine years later. Roussel's language is like an intricate mechanical/organic clock and presents itself in endless digressions. When Roussel revealed how he had written his accounts it transpired that they were entirely conceptual and "intralinguistic." His method of writing was based on homonymic puns.

21. Gérard de Nerval, *Aurélia & Other Writings*, Exact Change 1996, p. 1.

22. Roger Caillois, "Letter to André Breton" in *The Edge of Surrealism: A Roger Caillois Reader*, ed. Claudine Frank, Duke University Press 2003, p. 84.

23. William Clark, "A Lovely Curiosity – Raymond Roussel (1877–1933)", *Variant*, Vol. 2 No. 15 Summer 2002.

24. Raymond Roussel, *Impressions of Africa*, Calder publications 2001.

Gérard de Nerval utforskade i sina böcker drömmar och parallella medvetandetillstånd. Hans *Aurélia* (1885) är en märklig, hallucinatorisk text som inleds med orden ”Drömmen är ett andra liv. Jag har aldrig utan en rysning kunnat gå igenom de portar av elfenben eller horn som skiljer oss från den osynliga världen.”²¹ Det berättas att Nerval vägrade bege sig in i Palmyra därför att han var rädd att få sina föreställningar om platsen rubbade.²² Raymond Roussel (1877–1933) skrev de flesta av sina berättelser som utspelar sig på främmande platser på hotellrum i Paris eller i sin specialbyggda husbil med fördragna fönster. Roussel avsåg sig observationen som metod, förmodligen därför att det finns för mycket att titta på i världen. Den som försöker se allt riskerar inte bara att upplösas av sin blick utan också att förlora sitt språk och sin förmåga att namnge. Michel Foucault skrev i en kommentar om Roussel:

Ordens identitet – det simpla, grundläggande språkfaktumet att det finns färre termer för att peka ut saker än det finns saker att peka ut – är i sig själv en dubbelsidig erfarenhet: den avslöjar ord som den oväntade mötesplatsen för de mest avlägsna bilder av verklighet.²³

I Roussels världar ingår människor symbioser med märkliga maskiner och instrument. I romanen *Impressions d’Afrique* (1910)²⁴ korsar han musikterminologi, naturvetenskap, antropologi och teater. Människor uppträder i blodiga ceremonier, kemiska experiment och futuristisk mekanik, vilket får texten att ibland framstå som en förutsägelse av Franz Kafkas *I straffkolonien* som utkom nio år senare. Språket hos Roussel är som ett intrikat mekaniskt/organiskt urverk och formerar sig i ändlösa utvecklingar. När Roussel väl avslöjade hur han skrivit böckerna framgick det att de var helt och hållet konceptuella och ”inomspråkliga”. Skrivmetoden utgick från homonyma ordlekar.

21. Gérard de Nerval, *Aurélia*, Tidens förlag 1953, s. 9.

22. Roger Caillois, ”Letter to André Breton” i *The Edge of Surrealism: A Roger Caillois Reader*, red. Claudine Frank, Duke University Press 2003, s. 84.

23. Citerad i William Clark, ”A Lovely Curiosity – Raymond Roussel (1877–1933)”, *Variant*, Vol. 2 No. 15 Summer 2002 (egen övers. M.B.)

24. Raymond Roussel, *Impressions of Africa*, Calder publications 2001.

Foucault's comment on the identity of words belongs with the possibilities of the imagination or the ability to form conceptions without which one cannot approach the imaginary. As a writer, Nerval was indebted to Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772). He made use of Swedenborg's term *memorabilia* as the title of the final chapter of *Aurélia* in which the main character talks about his dreams and his revelations of the other world. Memorabilia, which we understand as things worth remembering, Nerval himself explained as spiritual visions.

Swedenborg claimed to have daily contact with angels and spirits, contacts that were natural and undramatic. When he wanted to communicate his experiences to the world at large he assumed the teacher's role, explaining that the other side is subject to laws and can be understood. When Swedenborg published his sensational *Arcana* (secrets, or something wonderful that is fully clarified) he was careful to point out that the book is concerned with actual testimony and experiences. He had learnt from the angels that heaven is a complex system with innumerable representations, reflections and hierarchical structures. Heaven is a magnificent chancellery, a beneficial bureaucracy in which the "common good" is paramount. The angels are charged with tasks of communication, participation and subservience.²⁵ For there are so many official positions and administrative offices as well as other tasks that they cannot all be counted.²⁶

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As a child I thought a lot about life behind the Iron Curtain. I grew up in a small, country town in southern Sweden and I had seen little of the world. I thought a lot about other places, other countries where everything is different. The communist countries interested me particularly. One could not visit them for this was far too complicated if not forbidden, but there were photographs and travel articles and stamps. In these countries there were cities with no advertising on the streets and people wore different types of clothing, unbranded clothes, I was led to believe. They

25. See Emanuel Swedenborg, *Heaven and its Wonders and Hell, From Things Heard and Seen*, Swedenborg Society (<http://swedenborg.newearth.org/org/hh/hh48.html>, 24/2 2010). See also Magnus Bårtås and Fredrik Ekman, "Swedenborgs skalle" in *Innanför cirkeln*, Bokförlaget DN 2005.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 324.

Till Foucaults kommentar om ordets identitet hör fantasins möjligheter, eller föreställningsförmågan, utan vilken man inte kan närma sig det imaginära. Nerval stod i sitt författarskap i skuld till Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772). Han använder Swedenborgs term *memorabilia* som titel på det avslutande kapitlet i *Aurélia* där huvudpersonen berättar om sina drömmar om och uppenbarelser av den andra världen. Memorabilia skulle kunna översättas med minnesvärdigheter, Nerval själv förklarade termen som ”andesyner”.

Swedenborg sade sig ha dagliga kontakter med änglar och andar, kontakter som var självklara och odramatiska. När han ville delge omvärlden sina erfarenheter framträdde han som en pedagog, livet på den andra sidan var lagbundet och möjligt att förstå. När Swedenborg lägger fram sina sensationella *arkana* (hemligheter, eller något underbart som får full klarhet) i skrift är han mån om att påpeka att det handlar om vittnesmål och erfarenhet. Av änglarna har han lärt sig att himlen är ett komplext systembygge med otaliga representationer, återspeglings och hierarkiska strukturer. Himlen är som ett prima ämbetsverk, en god byråkrati där ”allmännyttan” hålls högst. Änglarna har ”/.../ förmedlande, medverkande och underordnade uppgifter.”²⁵ Här finns nämligen ”/.../ så många ämbeten och förvaltningsgrenar, och även andra sysslor, att de på grund av mängden inte kan uppräknas.”²⁶

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Som barn funderade jag mycket över livet bakom järnridån. Jag bodde i en mindre stad på landet i södra Sverige, jag hade inte sett så mycket och jag tänkte mycket på andra platser, på andra länder där allt var annorlunda. Kommunisländerna var intressanta. Man kunde inte resa dit, det var alltför krångligt, rent av förbjudet, men det fanns fotografier och berättelser och frimärken. Där fanns städer utan reklamskyltar och människorna hade annorlunda kläder, kläder utan märken, hade jag fått för mig.

25. Emanuel Swedenborg, *Om Himlen och dess under och om helvetet enligt vad jag hört och sett*, Proprius förlag 1986, s. 323. Se också Magnus Bårtås och Fredrik Ekman, ”Swedenborgs skalle” i *Innanför cirkeln*, Bokförlaget DN 2005.

26. *Ibid.*, s. 324.

had different telephones and different motorcars. In the communist countries toothpaste tubes were simply marked TOOTHPASTE and nothing more. Bottles of soft drinks were marked SODA, bicycles were simply branded BICYCLE while on skis one could read... was it SKI or SKIS? The promise of such a generic and emblematic world is attractive to a child.

Sometimes I genuinely wondered whether these countries really existed or whether someone might have invented them for some reason. The idea of parallel but totally separate lives with totally different appearances somehow belonged together with another notion that I could enter into experimentally as a child and that made such a powerful impression on me that it sometimes took over my conscious mind entirely. I thought that everything was just some sort of stage set, a façade that was carefully reconstructed each day so that one would believe in the existence of things and the way the world was made. A very childish idea, both egoistic and fundamentally critical. That all the unfamiliar people one met were carefully instructed to pretend that one did not exist, and their off-handedness and their averted gaze were mere acting in the same manner that everything beyond one's immediate neighborhood was a stage set, not least the landscape sets that were rapidly put in order whenever one traveled anywhere by car. Sometimes I tried to unmask the world by suddenly turning my head so that I could catch a glimpse of the stagehands on the margins of the set. Sometimes, when I went to do the Saturday shopping in town I would suddenly stop, letting go of my father's hand and rushing back round the corner in the hope of seeing the machinery in action.

Peter Fröberg Idling's book about Cambodia entitled *Pol Pots leende* [Pol Pot's Smile]²⁷ depicts how a stage set and the communist system were synthesized in a highly real manner. The Swedish delegation from the Sweden-Kampuchea Friendship Society, led by author Jan Myrdal, traveled round the war-torn country in 1978. The trip led to a flood of enthusiastic and polemical newspaper articles, reportage, lectures and a film. The delegation described a successful revolution in which people shared burdens equally and were building a just nation of farmers from the bottom upwards. They saw a social experiment that ought to act as a model for the rest of the world. Six months later what we know today was revealed to the world: that almost two million people were executed or died from famine, disease and other hardships during Pol

27. Peter Fröberg Idling, *Pol Pots leende: om en svensk resa genom röda khmerernas Kambodja*, Atlas 2006.

Man hade annorlunda telefoner och annorlunda bilar. I kommunistländerna stod det TANDKRÄM på tandkrämstuben och inget annat. På läskflaskan stod det LÄSK, på cyklarna stod det CYKEL och på skidorna stod det... ja vad stod det egentligen på skidorna? ...SKIDA eller SKIDOR...? Fantasin om en sådan generisk och emblematisisk värld är lockande för ett barn.

Ibland undrade jag uppriktigt om dessa länder verkligen fanns eller om det var så att man av något skäl diktat ihop dem. Tanken om parallella helt åtskiljda liv med åtskiljda utseenden hörde på något sätt samman med en annan föreställning som jag under min barndom kunde gå in i som ett experiment, som suggererade mig till den grad att den ibland tog över mitt sinne. Jag tänkte mig att allt var kulisser, ett enda stort *set up* som omsorgsfullt uppfördes varje dag för att man skulle invaggas i tron på sakernas tillstånd och världens beskaffenhet. En vanlig barnslig idé, både egoistiskt och grundläggande kritisk. Att alla obekanta människor man mötte var nogsamt instruerade att inte låtsas om en, och deras nonchalans och bortvända blickar bara var ett skådespeleri på samma sätt som allt det som utgör världen utanför de närmaste kvarteren bara var tillfällig scenografi, inte minst de landskapskulisser som i hast arrangerades så fort man färdades någonstans med bil. Ibland försökte jag avslöja världen genom ett hastigt kast med huvudet för att få syn på scenarbetarna i byggets marginaler. Ibland när jag gick och lördagshandlade i centrum stannade jag plötsligt, slet mig från pappas hand för att rusa tillbaka och kasta mig runt hörnet i hopp om att ertappa maskineriet i arbete.

Peter Fröberg Idlings reportagebok *Pol Pots leende*²⁷ skildrar i en scen hur kullissvärlden och ett kommunistiskt system syntetiserades på ett högst reellt sätt. Den svenska delegationen från Vänskapsföreningen Sverige-Kampuchea, med Jan Myrdal i spetsen, gjorde 1978 en rundresa i det krigshärjade landet. Resan kom att resultera i en ström entusiastiska debattartiklar, resereportage, föreläsningar och en film. Man noterade resultaten av en framgångsrik revolution, där man jämlikt delade bördorna och byggde en rättvis bondenation från grunden. Man upplevde ett socialt experiment som borde tjäna som förebild för resten av världen. Ett halvår senare avslöjades vad alla vet idag: att närmare två miljoner människor hade avrättats eller dött av svält, sjukdomar och andra umbäranden under Pol Pots korta tid vid makten. Många hade

27. Peter Fröberg Idling, *Pol Pots leende: om en svensk resa genom röda khmerernas Kambodja*, Atlas 2006.

Pot's brief reign. Many had died under torture. How was the Swedish delegation able to avoid catching the slightest glimpse of the cruelty and hardship? That the members of the delegation were blinded by their ideology (an ideology that represented for each of them a considerable investment in their own identity) would seem to be too simple an explanation. It must also have been the case that their Cambodian hosts, despite the chaos that reigned, had produced a magnificent show of propaganda.

Fröberg Idling writes about a photograph taken by one of the Swedish delegates that was used as a cover for the friendship society's magazine in 1978. The photograph shows a young man at the Prek Kdam ferry station. With a smile on his lips he is in the act of mounting a shiny motorcycle while in the background there are smiling Cambodians, dressed in black and wheeling their bicycles. There is one detail that is wrong: the wristwatch. At that time it was only senior functionaries, those in positions of trust, who had the right or possibility of wearing a wristwatch. The man with the splendid motorbike is wearing a watch and, like most of the people that the delegation met in Cambodia, he was a walk-on extra who succeeded in giving the impression that he just happened to be there.²⁸

In 2009 Gunnar Bergström, who was a member of the delegation, wrote in the Swedish newspaper *Expressen*: "We certainly saw what we saw in Cambodia – but what did we really see?"²⁹

Have artists then developed a better, more elevated vision as an historical consequence of their praxis? Such a notion comes close to viewing the artist as a person of extraordinary capacities; a person whose vision can *penetrate the veil*. Nora Alter writes of Harun Farocki's film *Vexierbild*:

What is perceptible in some respects remains simultaneously imperceptible in others, but this im/perceptibility is not random: it has specific political causes and consequences for specific instances of production and reception. Farocki's film illustrates that notion of im/perceptibility in showing that people can look without seeing. Is this failure conscious or unconscious, natural or cultural, physical or psychological?³⁰

28. *Ibid.*, p. 276–277.

29. Gunnar Bergström, "Erkänn att vi hade fel, Jan", *Expressen* 8/9 2009.

30. Nora Alter, "The Political Im/perceptible. Faocki's Images of the World and the Inscription of War" in *Harun Farocki. Working on the Sight-Lines*, ed. Thomas Elsaesser, Amsterdam University Press 2004, p. 216.

dödats under tortyr. Hur kunde den svenska delegationen undgå att uppfatta den minsta skymt av grymheterna och umbärandena? Att medlemmarna i delegationen var förblindade av sin ideologi (en ideologi som för var och en av dem var en betydande investering i den egna identiteten) låter som en alltför enkel förklaring. Det måste också ha varit så att de kampucheanska värdarna, mitt i detta kaos, hade fått till en strålande propagandaföreställning.

Fröberg Idling skriver om ett foto, taget av en av de svenska delegaterna, som kom att pryda omslaget på vänskapsföreningens tidning 1978. Bilden visar en ung man vid färjeläget Prek Kdam. Leende är han i färd att gränsla en skinande motorcykel, i bakgrunden syns andra leende, svartklädda kampucheaner som leder sina cyklar. Men en detalj är fel: armbandsuret. Vid denna tid hade enbart högre funktionärer – de betrodda – rätt eller möjlighet att bära ett armbandsur. Mannen med den fina motorcykeln bär det och liksom de flesta av de människor delegationen möter är han en statist som framgångsrikt ger intryck av att råka befinna sig på platsen.²⁸

2009 skriver Gunnar Bergström, som också var med på resan, i *Expressen*: ”Visst såg vi det vi såg i Kambodja – men vad såg vi egentligen?”²⁹

Har då konstnärer utvecklat ett bättre, högre seende, som en historisk konsekvens av deras praktik? En sådan idé närmar sig synen på konstnären som en människa med extraordinära förmågor, en som *genomskådar*. Nora Alter skriver om Harun Farockis film *Vexierbild*:

Vad som är förnimbart i vissa avseenden förblir samtidigt osynligt i andra, men det synliga/osynliga är inte slumpmässigt: det har specifika politiska orsaker och konsekvenser för specifika instanser för produktion och reception. Farockis filmer illustrerar den betydelsen av osynligt/synligt genom att visa att människor kan titta utan att se. Är denna oförmåga medveten eller omedveten, naturlig eller kulturell, fysisk eller psykologisk?³⁰

28. *Ibid.*, s. 276–277.

29. Gunnar Bergström, ”Erkänn att vi hade fel, Jan”, *Expressen* 8/9 2009.

30. Nora Alter, ”The Political Im/perceptible. Faocki’s Images of the World and the Inscription of War” i *Harun Farocki: Working on the Sight-Lines*, red. Thomas Elsaesser, Amsterdam University Press 2004, s. 216.

As I see it there is really no art that is non-political and political motivation most usually underlies the works that interest me. Even melodrama and films about monsters, to take two examples that I discuss in this study, have political messages. But this does of course not mean that artists have superior political judgement, or more advanced political insights.³¹

Farocki's films have a capacity for revealing invisible contexts. Alter claims that his works do not provide answers but, rather, stimulate the viewers interest in the issues. His strength lies in the way he juxtaposes things in his art. In his capacity to link together, to cross tropes and find correspondences, for example those between different representational cultures. One cannot remove Farocki's political message but his works do not require that we share his analyses and political positions. As I see it his works have a potentiality to create meaning only because they, in a convincing manner, involve synoptic and synthetic operations. Ludwig Wittgenstein spoke in a similar way about the nature of philosophy:

Our grammar is deficient in surveyability. A surveyable representation produces precisely that kind of understanding which consists in "seeing connections". Hence the importance of finding and inventing *intermediate links*.³²

In a long essay entitled *Dog from the Freeway*, Harun Farocki quotes Jan Myrdal's defence of his blindness with regard to the human tragedy in Pol Pot's Kampuchea.³³ In Myrdal's view one cannot portray the cruelties of Pol Pot just anyhow because that would be to reveal an "unsystematic version of reality". Before portraying Pol Pot one must show pictures of Vietnam's 1979 invasion of Kampuchea for, according to Myrdal, this would give a truer picture of the whole political scenario. But Vietnam had not invaded Cambodia at the time when he visited the country in 1978. Was

31. In a comment on this manuscript the *Geist Magazine* editors (Andreas Ejiksson, Fredrik Ehlin and Oscar Mangione) point out that the most important question in this context is whether the artist/the artistic practice accommodates a certain kind of politics/political discourse, and if so: What is characteristic of that discourse and what kind of politics would it be?

32. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, Blackwell Publishing Ltd 2009 (originally published 1953).

33. In *Befreiung*, No 15-16 1979. Myrdal quoted in Farocki "Dog from Freeway" (in *Harun Farocki. Working on the Sight-Lines*) p. 130.

Det existerar knappast någon opolitisk konst, som jag ser det, och den politiska motivationen är oftast grunden för de verk jag själv intresserar mig för. Även melodramen och monsterfilmen, för att ta två exempel som jag kommer diskutera i denna text, har politiska meddelanden. Men det innebär förstås inte att konstnärer har ett överlägset politiskt omdöme eller äger andra, mer avancerade politiska insikter.³¹

Farockis filmer kan verkligen få osynliga sammanhang att framträda – och Alter menar att hans verk inte ger några svar utan snarare stimulerar frågeställningarnas uppkomst hos betraktaren. Farockis styrka ligger i sammanställningens konst, i förmågan att förbinda och korsna troper eller hitta korrespondenser, till exempel mellan skilda representationskulturer. Man kan inte ta bort Farockis politiska ärende, men hans verk är inte beroende av att vi delar hans analyser och politiska ställningstaganden. Som jag ser det har hans verk en möjlighet att skapa mening – och ett särskilt politiskt samtal – därför att de på ett övertygande sätt inbegriper synoptiska och syntetiserande operationer. Ludwig Wittgenstein talade på ett liknande sätt om filosofins natur:

Vår grammatik brister i överskådlighet. Den översiktliga framställningen förmedlar förståelsen, som består just däri att vi 'ser sammanhangen'. Därav vikten av att hitta och hitta på *mellanled*.³²

I en lång not i essän *Dog from the Freeway* citerar Harun Farocki Jan Myrdals försvar för sin blindhet inför katastrofen i Pol Pots Kampuchea.³³ Man kan inte bara skildra grymheterna under Pol Pot utan vidare, menar Myrdal, det skulle innebära att visa upp en ”osystematisk bild av verkligheten”. Före bilden av Kampuchea måste bilder av Vietnams invasion (1979) av Kampuchea visas, en sådan sammanställning visar upp en sannare politisk helhet, enligt Myrdal. Men Vietnam hade ännu inte invaderat Kampuchea när han gjorde sin resa 1978. Var Myrdals ovilja att se grundad i

31. I en kommentar till mitt manus framhåller *Geist*-redaktionen (Andreas Ejiksson, Fredrik Ehlin och Oscar Mangione) att den viktigaste frågan i sammanhanget handlar om huruvida konstnären/den konstnärliga praktiken ger utrymme för ett särskilt slags politik/politiskt samtal och i så fall: Vad kännetecknar det samtalet och vad skulle det vara för slags politik?

32. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Filosofiska undersökningar*, Thales 1992, s. 62 (ursprungligen publicerad 1953).

33. I *Befreiung*, No 15–16 1979. Myrdal citerad i Farocki "Dog from Freeway" (i *Harun Farocki. Working on the Sight-Lines*) s. 130.

Myrdal's unwillingness to see due to his capacity for looking into the future? Farocki does not say a word about Myrdal's absurd argument.

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At the end of the 1980s I came across a book with the title *Mit dem Sozialismus gewachsen – 25 Jahre DDR*. This was an East German propaganda publication with strangely yielding colours that embedded everything in a pleasant haze, whether dealing with military parades, massgames, processing plants or apartment blocks. The book managed to present models of the world and I had the idea of trying to establish a time axis – to produce models in retrospect when it was already too late because the world, in all its vindictiveness, had already manifested itself. One may term this embellishing the world and argue that the same type of embellishment is used in advertising and fashion. But this was a visual language that was concerned with the structure of society. This was a method of presentation that was in conflict with what is often presented as photography's very nature – its ability to freeze time, to preserve a slice of history in an instant. I determined to try to imitate this heroic style of presentation and to apply it to my own surroundings in Sweden. Together with a friend of mine (photographer Anders K. Johansson) I started visiting a neighborhood of high-rise apartment blocks in the Stockholm suburb of Sollentuna. The neighborhood dated from 1972 and, at the time it was build, it was seen as a model of "integrated living" but had now, at the end of the eighties, become a symbol of the failure of the endeavor to solve the housing crisis in Sweden in the late 1960s and 1970s (the so-called Million Program).

For the invitation card in connection with our exhibition at Galleri 18A in Stockholm (1990) we chose a photograph from *Mit dem Sozialismus gewachsen*, but the three dominant works in the exhibition were three photographs from three neighborhoods in Sollentuna representing architecture from three decades (1960s, 1970s and 1980s). The photographs were taken from elevated positions using black and white film. The prints were then tinted using an airbrush in order to imitate the soft and diffuse pastel coloring that appears in the book as a medium in which to present

hans förmåga att skåda in i framtiden? Farocki nämner inte med ett ord det absurda i Myrdals argumentation.

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I slutet av åttiotalet kom jag över en bok med titeln *Mit dem Sozialismus gewachsen – 25 Jahre DDR*. En östtysk propagandabok med märkliga mjuka färger som svepte in allt i ett behagligt dis, såväl militärparader och mass-spel som industrianläggningar och höghusområden. I boken lyckades man framställa modeller av världen, och jag fick ingivelsen att försöka upprätta en omvänd tidsaxel – att göra modeller efterhand när det redan är för sent eftersom världen i all sin obarmhärtighet redan manifesterat sig. Man kan säga att det är att försköna världen och att samma förskönande används inom reklam och mode. Men det här var ett bildspråk som handlade om samhällsstrukturen. Det här var en framställningsform som låg i konflikt med vad som ofta framhålls som fotografiets natur – dess förmåga att frysa tiden, att hålla kvar ett stycke historia i ett ögonblick. Jag beslöt mig för att försöka imitera denna heroiska framställning och applicera den på min omgivning i Sverige. Tillsammans med en vän (fotografen Anders K. Johansson) började jag besöka ett område med lamellhus i Sollentuna, ett område som när det byggdes 1972 i Sverige hade betraktats som ett föregångsområde för integrerat boende men nu (i slutet av åttiotalet) närmast blivit en symbol för det misslyckade, eller – som det sågs – groteska miljonprogramprojektet.

På vernissagekortet till vår utställning på Galleri 18A i Stockholm (1990) valde vi en bild ur *Mit dem Sozialismus Gewachsen*, men de tre dominerande verken i utställningen var tre bilder från tre områden i Sollentuna som representerade arkitekturen från tre årtionden (1960-tal, 1970-tal och 1980-tal). Fotografierna togs med svartvit film från höga punkter. Kopiorna kolorerade jag med airbrush för att kunna närma mig den diffusa, mjuka färgsättning som jag fann i boken, detta som ett medel att

models.³⁴

In February 1992, four months after the reunification of East and West Germany a friend and I made our first journey to Rügen, driving between Sassnitz and Rostock. We then repeated this journey more or less exactly over a number of years.

On our first trip Sassnitz presented a worn appearance in shades of greyish brown. To the west of the city, on the way to the bathing resort of Binz, huge gas pipes wound their way through a conglomeration of railway sidings, industrial neighborhoods and dumps.

After passing through the oily facilities of Sassnitz and the mighty beech woods surrounding it one came upon endless, perfectly straight avenues of lime trees interrupted at times by poplars and chestnuts. The traffic consisted mainly of Trabants and it moved at a leisurely pace. In the towns, the façades of the buildings of Mecklenburg created remarkable palimpsests. At the bottom were the faint, peeling remnants of art nouveau signs painted directly onto the rendering: *Schuhwaren, Bäckerei, Spezialitäten*. The next sedimentary layer showed the names of the DDR shops which had yet to be painted over: *HO Kaufhalle*, while on top of these were the brand new, illuminated signs: *Eduscho, Sparkasse* and *Camel*. In front of the buildings there were metal advertising signs with the red paint hardly dry from the factory. These had only recently been installed as was evident from the earth heaped around the bases.

34. In the Soviet Union what is often termed Soc-Art (inter alia Erik Bulatov, Komar & Melamid and Ilya Kabakov) had been establishing its own semantics of signs and images since the beginning of the 1970s. This system deconstructed the official rhetoric and the iconography of social-realist art. (One of the simplest but most striking works was a performance by Group Gneздо in Moscow in the late 1970s. A small sheet of metal bearing the words "The Iron Curtain" was carried around like a curtain hanging from a curtain rod.) In conjunction with an exhibition by Irwin-NSK, a Slovenian group of artists, held in Moscow in 1992 a group of theorists, critics and artists presented *The Moscow Declaration* which might possibly be read as a critique of commercialism and the kitschification of Soc-Art but, above all, the repudiation of all attempts from outside to seek to define a cultural, political and historical eastern bloc. The declaration claimed that Eastern Europe's specific "..."/history, experience and time and space" had created the bloc's own subjectivity which cannot be "..."/ forgotten, hidden, rejected or suppressed." Instead, this subjectivity was to be developed and reformed. This identity "..."/ has an universal – not specifically Eastern – importance and meaning." At least it belongs to "..."/Europe as a whole." The experience of "..."/ oppressive regimes (totalitarian, authoritarian)," according to the declaration, is to be found in all more or less developed states throughout the universe and "..."/is common to more than half of the population in these countries." "This context and the developed subjectivity are the real base for our new identity, which has taken a clear shape (also in the form of new social, political and cultural infrastructures) in the last decades of this century." Quotations from Marina Gržinic, *Fiction Reconstructed, Eastern Europe, Post-socialism & The Retro-Avantgarde*, Springerin, Edition Selene 2000, pp. 129-130. The declaration was signed by Josif Bakstein, Eda Cufer, Marina Gržinić, Olga Kholmogorova, Irwin, Elena Kurlandzeva, Georgy Litichevsky, Victor Misiano, Dimitri Prigov and Konstantin Zvezdichiotov.

framställa försenade modeller.³⁴

I februari 1992, fyra månader efter återföreningen av Öst- och Västtyskland, gjorde jag och en vän vår första resa på Rügen med bil mellan Sassnitz och Rostock, en resa som vi skulle upprepa mer eller mindre exakt under ett antal av de kommande åren.

Sassnitz var vid första resan en åtgången stad i det gråbruna registret. Väster om staden på vägen mot badorten Binz löpte enorma gasledningar genom ett konglomerat av rangerbangårdar, industriområden och avställningsplatser.

När man tagit sig igenom Sassnitz oljiga konglomerat och därefter mäktiga bokskogar kom man ut i spikraka lindalléer utan slut, ibland varierade med popplar och kastanjer. Vägarna dominerades av Trabant och trafiken flöt i lugn takt. I städerna bildade de mecklenburgska stenhusens fasader märkliga palimpsester. Underst fanns de svaga, flagnande resterna av texter skrivna i jugendstil direkt på putsen: *Schuhwaren*, *Bäckerei*, *Spezialitäten*. Nästa sediment bestod av DDR-affärernas namn, ännu ej övermålade: *HO Kaufhalle*, ovanpå dessa splitter nya ljusskyltar: *Eduscho*, *Sparkasse* och *Camel*. Framför husen röda reklamskyltar av metall, som knappt hunnit torka på vägen från skyltfabrikerna. De hade alldeles nyss planterats, det avslöjades av små upphöjningar av färsk jord runt stöden.

34. I Sovjet hade vad som ofta omnämns som Soc-Art (bl.a. Erik Bulatov, Komar & Melamid och Ilya Kabakov) sedan början av 1970-talet upprättat en egen teckenstruktur och bildsemantik som dekonstruerade den officiella retoriken och den socialrealistiska konstens ikonografi. (Ett av de enklaste men mest geniala verken var en performance av Group Gnezdno i Moskva i slutet av 70-talet. En mindre järnskiva med texten "The Iron Curtain" bars omkring likt en gardin på en gardinstång.) I samband med en utställning av den slovenska konstnärgruppen Irwin-NSK i Moskva 1992 presenterade en grupp teoretiker, kritiker och konstnärer en deklaration kallad *The Moscow Declaration*, vilken möjligen kan läsas som en markering mot kommersialiseringen och kitschifieringen av Soc-Art, men framför allt som ett avståndstagande mot alla yttre försök att definiera ett kulturellt, politiskt och historiskt östblock. Deklarationen hävdade att Östeuropas specifika "/.../ historia, erfarenhet och tid och plats" format en egen subjektivitet som "/.../ inte kan glömmas, gömmas, förkastas eller undertryckas." Istället ska denna subjektivitet utvecklas och reformeras. Denna identitet är "/.../ gemensam för alla och har en universell – inte specifikt östlig – betydelse och mening". Åtminstone tillhör den "Europa som helhet". Erfarenheten av "/.../ förtyckaregimer (totalitära eller auktoritära) /.../" finns enligt deklARATIONEN "/.../ i alla mer eller mindre utvecklade stater i universum /.../" och "/.../ den delas av mer än halva befolkningen i dessa stater." "Denna kontext och den utvecklade subjektiviteten är den verkliga grunden för vår nya identitet, som nu alltmer håller på att få en tydlig form (även i form nya sociala, politiska och kulturella infrastrukturer) under de senaste årtiondena i detta århundrade." Citaten är hämtade ur Marina Gržinić, *Fiction Reconstructed, Eastern Europe, Post-socialism & The Retro-Avantgarde*, Springerin, Edition Selene, 2000, s 129–130 (egen övers. M.B.) Deklarationen var signerad av Josif Bakstein, Eda Cufer, Marina Gržinić, Olga Kholmogorova, Irwin, Elena Kurlandzeva, Georgy Litijevskij, Víctor Misiano, Dimitri Prigov och Konstantin Zvezdichiotov.

Eight thousand shipbuilders had blocked the major roads leading into Rostock on the day before we arrived in the city. About half of the 50 000 workers at the Neptune and Warnow yards were about to lose their jobs. But the demonstration was not just about losing their jobs. It was also about wages. The remaining workers wanted to be paid 65% of the corresponding wage in the West.

At the student bar in Rostock the DJ was playing Pixies' "Monkey Gone to Heaven" but they had not had time to change the admission tickets which still bore the Freie Deutsche Jugend logo. At the seamen's hotel in Rostock, the Hotel Sonne, they were still using the registration forms that informed guests that they were not allowed to receive any visitors who had not informed the police.

We looked at the pillows on the beds in our room. They were placed on their sides and had been pressed down in the middle so that the ends pointed upwards like two rabbit's ears. This karate treatment was not some whim on the part of the maid but, we discovered on staying at a second hotel on Rügen, an aspect of East German aesthetics. (The norm disappeared in the new Germany, we discovered during our later trips to Rügen.)

We continued traveling between Sassnitz and Rostock and even ventured further east to Frankfurt an der Oder. The symbols of consumption were assimilated and some of the buildings were renovated but the fields of the collective farms, the so-called LPD farms, continued to lie fallow while the complicated legal processes pertaining to the land rights moved through the courts. Watchtowers had been demolished, youth hostels and summer cottages had been destroyed. The smell of brown coal lessened year by year and one could no longer wander freely through the military camps at Rügen with their strange and rusty apparatus, machines of every sort, giant and unfathomable spheres and radar installations, places that had been instantly abandoned after the fall of the Berlin wall.

Customs officers and transport officials had assumed the uniforms of their western counterparts and I could not avoid the presumptuous thought that, when two people move in together surely both of them should be allowed to keep at least some of their own furniture. Why should everything come from the West? Is it really a good idea to erase a memory so rapidly and totally? Such a complete denial of everything belonging to the past, such an obligatory oblivion must have repercussions. A

Åtta tusen varvsarbetare hade spärrat av de viktigaste infarterna till Rostock dagen innan vi anlände. Ungefär hälften av de femtiotusen arbetarna på Neptun- och Warnowvarven skulle bli av med sina jobb. Men demonstrationen handlade inte om uppsägningarna utan om lönerna. De kvarvarande arbetarnas krav var 65% av lönen för motsvarande arbete i väst.

På Studentenkeller i Rostock spelade dj:n Pixies' "Monkey Gone to Heaven" men man hade inte hunnit byta ut inträdesbiljetterna som var förtryckta med Freie Deutsche Jugend-märket. På sjömanshotellet i Rostock, Hotel Sonne, hade man fortfarande kvar de inskrivningsblanketter som påpekade att man inte tog emot några gäster som inte anmält sig hos polisen.

Vi såg på kuddarna i sängarna i vårt rum. Man hade placerat dem på sidan för att sedan trycka ner mitten så att hörnen pekar upp i luften som två kaninöron. Det var inget infall som städerskan fått, att ge kuddarna karateslag, det var norm eller sed förstod vi efter att ha tagit in på andra hotell på Rügen. Detta var en del av den östtyska estetiken. (Denna norm försvann med det nya Tyskland, blev vi varse under de närmaste årens resor.)

Vi fortsatte att resa mellan Sassnitz och Rostock och även längre österut till Frankfurt an der Oder. Konsumtionssymbolerna var assimilerade och vissa av husen hade renoverats men åkrarna runt kollektivjordbruken, de så kallade LPD-jordbruken, låg fortfarande i träda då komplicerade juridiska processer fördes om rätten till att bruka jorden. Vaktorn hade monterats ner, ungdomshärbergen och semesterstugor slagits sönder. Brunkolsdoften mattades för varje år och man kunde inte längre fritt vandra omkring i Rügens militäranläggningar med märkliga rostiga apparater, allehanda maskiner, jättelika obegripliga klot och radaranläggningar, platser som efter murens fall övergivits i all hast.

Tulltjänstemän och konduktörer hade tagit på sig uniformer från väst och jag kunde inte låta bli att tänka den förmätta tanken; om två människor flyttar ihop måste väl den ena få behålla åtminstone några av sina möbler. Varför ska allt komma från väst? Är det verkligen nyttigt att så snabbt och fullständigt radera i minnet? En sådan total förnekelse av allt som hör ihop med det förgångna, en sådan påbjuden glömska måste ge ett bakslag. En ny repression av förnekelse och utradering tar vid

new era of repression, denial and erasure takes over as the previous system of repression is discontinued. The methodical way in which the aesthetics of the Eastern bloc are eradicated must cause “congested feelings” in the East.³⁵

Just a couple of years later when we traveled to Eisenhüttenstadt in order to visit the institution known as the *Dokumentationszentrum Alltagskultur der DDR*, a wave of nostalgia had started to develop among the former East Germans.³⁶ This was known as *Ostalgie* and it had an ironic aspect, though for some people it was surely a subversive and obstinate form of devotion. For others, *Ostalgie* was probably just a form of melancholy.

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In September 2008 I went to North Korea with Fredrik Ekman. The questions about public façades, propaganda and what one sees or does not see were brought to life. Michel Leri’s comment on Raymond Roussel was materialized, that Roussel: “/.../ discovered one of the most ancient and widely used patterns of the human mind: the formation of myths starting from words.”³⁷

On the second day of our trip we were in the vicinity of the northern coast of the country (North Hamgyon Province). We had climbed to a considerable height and stopped to observe the rock formations of Mount Chilbo. We were very close to the place where the North Koreans had tested a nuclear device on the ninth of October 2006. As I observed the unspoiled mountain clad in conifers it was difficult to imagine that, just a couple of years earlier, they had exploded an atomic bomb a few miles inland. This took the form of an underground test in a valley outside Kilju where they had dug a series of tunnels. The North Korean press agency, KNCA, announced that the test had “/.../ greatly encouraged and pleased the KPA [Korean

35. “Congested feelings” (“blocked emotionality”) refers to Hans-Joachim Maaz, an East German psychiatrist who in an empirical (and disputed study) spoke of *Gefühlstau* developing among East German citizens as an effect of the repression that was in force at all levels of the DDR: government, schools, the Church, the family, law and medicine. In all these institutions all forms of deviance and authentic expressions were ridiculed, according to Maaz. See Hans-Joachim Maaz, *Gefühlstau. Ein Psychogramm der DDR*, Argon Verlag 1990.

36. We reached Eisenhüttenstadt after a eight-hour drive from Berlin but the museum was closed on that day.

37. See William Clark, “A Lovely Curiosity – Raymond Roussel (1877–1933)”.

där det förra systemets repression upphörde. Just det metodiska i försöken att utplåna östestetiken måste ytterligare få östtyskarnas känslor att stocka sig.³⁵

Redan ett par år senare när vi reste till Eisenhüttenstadt för att besöka *Dokumentationszentrum Alltagskultur der DDR* hade öststatsnostalgin bland de forna östtyskarna börjat växa.³⁶ Den kallades *Ostalgie* och hade ett ironiskt anslag men var för vissa antagligen en subversiv och obstinat form av hängivelse. För andra var antagligen *Ostalgie* bara en form av melankoli.

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I september 2008 reste jag till Nordkorea tillsammans med Fredrik Ekman. Frågor om kulissvärlden, om propagandan, det slutna systemet, om vad man ser och inte ser kom att aktualiseras. Här upplevde jag också hur surrealisterna och etnografen Michel Leiris kommentar om Raymond Roussel materialiserades, att Roussel ”/.../ upptäckte ett av de mest uråldriga och mest återkommande mönster i det mänskliga sinnet: uppkomsten av myter börjar i orden.”³⁷

Under den andra dagen av vår resa befann vi oss nära kusten i norra delen av landet (Norra Hamgyon-provinsen). Vi hade tagit oss högt upp i terrängen och stannat för att beundra de märkliga klippformationerna på Chilbo-berget. Vi var nu helt nära den plats där man genomförde ett kärnvapentest den nionde oktober 2006. När jag såg de orörda, barrträdsklädda bergen hade jag svårt att föreställa mig att man någon mil inåt landet för två år sedan sprängt en atombomb. Det var ett underjordisk test i en dalgång utanför Kilju där man uppfört ett system av tunnlar. Den nordkoreanska nyhetsbyrån KNCA meddelade att testet ”/.../ bringat stor lycka åt KPA [Koreanska Folkarmén] och vårt folk” och var ”/.../ ett stort steg framåt i

35. Ordet "känslstockningen" kommer från den östtyske psykiatrikern Hans-Joachim Maaz som i en empirisk (och omdiskuterad) studie talade om hur *Gefühlsstau* uppstod hos de östtyska medborgarna som en effekt av repressionen utövad inom nivåer i DDR; staten, skolan, kyrkan, familjen, juridiken och medicinen. På alla dessa institutioner nedgjordes, enligt Maaz, alla former av avvikelser och autentiska uttryck. Se Hans-Joachim Maaz, *Gefühlsstau: Ein Psychogramm der DDR*, Argon Verlag 1990.

36. Efter åtta timmars bilresa från Berlin nådde vi Eisenhüttenstadt men museet var just denna dag stängt.

37. Se William Clark, "A Lovely Curiosity – Raymond Roussel (1877–1933)" (egen övers. M.B.).

Peoples' Army] and people” and that it was “/.../ a great leap forward in the building of a great prosperous powerful socialist nation.”³⁸ The test appalled the whole of Asia if not the entire world.

A local guide had met us to tell us about the rock formations we saw before us. His English was far from perfect but he was very concerned that we should understand him.

He pointed to a gigantic, horizontal rock resting on a few smaller stones and he told us that Kim Jong Il had visited the site a few years earlier and had immediately renamed it. It had formerly been known as the Stone Table but, in the eyes of the dictator, it was a piano. It has ever since been known as the Piano Rock.

“Can you imagine?” he asked, but not one of the group could actually see the formation as a piano. The image existed only in the supreme leader’s head, but since it was his image and he was in charge, the rock was now a piano, though, as the guide noted, no one in the district actually knew what a piano was at the time.

The next day we visited the “revolutionary, holy mountain” of Baekdu which is an extinct volcano with a deep lake in the crater that lies on the border with China. Baekdu, at a height of some 3000 meters is the highest point on the Korean peninsula. The strips of red, orange and rust-brown against the grey of the lava were reminiscent of the Icelandic landscape.

Giant metal letters had been fixed to the rock face in honor of Kim Il Sung’s eightieth birthday in 1992: “Revolutionary Sacred Mountain.” Baekdu has a central position in the mythology of North Korean government. The mountain is an icon that appears in photographs, postage stamps, mosaics and paintings. The revolutionary Korean spirit that drove out the Japanese colonizers and defeated imperialism emanates from this mountain, it is believed, like radiation from a giant magical monolith.

According to legend, Kim Jong Il was born in a little log cabin below the mountain. At the moment of his birth, a new star appeared in the sky accompanied by a double rainbow – a remarkable conjunction of heavenly phenomena. A swallow descended from the heaven to “/.../ herald the birth of ‘a general who will rule all the

38. <http://www.kcna.co.jp/index-e.htm> (15/1 2010). Eight months after our return to Sweden, on May 15, 2007, a new test was conducted at the same site, this time with a bomb comparable with those dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The United Nations Security Council immediately assembled as a new international crisis developed.

byggandet av en blomstrande mäktig socialistisk nation.”³⁸ Händelsen satte skräck i hela Asien, ja i hela världen.

En lokal guide hade mött upp för att berätta om klippblocken i landskapet framför oss. Hans engelska var långt ifrån perfekt men han var mån om att vi skulle förstå honom.

Han pekade på ett gigantiskt horisontellt klippblock som vilade på ett antal mindre stenar och berättade att Kim Jong Il kommit hit för ett antal år sedan och omedelbart döpt om det. Det kallades för Stenbordet, men i diktatorns ögon så var det inget bord, det var ett piano. Klippblocket heter sedan dess Pianoklippan.

”Can you imagine?” sa han, men ingen i gruppen kunde på något sätt föreställa sig formationen som ett piano. Den bilden fanns bara i ledarens huvud, men eftersom det var hans bild och det var han som bestämde så var det ett piano för all framtid även om – vilket guiden påpekar – ingen i den här trakten vid den tiden visste vad ett piano var.

Nästa dag besökte vi det ”revolutionära, heliga berget” Baekdu, en slocknad vulkan med djup kratersjö på gränsen till Kina. Baekdu, på nära 3000 meters höjd, är den högsta punkten på hela den koreanska halvön. De röda, orangea och rostbruna stråken mot den grå lavastenen påminde om det isländska landskapet.

En jättelik text av metallbokstäver med anledning av Kim Il Sung's åttioårsdag 1992 hade fästs på en av bergssidorna: ”Revolutionärt heligt berg”. Baekdu har en central plats i Nordkoreas statsmytologi, berget är en ikon som sprids genom fotografier, frimärken, mosaiker och målningar. Den revolutionära koreanska andan, som drivit bort de japanska kolonisatörerna och besegrat imperialisterna, emanerar från detta berg, anser man, som en utstrålning från en jättelik magisk monolit.

Enligt legenden föddes Kim Jong Il i en liten timrad stuga nedanför berget. I födelseögonblicket uppstod en ny, klar stjärna på himlen samt dubbla regnbågar, hur nu dessa fenomen kan samsas i samma bild. En svala steg ner från himlen för att ”/.../

38. <http://www.kcna.co.jp/index-e.htm> (egen övers. M.B.). Åtta månader efter vår hemkomst, den femtonde maj 2007, gjorde man en ny provsprängning på samma plats, denna gång med en bomb jämförbar med de man använde mot Hiroshima och Nagasaki. FN:s säkerhetsråd blixtkallades och en ny internationell kris uppstod.

world.”³⁹ When he revisited the site as an adult the same phenomenon recurred: the dense cloud that enveloped the crater dissolved and a rainbow stretched across the firmament. The elements recognized him as their ruler.

Up on the rim of the crater we looked out over the huge lake with its cerulean blue water. The guide informed us that the mountain peaks here are permanently covered with snow, though this was not the case. When we pointed to the fact that the peaks were not actually covered in snow the guide merely repeated his information: “The peaks of Mount Baekdu are always covered in snow.” The simple impression of our eyes was not to soil the image of a national treasure whose appearance had been decided upon for all history.

We then caught sight of an alarmingly steep set of steps leading all the way down to the lake. The guide told us that there were 216 steps that were a numerological representation of Kim Il Sung’s birth date (February 16). But visual inspection showed that this was not true either. There were in fact several thousand steps and they were so steep that even the bravest soul might suffer from vertigo.

Joining an organized trip was the only feasible way for us to gain entry to North Korea. Foreigners are not allowed to travel in the country by themselves, journalists and authors are not permitted to enter the country but artists are considered OK. During the visa application in Stockholm we had explained that our books dealt exclusively with art and this had proved acceptable.

Our trip included a visit to the film studios outside Pyongyang. These were the film studios that had been rebuilt and expanded for the abducted actress Choi Eun-hee and director Shin Sang-ok in 1983.

Fredrik Ekman and I had a conversation with Choi Eun-hee at a hotel in Seoul in July 2007. This was when Choi Eun-hee told us about how she and Shin had been kidnapped and taken to North Korea. She told us about her life as a luxurious captive in there, about her work in the studio and their trips to Eastern Europe and China, and how they finally managed to flee from North Korea.

The legendary actress Madame Choi, as she was known in South Korea, had finally agreed to meet us for two hours at the Marriott Hotel in Seoul. We had prepa-

39. Bertil Lintner, *Great Leader, Dear Leader, Demystifying North Korea under the Kim Clan*, Silkworm Books 2005, p. 60. Most experts agree that Kim Il Sung was actually born in Vyatskoya in the former Soviet Union.

tillkännage födelsen av 'en general som kommer att styra över världen'.³⁹ När han för första gången i vuxen ålder tog sig upp hit skedde det igen: de tunga molnen som hängde över kratern skingrades, en regnbåge spändes upp över himlavalvet. Elementen erkände honom som härskare.

Uppe på kraterns kam spanade vi ut över den mäktiga kratersjön med sitt cölinblå vatten. Guiden berättade att bergstopparna här alltid är snötäckta, men det stämde inte. När vi pekade på bergen och sa att de faktiskt inte är snötäckta upprepade guiden bara orden: "Mount Baekdus bergstoppar är alltid snötäckta". Våra enkla intryck skulle inte smutsa bilden av en nationalklenod med ett fastställt utseende som för alltid skrivits in i historien.

Vi stirrade sedan ner på en farligt brant trappa som ledde hela vägen ner till sjön. Guiden sa oss att den bestod av 216 steg som var en numerologisk representation av Kim Il Sung's födelsedag (den 16:e februari). Men det stämde inte heller, kunde man konstatera med ett ögonkast. Trappan hade flera tusen trappsteg och var så brant att även den mest oberörde kunde få svindel.

Att ansluta sig till en organiserad turistresa var det enda överkomliga sättet för oss att ta oss in i Nordkorea. Man får inte resa på egen hand, inte vara journalist eller författare, men konstnär går bra. Våra böcker, hade vi förklarat under visumproceduren i Stockholm, handlar uteslutande om konst, och med det beskedet hade man låtit sig nöjas.

I turistresan ingick ett besök på filmstaden utanför Pyongyang. Det var denna filmstad man byggt om och expanderat för skådespelerskan Choi Eun-hees och regissören Shin Sang-oks räkning 1983.

I juli 2007 hade jag och Fredrik Ekman samtalat med Choi Eun-hee i Seoul. Det var här som Choi berättade om hur hon och Shin kidnappades till Nordkorea. Hon berättade om livet som luxuös fånge i landet, om arbetet i filmstaden, om deras resor i Östeuropa och Kina och om hur de slutligen lyckades fly ur landet.

Den legendariska skådespelerskan Madame Choi, som hon kallas i Sydkorea, hade efter lång övertalning gått med på att träffa oss två timmar på Hotel Marriott. Vi

39. Bertil Lintner, *Great Leader, Dear Leader, Demystifying North Korea under the Kim Clan*, Silkworm Books 2005, s. 60 (egen övers. M.B.). De flesta forskare är överens om att Kim Il Sung föddes i Vyatskoya i dåvarande Sovjetunionen.

red for the interview with sessions at the national film archive in the capital, recently relocated to laboratory-like premises made of glass and polished stone. We had seen as many of her films as was possible including those that she had directed herself. With us were Joo Ha Young and Kim Taehyung who acted as interpreters.⁴⁰

Choi Eun-hee seldom gave interviews and had refrained entirely since the death of Shin Sang-ok in April 2006.⁴¹ Now, in her soft, deep voice, she told us her story from the beginning. She became increasingly involved in her narration and completely forgot the time, despite the fact that she must have told her story many times before. After three hours she suggested that we should continue our discourse at a bulgogi-restaurant. The interview continued for almost six hours. Choi Eun-hee's life had moved in strange cycles. Twice she had been kidnapped. With strange repetitions she had served those in power in two different systems.

Madame Choi told us how, after five years in North Korea, they had been asked to redeem the North Korean film industry with their expertise and how they had been given an enormous budget and almost infinite resources as regarded walk-on extras and technology. Madame Choi was fifty years old when she was kidnapped and Shin Sang-ok was fifty-two. At the time everyone believed that their careers were over. They had divorced, which was considered shameful at the time, and the South Korean dictator General Park had withdrawn their production rights. Up until this time Shin had directed two or three films each year and his company, Shin Films, had produced about 300 films during the 1960s.

Choi Eun-hee had been received in a personal audience by a proud Kim Jong Il. He had taken her to his private residence outside Pyongyang. On her first day of captivity in North Korea she had awakened to flowers sent by Kim Jong Il. Every day a doctor came to check her health. There was a private teacher who visited daily to school her in revolutionary history. At the age of 50 she found herself back at school, she filled four drawers with notes and was obliged to take part in regular tests.

Madame Choi told us about King Jong Il's enormous archive of 35-mm films;

40. Joo Ha Young took a doctorate in art at Leeds while Kim Taehyung has a doctorate in theater history from Los Angeles.

41. A few months after our visit, Choi Eun-hee was interviewed by Swedish Television's *Kobra* team.

hade förberett vårt möte med sessioner på det nationella filmarkivet i Seoul, nyligen inflyttat i laboratorieliknande lokaler i en byggnad av glas och polerad sten. Vi hade sett så många av hennes filmer som möjligt, även de som hon själv regisserat. Med oss var Joo Ha Young och Kim Taehyung, som översatte samtalet.⁴⁰

Choi Eun-hee gav sällan intervjuer och hade helt avstått från det sedan Shin Sang-ok avlidit (april 2006).⁴¹ Nu berättade hon med djup och mjuk röst, hon tog allt från början. Efterhand drogs hon egendomligt nog in i sin egen berättelse och glömde bort tiden, trots att hon måste ha berättat den så många gånger. Efter tre timmar föreslog hon att vi skulle åka vidare till en bulgogi-restaurang och fortsätta. Först efter närmare sex timmar avslutades samtalet. Choi Eun-hees liv hade rört sig i märkliga cykler. Två gånger hade hon blivit kidnappad. I märkliga upprepningar hade hon tjänat makten i två olika system.

Madame Choi berättade hur de efter fem år i Nordkorea av Kim Jong Il ombads lyfta den nordkoreanska filmindustrin med sitt kunnande, hur de hade fått en enorm budget och i stort sett obegränsade resurser vad gällde teknik och statister. Madame Choi var femtio år vid kidnappningen, Shin Sang-ok var femtiotvå, men vid denna tid trodde alla att deras karriärer var över. De hade skiljt sig, vilket ansågs skamligt, och den sydkoreanska diktatorn General Park hade dragit in deras produktionsrättigheter. Fram till dess hade Shin regisserat två, tre filmer om året och hans filmbolag Shin Films hade under 1960-talet producerat ungefär trehundra filmer.

Choi Eun-hee hade personligen tagits emot av en stolt Kim Jong Il. Han hade fört henne till ett av sina privata residens utanför Pyongyang. Första dagen i fångenskap i Nordkorea hade hon vaknat upp med blommor som Kim Jong Il skickat. Varje dag kom sedan en doktor och kontrollerade hennes hälsa, och en privatlärare kom för att skola henne i revolutionär historia. Vid 50 års ålder hamnade hon i skolbänken. Hon fyllde fyra lådor med anteckningar och tvingades regelbundet avlägga prov.

Madame Choi berättade om Kim Jong IIs gigantiska filmarkiv med 35-millime-

40. Joo Ha Young doktorerade i Leeds som konstnärlig forskare, Kim Taehyung doktorerade i teaterhistoria i Los Angeles.

41. Någon månad efter vårt besök blev Choi Eun-hee intervjuad av SVT:s *Kobra*.

probably in excess of 15 000 titles.⁴² She had free access both to the films and to Kim's private cinema. She was allowed to watch what she chose but was encouraged to study propaganda documentaries about North Korean history as well as Russian revolutionary films. The years passed and life was sorely uneventful.

Madame did not know that Shin was also in North Korea. The film director was housed in a villa from which he tried to escape after five months. He had taken a car and driven until the petrol ran out. He had then walked to a railway station where he hid in an explosives store. He managed to board a goods train but was discovered the following morning. After being arrested he was subjected to a lengthy interrogation. After each new question, the guards would leave the room to consult Kim Jong Il by telephone.

Shin was kept in solitary confinement for three months. He made another attempt at escaping and this time he was formally charged and convicted. He was placed in a work camp for political prisoners. The guards told him that Choi Eun-hee had died. Shin spent four years at the camp, surviving by eating salt, grass and bark.⁴³

He was finally released and reunited with Choi Eun-hee on the condition that he would now cooperate with Kim Jong Il who was in desperate need of Shin's expertise.

*

Shin Sang-ok had built up a small-sized company, Seoul Films, for producing and distributing films in 1950s South Korea. Financially the company was up and down. Producing films was considered a luxury at the time and films were heavily taxed. The censorship was impenetrable and there were many taboos in the cinema. Almost nothing pertaining to Japan or the Japanese occupation of Korea was allowed. Choi

42. According to official North Korean sources, Kim Jong Il has been involved in the production of 800 feature films, 400 children's films and 1000 documentaries. See Lintner, p. 90. The author refers to Hans Maretzki, *Kim-ismus in Nordkorea: Eine Analyse des letzten DDR-Botschafter in Pjöngjang*, Böblingen: Anita Thyke Verlag 1991, p. 109.

43. Michael Breen, *Kim Jong-Il: North Korea's Dear Leader*, John Wiley & Sons 2004, p. 87.

terskopior, förmodligen över 15 000 titlar.⁴² Hon hade fri tillgång till både filmerna och Kims privata biosalong. Hon kunde titta på vad hon ville men anmodades att studera propagandadokumentärer om den nordkoreanska historien samt rysk revolutionär film.

Åren gick och det blev ett händelsefattigt liv. Madame var ovetande om att Shin också befann sig i landet. Regissören hade även han installerats i en villa men försökte fly efter fem månader. Han hade stulit en bil och kört till bensinen tagit slut. Till fots hade han sedan tagit sig till en järnvägsstation där han hållit sig gömd i ett lager med sprängmedel. Han hade smugit sig ombord på ett godståg men upptäckts nästa morgon. Efter att ha satts i arrest utsattes han för ett långdraget förhör där vakterna ställde en fråga i taget för att efter varje svar lämna rummet och återkomma efter telefonkonsultationer med Kim Jong Il.

Shin sattes i isoleringscell i tre månader. Han försökte återigen fly och blev denna gång formellt åtalad och dömd. Han placerades i ett arbetsläger för politiska fångar. Han vistades där i fyra år och överlevde genom att äta salt, gräs och bark. Vakterna förklarade för honom att Choi Eun-hee hade dött.⁴³

När han frigavs och återförenades med Choi Eun-hee skedde det under förutsättning att han nu samarbetade med Kim Jong Il. Ledaren var i desperat behov av hans färdigheter.

*

Shin Sang-ok hade på 1950-talet i Sydkorea byggt upp ett mindre filmproduktions- och distributionsbolag, Seoul Films. Ekonomin gick upp och ner. Filmproduktion ansågs som lyx på den är tiden och beskattades hårt. Censuren var ogenomtränglig och det fanns en mängd tabun inom filmen. Knappast något som rörde Japan eller den japanska ockupationen kunde passera. Choi Eun-hee berättade att deras kostym-

42. Kim Jong Il har enligt officiella nordkoreanska biografier personligen varit inblandad i produktionen av 800 långfilmer, 400 barnfilmer och 1000 dokumentärer. Se Lintner, s. 90. Författaren hänvisar till Hans Maretzki, *Kim-ismus in Nordkorea: Eine Analyse des letzten DDR-Botschafter in Pjöngjang*, Anita Thyke Verlag 1991, s. 109.

43. Michael Breen, *Kim Jong-Il: North Korea's Dear Leader*, John Wiley & Sons 2004, s. 87.

Eun-hee explained that the costume drama *Farewell Tokyo*⁴⁴ in which she played a sort of Japanese Mata Hari, was totally forbidden by the censors and that *Naeshi* [The Eunuch] (1968) was torn to shreds.⁴⁵

Choi Eun-hee and Shin Sang-ok lived from hand to mouth during the 1950s. Shin was inspired by the Italian neorealist cinema. He was bowled over by Vittorio de Sica's *The Bicycle Thief* and Rossellini's *Rome, Open City*. Choi Eun-hee presented me with a DVD of one of their films from 1958, *Flower in Hell* (*Jiokhwa*).⁴⁶ This had been filmed on the streets in Seoul and round the barracks of the US base where prostitutes gathered. The women in the film are wearing American fifties dresses, smoking cigarettes, chewing gum and drinking Budweiser. Choi plays Sonya, a prostitute who trips around in the sandy, litter-filled surroundings where jeeps full of GIs whip up the dust on roads protected by barbed wire. The barracks are a gathering place for pimps and petty criminals and Sonya has an affair with one of the criminals, a gang leader who dreams of them moving out of Seoul to live an honest life somewhere else. For the women this is an illusion. They are the women of Western man, caught in no man's land. As Sonya's friend Judy puts it: "If we can neither live with Americans nor with Koreans, who are we?"

With his shaky camera Shin moves through the crowds, sometimes meeting people who stare into the lens. The film mixes studio sequences with extreme close-ups and documentary footage from the army base. Choi's portrait of Sonya is totally different from her role of the widow in *Sarangbang sonnim kwa omoni* [House Guest and Mother] from 1961. The widow seems almost encapsulated in her traditional Korean *hanbok* and her hair, as befits a widow, is worn as a firm bun on the back of her neck. But in both films, Madame's character is at one with her surroundings and, in a sense, dominated by the objects in the room. The mother, the widow, cannot openly confess her love for her guest as she is the prisoner of all that being a widow entails: photographs, flowers, a piano... Sonya, on the other hand, spends her days

44. I have not found the Korean title of this film.

45. Article 1 of the so-called Film Policy Measure (1973–1979) stipulated that every film in South Korea should promote a "revitalizing" ideology, which mean patriotic messages and messages about national identity and national unity. See Min Eungjun, Joo Jinsook and Kwak Han Ju, *Korean Film – History, Resistance and Democratic Imagination*, Praeger Publishers 2003, p. 50.

46. The Korean title is the made-up name of a flower (*hwa*).

drama *Farewell Tokyo* [Farväl Tokyo],⁴⁴ där hon hade rollen av ett slags japansk Mata Hari, blev totalcensurerad och att *Naeshi* [Enucken] från 1968 förstördes.⁴⁵

Choi Eun-hee och Shin Sang-ok levde på 1950-talet ur hand i mun, berättade Choi. Shin inspirerades av den italienska neorealismen. Vittorio de Sicas *Cykeltjuven* och Rosselinis *Rom – öppen stad* hade drabbat honom. Choi Eun-hee överräckte en dvd med en film från 1958 – *Jiokhwa*.⁴⁶ Den hade spelats in på Seouls gator och runt de baracker vid den amerikanska basen där de prostituerade höll till. Kvinnorna i filmen bär amerikanska 50-talsklänningar, röker cigaretter, tuggar tuggummi och dricker Budweiser. Choi spelar Sonya, en prostituerad som trippar omkring i den skräpiga och sandiga miljön där jeepar med GI:s virvlar upp damm längs de tagg-trådsavskärmade vägarna. Barackerna är tillhåll för hallickar och småtjuvar. Sonya har ett förhållande med en av tjuvarna, en ligaledare som vill få ordning på deras liv, flytta ut från Seoul för att leva ett ärbart liv. För kvinnorna är det en fåfång dröm. De är de västerländska männens kvinnor, de befinner sig i ett ingenmansland. Sonyas väninna Judy säger: ”Om vi varken kan leva med amerikaner eller koreaner, vilka är vi då?”

Shin rör sig med skakig kamera i folksamlingar, ibland glör folk rakt in i kameran, han klipper mellan spelscener med extrema närbilder och dokumentära scener från armébasen. Chois porträtt av Sonya är så annorlunda hennes porträtt av en änka i *Sarangbang sonnim kwa omoni* [Hyresgäst och mor] från 1961. Änkan är inbäddad, liksom inkapslad i sin traditionella hanbok och har håret på änkers vis uppsatt i en hård knut i nacken. Men i båda filmerna är Madames karaktärer ett med sina rum och på något sätt dominerade av rummens objekt. Modern, änkan, kan inte erkänna sin kärlek till sin hyresgäst, fången som hon är bland allt det som tillhör en änka: fotografier, blommor, ett piano... Sonya, å sin sida, tillbringar sin tid framför spegeln,

44. Jag har inte hittat den koreanska titeln på denna film.

45. Artikel 1 i den så kallade Film Policy Measure (1973-1979) stipulerade att varje film i Sydkorea skulle verka för en "revitaliserande" ideologi, vilket betydde patriotiska budskap och meddelanden om nationell identitet och enhet. Se Min Eungjun, Joo Jinsook and Kwak Han Ju, *Korean Film – History, Resistance and Democratic Imagination*, Praeger Publishers 2003, s. 50.

46. Titeln är en påhittad blomma (*hwa*). På engelska har filmen fått titeln *A Flower in Hell*.

in front of the mirror, painting her lips and brushing her hair, sometimes interrupted by a cigarette that she smokes with extreme elegance. Madame plays a role within a role, emphasizing the fact that Sonya protects herself from degradation by the erotic power which she wields over men; and this is her dignity.

In due course their financial situation improved, at least temporarily according to Choi. In 1959 they had a box-office success with *Eoneu yeodaesaengui gobaek* [Confessions of a College Student]. Inspired by Hollywood's studio system and with money from the recent success they were able to build up Shin Films. Their operations soon dominated the Korean film industry producing everything from costume films, melodramas, horror films, war films and musicals to "wild east" movies known as Manchurian Westerns. Shin Films soon employed a staff of 300 with their own studios, props and printing press.

"We worked 24 hours a day. Our lives were totally immersed in film. There were very few cameras and we were constantly worried that they would be damaged. The cameras went from director to director. Shin took the negative film home and edited at night. I made costumes and designed sets. Much was reused from film to film," Choi Eun-hee explained.

Choi Eun-hee differed from her female colleagues in that, whenever the opportunity arose, she looked through the camera and discussed the shots. She had a background as an actress in the theater and had doubts about acting without an audience. She wanted to understand the entire process of making films and to acquaint herself with the eye of the camera.

Women were not allowed to touch a camera at this time. Cameras were extremely valuable and women were not trusted with them. This superstitious attitude was part of the Confucian tradition according to Choi. To concern oneself, as a woman, with the practicalities of filming was not considered decent. But Shin encouraged her. During only the second film they made together she was involved in the editing. But she was still not allowed actually to touch the equipment. She left detailed instructions on pieces of paper.

Shin encouraged Madame to take up film direction. In 1965 she made her debut with *Min-myu-nue-ri* [The Daughter-in-law To Be],⁴⁷ a film about a poor young girl

47. English title: *Future Wife*.

målar sina läppar, borstar sitt hår med avbrott för elegant rökande. Madame spelar en roll i rollen, hon markerar att Sonya skyddar sig från förnedring genom att utöva erotisk makt över männen, att det är hennes värdighet.

Den ekonomiska situationen för paret skulle, om än tillfälligt, komma att ljusna, berättade Choi. 1959 hade paret en kassasuccé med *Eoneu yeodaesaengui gobaek* [En kvinnlig universitetsstudents bekännelser]. Inspirerade av Hollywoods studiosystem och med pengarna från framgången kunde de bygga upp Shin Films. Verksamheten växte för att snart dominera hela den sydkoreanska filmindustrin med allt från kostymfilmer, melodramer, skräckfilmer, krigsfilmer och musikalerna till vilda östernfilmer, så kallade Manchurian Westerns. Shin Films hade snart 300 heltidsanställda, egna ateljéer, rekvisitaförråd och eget tryckeri.

”Vi arbetade 24 timmar om dygnet. Allt i vårt liv var film. Det fanns få kameror och vi var livrädda att de skulle skadas, kamerorna gick från filmare till filmare. Shin tog hem negativerna och klippte på natten. Jag gjorde kostymer och scenografi, många saker återanvändes från film till film.” berättade Choi Eun-hee.

Choi Eun-hee avvek från sina kvinnliga kollegor. Så fort hon fick chansen gick hon bakom kameran för att se in i sökaren och titta på utsnittet. Hon hade en bakgrund som teaterskådespelare och kände sig kluven inför att agera utan publik. Hon ville förstå processen och sätta sig in i kamerablicken.

Ingen kvinna fick röra kameran vid denna tid. Kameror var ytterst dyrbara och kvinnor var inte betrodda att hantera dem. Det var en skrockfull inställning som hörde ihop med en konfuciansk tradition, berättade hon. Att ge sig in i det praktiska filmarbetet ansågs otillständigt. Men Shin uppmuntrade henne. Redan under den andra filmen som de skapade tillsammans var hon involverad i klipparbetet. Men fortfarande fick hon inte röra klipputrustningen utan skrev detaljerade instruktioner på lappar.

Madame uppmuntrades av Shin att regissera. 1965 debuterade hon med *Minmyu-nue-ri* [Den blivande svärdottern],⁴⁷ som handlar om en fattig ung flicka som

47. Engelsk titel : *Future Wife*.

who is sold to a rich family where she is, in due course, to become the bride of their insufferable young son. With this film Madame became the third woman director in the history of South Korea. When we told her that we had actually seen her second film *Kongjunimui tchaksarang* [Princess in Love] (1967) at Seoul's National Film Archive she expressed surprise because she believed that it had disappeared. Actually, she had never seen the finished film and she was sure that she would be ashamed of it if she were to see it today, she said with a laugh.

The film, like so many others of the period, was set in the Chosun dynasty and depicts a princess who falls in love with a man of the people. She tries to escape from the palace in order to get a glimpse of the beloved who, in a dreamy state, is fishing in the river. The emperor's guards follow her, take her prisoner and place her in a cage like a stray cat. She is returned to her home and released into the gilded prison of the palace.

Impossible love affairs were a popular subject for films in South Korea in the 1960s; the power of tradition and the unhappiness that strikes people who try to transgress these boundaries. In the real world there were also strict boundaries and exceeding them meant challenging fate. This was true both of traditional family life and the political arena.

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The film studios outside Pyongyang were deserted when we climbed out of our chartered bus early in September 2008. The offices that surrounded a sort of public square could have housed an entire army of filmmakers. The guide explained that the filmmakers were currently making films on location.

There was a bronze sculpture on the square showing Kim Il Sung in an overcoat with his arm affectionately resting on the shoulder of a little girl. The girl had her hair in plaits and was smiling while her little fingers grasped the dictator's forefinger. Bronze filmmakers on the right, camera at the ready, seemed as though they were waiting for instructions, holding their notebooks and pens. On the left were the little girl's parents, proudly watching their daughter in the leader's embrace. They were

säljs till en rik familj där den odräglige lille sonen är tänkt att bli hennes man i framtiden. Hon var då den tredje kvinnliga regissören i Sydkorea någonsin. När vi berättade för henne att vi sett hennes andra film *Kongjunimui Tchaksarang* [Förälskad prinsessa] (1967), i Seouls Nationella filmarkiv, blev hon förvånad. Hon sa att hon inte hade en aning om att någon kopia av *Förälskad prinsessa* existerade, hon trodde att den var försvunnen. Hon hade i ärlighetens namn aldrig sett den färdiga filmen och hon skulle nog skämmas om hon såg den idag, sa hon och skrattade.

Som så många filmer från denna tid utspelar sig *Förälskad prinsessa* i historisk miljö, under Chosun-dynastin. Prinsessan blir förälskad i en man av folket. Hon försöker rymma från palatset för att få en glimt av sin älskade som med drömsk blick sitter och fiskar vid floden. Härskarens vakter smyger efter henne och fångar henne. Som en bortsprungen kratt sätter de henne i en bur. Hon återbördas och släpps ut i palatsets gyllene fångelse.

Omöjlig kärlek var ett stort ämne i den sydkoreanska 60-talsfilmen: traditionernas makt och olyckan som drabbar den som försöker överskrida gränser. I verkligheten fanns också strikta gränser som det var ödesdigert att överskrida. Det gällde både det traditionella familjelivet och det politiska livet.

*

Filmstaden utanför Pyongyang var öde när vi steg av vår chartrade buss i början av september 2008. Kontorskomplexen som omgav en torgliknande plats skulle kunna rymma en armé av filmarbetare. Filmstadens guide sa att filmskaparna för tillfället låg ute i fält med sina inspelningar.

På torget fanns en skulpturgrupp i brons. Kim Il Sung i paletå, hans arm vilade ömt på en liten flickas axel. Hon hade flätor och log, hennes små fingrar omslöt ledarens pekfinger. Filmarbetarna till höger, med kameran klar, tycktes vänta på instruktioner, anteckningsblock och penna var redo. Till vänster: flickans föräldrar som med stolthet såg sin dotter i den store faderns famn. Underdåniga väntade de på tillfället

humbly awaiting an opportunity to present him with a basket of flowers. There could be no doubt that all filmmaking was dependent on the “Great Leader”.⁴⁸

These were the studios, built in 1947, which had been refurbished and expanded for Shin Sang-ok and Choi Eun-hee. During this period there was a staff of some 1800 people with unlimited access to extras.⁴⁹ When, in one scene during shooting of *Toraochiannun milsa* [The Agent Who Doesn't Return]⁵⁰ at the studios, Shin wanted to show a locomotive being blown up with dynamite, they did not use a model or special effects but the authorities provided him with a locomotive which was blown up in front of the cameras.⁵¹

With the bus we were brought to the side-scene cities. But it was actually not side-scenes but rather houses built in different styles. We walked through the muddy streets where film crews erected a vision of Seoul under Japanese occupation. Among the other sets we find a decadent bar district in Tokyo; naïve backdrops for narratives about immoral living in contemporary Seoul; buildings from the *Chosun* era; and even a Bavarian village – a convincing illusion at a distance, though closer inspection reveals that the houses are made of military-grade cement. Ordinary North Korean citizens' ideas about the world outside the country have shaped these sets.

I photographed the signs at the film studios. There was the “Oasis” bar, “Happy Toothpaste” which was a shop selling nylon underwear, “Fujicolor” painted by a shaky hand. They used Korean and Chinese characters for the establishment. The signs depict life in the West as shamelessly luxurious. “Luxury shirts, ties, suits and make-up” one sign proclaimed. Another was advertising something as superfluous as accessories for pets. There was a comical dog wearing dark glasses, a pearl necklace and a hat. Another sign offered “Female wrestling outfits.”⁵²

Watching films is not a matter of free choice in North Korea. Every citizen who

48. Kim Jong Il is known in North Korea as the “Great Leader” while Kim Il Sung is the “Dear Leader”.

49. According to Breen (p. 88) their personal budget amounted to 2 million US dollars per year. According to Harrison, who interviewed Shin Sang-ok in 1987 (p. 58) the film budget was financed from the revenues of Kim Jong Il's private goldmine.

50. English title: *Runaway*.

51. Kim Suk-young, “‘Guests’ of the Dear Leader: Shin Sang-ok, Choi Eun-hee, and North Korea's Cultural Crisis”, *Joint U.S.-Korea Academic Studies*, vol 18 2008, p. 207.

52. Some of the images can be seen in *Cabinet Magazine*, Issue 35 2009. (Magnus Bårtås, Fredrik Ekman, “All Monsters Must Die. Godjira's children go to North Korea”).

att överrätta en korg med blommor. Att allt filmskapande utgick från Den Store Ledaren⁴⁸ råder det ingen tvekan om.

Det var denna filmstad, uppförd 1947, som man hade rustat upp och byggt ut för Shin Sang-oks och Choi Eun-hees räkning. Filmstaden hade under deras tid 1800 anställda och tillgången till statister var obegränsad.⁴⁹ När Shin i en scen under inspelningen av *Toraochiannun Milsa* [Agenten som försvann]⁵⁰ ville skildra ett lok som sprängs med dynamit byggde man inte några modeller eller använde specialeffekter. På begäran gav myndigheterna honom ett lok som man sprängde inför kamerorna.⁵¹

Man tog oss med bussen till kuliss-städerna. Men det var egentligen inga kulisser utan hus som hade uppförts i olika stilar. Vi vandrade på de leriga gator där man skapat en representation av Seoul vid tiden för den japanska ockupationen. En annan kuliss skulle föreställa ett dekadent bardistrikt i Tokyo. Där fanns också naiva fonder för skildringar av omoraliskt leverne i dagens Seoul, en lantlig asiatisk bondeidyll från obestämd tid, en bayersk småstad – illusorisk på avstånd tills man kom närmare och upptäckte att husen var gjorda i armébetong. Vanliga nordkoreanska medborgares föreställningar om världen utanför har formats av dessa byggnader.

Jag fotograferade skyltarna i filmstaden. Baren ”Oasen”, ”Lycklig tandkräm” – en butik som sålde underkläder i nylon, ”Fujicolor” handmålade i darrig stil. Man använde koreanska och kinesiska tecken på etablissemangen. Livet i väst uppfattas som skamlöst lyxigt förstod man av skyltarna. ”Lyxiga skjortor, slipsar, kostymer och make up” förkunnade en skylt. En annan gjorde reklam för något så överflödigt som husdjursaccessoarer. Man hade målat en komisk hund som bar solglasögon, pärlhalsband och hatt. En annan skylt saluförde ”Kvinnliga brottarkläder”.⁵²

Att titta på film är inte fråga om fritt val i Nordkorea. Alla medborgare som kan

48. Kim Jong Il kallas i Nordkorea ”Den Store Ledaren” och Kim Il Sung är ”Den Kära Ledaren”.

49. Enligt Breen (s. 88) var deras personliga budget två miljoner dollar per år. Enligt Harrison, som intervjuade Shin Sang-ok 1987 (s. 58) togs filmbudgeten från intäkterna av Kim Jong IIs privata guldgruva.

50. Engelsk titel: *Runaway*.

51. Kim Suk-young, ”Guests’ of the Dear Leader: Shin Sang-ok, Choi Eun-hee, and North Korea’s Cultural Crisis”, i *Joint U.S.-Korea Academic Studies*, vol. 18 2008, s. 207.

52. Några av bilderna kan ses i *Cabinet Magazine*, Issue 35 2009. (Magnus Bärtås, Fredrik Ekman, ”All Monsters Must Die. Godzilla’s children go to North Korea”).

can still walk is expected, in principle, to go and see every film that is made in the country. This is part of their ideological training.⁵³ It is probable that the studios were the venue for the production of series like *Jeokhu eseo* [Unnamed Heroes]⁵⁴ (1978-1981) and *Minjokgwa woonmyung* [The Nation and Destiny] (1992-1999), films in which Kim Jong Il was deeply involved. Film historian Lee Hyangjin, in *Contemporary Korean Cinema*, says that refugees from North Korea have claimed that these series depicting the immorality of life beyond North Korea's borders did not always have the desired effect. Rather than being put off life elsewhere, audiences were fascinated by the scenes portraying the capitalist world. Their reaction “/.../ evinces the limitation of the role of cinema as propaganda and socialisation of the masses in the society and warns of the failure of the Party's film policy.”⁵⁵

In the film town there were billboards with hand-painted film posters. These were fusions of existing films. They had taken fragments, changed the actors and actresses, and created imaginary hybrid films. *The Seven Year Itch* had a portrait of a woman who was like Jeanne Moreau rather than Marilyn Monroe. *Giant* had a new cast: Clark Gable and Jane Russell instead of James Dean and Elizabeth Taylor. *Treasure Island* had the British actor Robert Newton in the starring role but he was paired with the unknown “Linda Danelle.” This was Hollywood in cut-up technique.

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Had we visited the film studios exactly 24 years earlier we should have found ourselves in the midst of filming *Pulgasari*. A Japanese film team from Toho Studios in Tokyo had just arrived. The team consisted of a number of special-effects experts and stuntman Kenpachiro Satsuma. They had with them a large load of expanded

53. Lee Hyangjin, *Contemporary Korean Cinema. Identity, Culture, Politics*, Manchester University Press 2000 (p. 41) cites the 1986 annual survey of North Korean films which prints these rules together with relevant statistics.

54. For the 2006 Gwangju Biennial, Sean Snyder and Takuji Togo produced a videomix of scenes from the *Unnamed Heroes*. See *RE: WATCH RECORD REWIND/NAMELESS HEROES, AKA UNSUNG HEROES, DPRK TV SERIES*. The work can be viewed at <http://artonline.jp/unsunghero/index.html> (14/1 2010).

55. Lee Hyangjin, *Contemporary Korean Cinema. Identity, Culture, Politics*, 2000, p. 40.

stå och gå måste se i princip alla inhemska produktioner. Det är en del av den ideologiska skolningen.⁵³ De är troligt att man i denna filmstad spelade in filmserier som *Jeokhu eseo* [Namnlösa hjältar] (1978–1981)⁵⁴ och *Minjokgwa woonmyung* [Nationen och ödet] (1992–1999), filmer som Kim Jong Il personligen var djupt involverad i. Filmvetaren Lee Hyangjin skriver i *Contemporary Korean Cinema* att nordkoreanska avhoppare berättat att dessa serier som skulle visa på det omoraliska livet utanför landet inte alltid hade den effekt som man önskade. Istället för att avskräcka visade publiken en otillbörlig nyfikenhet inför och till och med fascination över de scener som skildrade den kapitalistiska världen. Reaktionen ”/.../ visar på filmens begränsningar som propagandaverktyg för att uppfostra samhällets massor och sänder ut varningssignaler om att partiets filmpolicy har misslyckats.”⁵⁵

Det fanns skyltar med handmålade filmaffischer i filmstaden. Det var säregna fusioner av existerande filmer. Man hade fogat samman fragment, bytt ut rollbesättningar och skapat imaginära hybridfilmer. *Flickan ovanpå* hade försetts med ett porträtt av en kvinna som liknade Jeanne Moreau istället för Marilyn Monroe. *Jätten* hade fått nya skådespelare: Clark Gable och Jane Russell, istället för James Dean och Elizabeth Taylor. *Skattkammaren* hade visserligen den brittiske skådespelaren Robert Newton i huvudrollen men försetts med den okända motspelerskan ”Linda Danelle”. Det här var Hollywood i cutup-teknik.

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Om vi skulle ha befunnit oss i filmstaden för exakt 24 år sedan skulle vi ha hamnat mitt i inspelningen av *Pulgasari*. Ett japanskt filmteam från Toho Studios i Tokyo hade då just anlänt. Gruppen bestod av ett antal specialeffektsmakare samt stuntskådespelaren Kenpachiro Satsuma. Med sig hade de stora lass frigolit, då denna vara

53. Lee Hyangjin, *Contemporary Korean Cinema: Identity, Culture, Politics*, Manchester University Press 2000 (s.41) utgår från årsboken över Nordkoreansk film 1986 där dessa regler uttrycks tillsammans med statistik över visningar.

54. Sean Snyder och Takuji Togo gjorde för Gwangju Biennial 2006 en videomix av scener ur *Namnlösa hjältar*. Se *RE: WATCH RECORD REWIND/NAMELESS HEROES, AKA UNSUNG HEROES, DPRK TV SERIES*. Verket kan ses på <http://artonline.jp/unsunghero/index.html> (14/1 2010).

55. Lee Hyangjin, *Contemporary Korean Cinema: Identity, Culture, Politics*, s. 40 (övers. Fredrik Ehlin).

polystyrene, a product that did not exist in North Korea. The expanded polystyrene was used for making rocks that were to be rolled down into a ravine, thereby crushing the imperial army.

Kim Jong Il had had a fantastic idea. He wanted to imitate an entire concept from the arch-enemy Japan. A *kaiju* or monster film was to unify the nation and the monster itself was to become a popular idol. The figure would be spread throughout the country in the form of a plastic toy.

Exactly how the Toho team from Tokyo had ended up in North Korea was something of a mystery. Satsuma wrote about the event in his autobiography *Ore ha haiyu da* [I am the Actor].⁵⁶ The author is depicted on the cover as a Mifune look-alike and he writes in a self-congratulatory style. His film list comprises porn films and comedies alongside numerous monster films.

According to Satsuma, the Toho team believed that they were on their way to Hollywood to film when, somewhat surprised, they landed at Pyongyang's airport. A Mr. Kazuo Kinagawa from Hong Kong had conducted the negotiations with the team's manager Mr. Suzuki. The Hong Kong man was evidently in the pay of Kim Jong Il. Satsuma does not make it clear whether Mr. Suzuki was deceived or bribed.

The team was taken in a fleet of Mercedes along empty roads with no traffic lights to one of Kim Jong Il's private residences. Satsuma describes his astonishment at the sight that confronted them at the studios: the new, four-story building contained 300 rooms.

In the introductory footage of *Pulgasari*, the old village blacksmith, Takse, is alarmed to discover that his protégé, Inde, has a cache of hidden iron tools under a bush. It is known that the imperial army is going round the villages and impounding everything made of iron, kitchen pots and domestic tools as well as swords. All the iron is being melted to make cannons.

In the next sequence we find ourselves in the middle of just such an event. The villagers are brutally struck down by the soldiers who tear the kitchenware from their arms. The soldiers discover the hidden cache of iron and both Inde and Takse are thrown into prison after being publicly flogged.

The blacksmith's daughter, Ami, is the heroine of the film. She is prevented by the

56. Kenpachiro Satsuma, *Ore ha haiyu da*, Wides Shuppan 2004.

inte finns i Nordkorea. Frigoliten användes för att tillverka stenbumlingar som skulle rullas ner i en ravin och krossa den kejserliga armén.

Kim Jong Il ville imitera ett helt koncept från ärkefienden Japan. Kanske tänkte han att en *kaiju*-film (monsterfilm) skulle kunna samla nationen. Figuren skulle maspridas som plastleksak.

Hur Toho-teamet från Tokyo hade hamnat i Nordkorea var något av ett mysterium. Satsuma har själv skrivit om händelserna i självbiografen *Ore ha haiyu da* [Jag är skådespelaren].⁵⁶ Han poserar på omslaget som en Mifune-look alike och skriver i en självberömande stil. I hans filmografi redovisas porrfilmer och komedier vid sidan av de många monsterfilmerna.

Toho-teamet trodde, enligt Satsuma, att de var på väg till Hollywood på ett uppdrag när de förvånade landade på Pyongyangs flygplats. En Mr Kazuo Kinagawa från Hongkong har skött förhandlingarna med deras chef Mr Suzuki. Hongkong-mannen var uppenbarligen anställd av Kim Jong Il. Om han lurade Mr Suzuki eller köpt honom låter Satsuma vara osagt.

Teamet kördes i Mercedesbilar på de tomma vägarna utan trafikljus och fick övernatta i en av Kim Jong IIs privata bostäder. Satsuma beskriver sin häpenhet över den syn som mötte dem i filmstaden. Den nyuppförda filmstudion i fyra våningar rymde 300 rum.

I Pulgaris inledning upptäcker den gamle bysmeden Takse förskräckt att hans protegé Inde, filmens hjälte, har skapat en gömma med järnredskap under ett buskage. Man vet nämligen att den kejserliga armén driver runt i byarna och brandskattar folket på allt av järn, såväl grytor som hackor och svärd för att smälta det till kanoner.

I nästa scen befinner vi oss i en sådan indrivning i grannbyn. Byborna sparkas brutalt till marken av soldaterna som sliter grytorna ur deras armar. Soldaterna upptäcker järngömmen och både Inde och Takse kastas i fängelse efter att ha pryglats upp offentligt.

Smedens dotter Ami, hjältinnan, motas bort av vakterna när hon kommer till

56. Kenpachiro Satsuma, *Ore ha Haiyu da*, Wides Shuppan 2004.

guards from handing over the rice she has brought for her revered father and for the hero whom she is in love with. She sits in tears outside the prison wall, eventually forming the rice into balls that she can throw over the wall and between the bars. Takse is bruised and wounded and exhausted from thirst and hunger. He gathers up the rice but something makes him refrain from putting it in his mouth. Instead he begins to form the rice into a figure. The blacksmith realizes that he is going to die and sees how paltry it would be to stifle his hunger at this moment. He chooses, instead, to leave behind him something that he has created.

The dead smith is carried out on a stretcher, surrounded by the despairing villagers and Ami discovers the little rice sculpture hidden in his clothes. The figure, which is like a baby Godzilla (Minilla), is not larger than a thumb, but it has bright little eyes and all the details of the skin are carefully rendered. Ami takes the figure home as a memento of her father. In the evening she sits with a resigned expression sewing in the light of a lamp.

Ami has placed the little figure in her sewing box. She pricks her finger on a needle and a drop of blood falls on the figure. She does not notice the flash of light that accompanies this annunciation. The figure starts to move and gets up. A mere drop of the heroine's blood has brought it to life.

When the figure wakes up, earlier than everyone else, it has become three times as large. It starts its breakfast by eating up the padlock on the front door. It then goes into the smith's store where it enjoys its next banquet.

The populace has tired of the oppression and the feudal lord's capricious punishments. The hero and his fellow rebels managed to avoid being executed and they assemble to launch an armed uprising. With pitchforks and swords they prepare for a revolution. And the monster joins forces with them.

Pulgasari marches with firm steps like a giant mascot surrounded by a crowd of revolutionaries. The local ruler's forces are no match for the rebels who conquer the district bit by bit. Pulgasari grows rapidly in size and is soon as tall as the tops of the trees.

It is clear that, in these scenes, Shin faced major problems in creating effects. He tried to solve the dilemma by using close-ups of the giant's feet of which he produced large-scale models. When Pulgasari was shown in full figure on the battlefield, Shin

fängelset med ris till sin vördade far och till hjälten, som hon är förälskad i. Gråtande blir hon sittande utanför fängelsemuren. Hon formar bollar av riset och kastar det över muren in genom gallret. Takse är ledbruten och blåslagen och utmattad av hunger och törst. Han rafsar ihop riset men hejdar sig när han ska stoppa maten i munnen. Istället börjar han skulptera riset till en figur. Smeden förstår att han ska dö och inser det futtiga att i detta ögonblick stilla hungern. Han väljer att lämna efter sig en skapelse.

Den döde smeden bärs ut på bår omgiven av de förtvivlade byborna och Ami finner den lilla risskulpturen i hans klädnad. Figuren, som liknar en bäbisgodzilla (Minilla), är inte större än en tumme, har små pigga ögon och alla hudens detaljer är noggrant återgivna. Ami tar hem figuren som ett minne av sin far. På kvällen sitter hon med uppgivna ögon och tråcklar med nål och tråd i lampans sken.

Hjältinnan har lagt den lilla risskulpturen i syskrinet. Hon råkar sticka sig i fingret och en droppe blod träffar figuren. Hon märker inte ljusskenet som uppstår i bebådelseögonblicket. Figuren spritter till och reser sig, en endaste droppe av hjältinnans blod har gett den liv.

När figuren vaknar tidigast av alla har den vuxit till den tredubbla storleken. Den inleder sin frukost med att äta upp hänglåset till ytterdörren. Sedan ger den sig iväg till smedens materialförråd där den ger sig i kast med nästa skrovsmål.

Folket har tröttnat på förtrycket och feodalhärskarens lynniga bestraffningar. Hjälten och hans rebellkamrater lyckas undgå att bli halshuggna och samlas till ett väpnat uppror. Med högafflar och svärd förbereder man sig för revolutionen. Och monstret sluter upp på deras sida.

Pulgasari marscherar med bestämda steg, som en jättelik maskot, mitt i hopen av revolutionärer. Länsherrens trupper står sig slätt mot rebellerna som erövrar trakten bit för bit. Pulgasari växer i snabb takt och är snart i höjd med trätopparna.

Man förstår att Shin i dessa scener stod inför stora problem på effektmakeriets område. Han försöker lösa dilemmat genom närbilder på jättens fötter, som han låtit bygga storskaliga modeller av. När Pulgasari exponeras i helfigur på slagfältet sätter

made use of a blotchy, blue-tinted back projection. The extras seem to be moving in front of a giant screen on which Pulgasari is projected and this is presumably how the effect was achieved.

In the imperial palace, news of the rebellion in the province has reached the emperor. He realizes the seriousness of the situation and understands that he will have to use cunning to crush the monster and thus stop the revolution. His soldiers manage to kidnap Ami in the forest. They build a giant cage made of thick bamboo stems and place it on the battlefield. Under the threat of cutting the heroine's throat, the imperial commander manages to persuade the monster to enter the cage of its own volition. Accompanied by derisive laughter they seal the cage and set fire to it. Pulgasari stands there among the flames while the rebels weep and the commander is convinced that the battle is now won.

But Pulgasari raises himself from the flames with a great cry. Like the Phoenix, he is renewed in the flames and rises, hardened from the fire. His armor glows from the heat as he forces the imperial soldiers towards the lake. The soldiers try to flee swimming and in overloaded boats. Pulgasari descends into the water and the heat of his glowing armor makes the water boil. The soldiers are cooked like lobsters.

The emperor launches a new strategy. Assisted by a shamanic ritual he manages to lure the monster into a ravine. Pulgasari falls helplessly into a pit and is buried under falling rocks. The soldiers rejoice once more at having defeated their enemy.

But Ami manages to figure out where Pulgasari is buried and she makes her way to the site. The heroine knows that only her own blood can bring the being back to life. She cuts her hand and lets the blood drip down among the stones under which Pulgasari is buried. The monster comes to life once again and is now stronger than ever. In the final battle, Shin spares none of his resources: there are thousands of extras while explosions cause clods of earth to rain down on the combatants.⁵⁷

The revolutionary aspect is made all the clearer by the rebels' red flags. Enormous cannons in the form of dragons' jaws are fired from the ramparts of the imperial palace. Pulgasari catches the cannonballs in his mouth as though they were candy and

57. It is claimed that more than 10 000 extras were recruited from the North Korean People's Army and that it was Kim Jong Il who made this possible. See e.g. Young Il Seo, "The Epic from the North", SOP (The Student Operated Press) 28 June 2006.

Shin in en flammig blåtonad bakgrundsprojektion. Statisterna verkar röra sig framför en jättelik duk där Pulgasari projiceras, och det är förmodligen precis så som det är gjort.

I det kejserliga palatset har nyheterna om oroligheterna i provinsen nått kejsaren. Kejsaren inser allvaret och förstår att man måste använda sig av list för att krossa monstret och därmed stoppa revolutionen. Hans soldater lyckas kidnappa Ami i skogen. Man bygger en jättelik fångstbur av tjocka bamburör och placerar den på slagfältet. Under hot om att skära halsen av hjältinnan förmår kejsarens befälhavare besten att frivilligt gå in i buren. Hånskrattande förseglar man buren och sätter fyr på den. Pulgasari står i lågor, rebellerna gråter och befälhavaren är nu övertygad om att slaget är vunnet.

Men ur lågorna reser sig Pulgasari med ett vrål. Likt fågel Fenix har han förädlats av lågorna och stiger fram härdad av elden. Hans pansar glöder av hettan när han driver kejsarens soldater mot sjön. Soldaterna försöker fly ut i vattnet, simmande eller i överfulla båtar. Pulgasari stiger ner i vattnet. Hettan av hans rödglödande pansarkropp får det att bubbla. Soldaterna kokas som kräftor.

Kejsaren iscensätter en ny plan. Med hjälp av en schamanistisk ritual lyckas de lura in monstret i en ravin. Pulgasari faller handlost i ett schakt och begravs av ett stenras. Soldaterna jublar återigen över att ha oskadliggjort sin fiende.

Men Ami lyckas lista ut var Pulgasari ligger begravd och beger sig dit. Hjältinnan vet att enbart hennes blod åter kan ge liv åt varelsen. Hon skär sig i handen och låter blodet droppa ner bland stenarna där Pulgasari ligger begravd. Så bebådas monstret återigen och nu är han starkare än tidigare. I det sista fältslaget sparar Shin inte på resurserna: tusentals statister, bombkrevader som får jorden att regna över de stridande.⁵⁷

Den revolutionära innebörden tydliggörs av rebellernas röda fanor. Ifrån det kejserliga palatsets palissader avfyras enorma kanoner gjutna som drakkäftar. Pulgasari fångar kanonkulorna i munnen som vore de mintpastiller och spottar tillbaka dem så

57. Uppgifter förekommer om att de över 10 000 statisterna var hämtade ur nordkoreanska folkarmén och att det var Kim Jong Il personligen som ordnande fram dem. Se t.ex. Young Il Seo, "The Epic from the North", SOP (The Student Operated Press) 28/6 2006.

spits them out with such force that the fortifications are reduced to splinters.

Pulgasari's ability to return the assailants' force links up with Godzilla's radioactive beam that sets buildings and cars on fire. As we watch the monster destroy the imperial palace in slow-motion the two monsters elide to become a single figure; not just because the same actor, Kenpachiro Satsuma, is to be found beneath both costumes, but also because of the monsters' delight in destruction and how this is choreographed. Shin took great care when filming these scenes. The model is meticulously constructed with every brick made to scale.

The monster wanders about in the ruins of the palace in a dejected state. The battle has been won but Pulgasari is hungry. The rebels collect all the weapons and iron objects in their possession but this amounts to a mere handful. Ami realizes that Pulgasari's powers cannot be controlled and that they will be turned against the people in due course. And so she decides to undertake a final sacrifice. She brings Pulgasari to her side by ringing the huge iron bell in the palace – an important pan-Korean symbol with ritual functions. A large pole suspended by ropes strikes the bell to make it ring and it gives off a metallic sound that attracts Pulgasari. Ami climbs inside the bell. When Pulgasari pulls down the bell from its support and consumes it he is not aware that Ami is hidden inside it; the woman who is a symbol of the Korean *Ur*-mother whose pure blood has given him life but can also destroy him. The monster is turned into stone and pulverized.

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Kim Il Sung proclaimed the importance of the cinema in the North Korean system of government at an early date. Lenin had claimed that film was the most important form of art.⁵⁸ The Japanese occupying forces in Korea were also well aware of the political importance of the cinema, creating their own studios in 1920 for the production pro-Japanese films. Japan had been occupying Korea since the beginning of the twentieth century. In the years before 1945 they managed to produce 230 propaganda films in which the Korean identity was hidden or neglected while Japan was

58. See, for instance, Erik Barnow, *Documentary: A History of the Non-fiction Film*, Oxford University Press 1993, p. 55.

att bålverket förvandlas till flis.

Pulgasaris förmåga att returnera angriparnas kraft refererar till Godzillas radioaktiva stråle från käften som sätter hus och bilar i brand. När monstret i slow motion går lös på det kejsrerliga palatset är det uppenbart att de båda monstren glider samman i en figur, inte bara genom det faktum att samma skådespelare, Kenpachiro Satsuma, agerar i de båda dräkterna utan också genom förstörelselustan och koreografin. Shin var omsorgsfull i sitt arbete med dessa scener och modellen var minutiöst sammansatt med varenda tegelsten återgiven skalenligt.

I ruinerna av palatset vandrar monstret omkring med hängande huvud. Striden är vunnen men Pulgasari är hungrig. Rebellerna samlar allt de har av vapen och järnföremål, men det är inte mer än att det ryms i hans hand. Ami inser att Pulgasaris krafter inte kan kontrolleras utan kommer att vändas mot dem själva. Hon beslutar sig för att genomföra ett sista offer. Hon lockar Pulgasari till sig genom att slå i palatsets stora järnklocka — en viktig pankoreansk symbol med rituella funktioner. En stor stock som hänger i rep svingas mot klockan, den metalliska klangen får Pulgasari att lystra. Ami kryper in i klockan. När Pulgasari sliter loss den från sin ställning och slukar den är han ovetande om att hon gömt sig där, kvinnan som är symbolen för den koreanska urmodern, vars rena blod givit honom liv men som också kan förgöra honom. Monstret förstelnas och sprängs.

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Kim Il Sung proklamerade tidigt filmens betydelse som kugge i den nordkoreanska statsapparaten. Lenin hade sagt: ”Film är för oss den viktigaste av konstarterna”.⁵⁸ Även den japanska ockupationsmakten i Korea var starkt medveten om filmens politiska betydelse och inrättade 1920 sin egen filmstudio för pro-japansk filmproduktion. Japan hade då ockuperat Korea sedan början av seklet. Fram till 1945 hann man göra 230 propagandafilmer där den koreanska identiteten skulle skylas över eller negligeras och Japan framställas som räddare i nöden. De koreanska filmskaparnas

58. Se t.ex. Erik Barnow, *Documentary: A History of the Non-fiction Film*, Oxford University Press 1993, s. 55.

portrayed as a savior in the hour of need. The Korean filmmakers had little freedom. In each region of occupied Korea the local police were responsible for monitoring films and how the public reacted to them. Not even films based on traditional folk tales were ignored by the censors since they might be seen as critical allegories of the occupying power.

During the 1940s controls became even more rigorous. In 1942 all Korean-language films were banned. From that year up to the time of liberation in 1945, only Japanese-language films were shown in Korea and all the actors, directors and other people involved were given Japanese names. All the Korean film companies could be forced to make propaganda films for the occupiers at any time.

As early as 1928 a group of writers and artists formed the KAPF, a socialist film guerrilla with the motto "Art as a weapon in the class struggle."⁵⁹ After they had finished their fifth feature film, *The Underground Village*, the members of the group were imprisoned. At the end of the war, when Korea was divided, some of the members of KAPF chose to move to the north to be reunited with what they felt to be their ideological colleagues while some remained in the south. Some of them were kidnapped by Kim Il Sung's agents. Kidnapping was regarded as a legitimate weapon in the struggle and was something that Kim Il Sung had employed while fighting as a guerrilla soldier in Manchuria. He was extremely eager to start up his own film production and wanted to ensure that there was cinematic expertise available to the new nation. "Film should strongly appeal to the masses and advance them more than reality," he claimed.⁶⁰

The KAPF filmmakers rapidly fell out with the party. Im Hwa, one of the kidnaped members, was executed after being accused of pro-Japanese activities. The other members were branded as revisionists and anti-revolutionaries and were deleted from North Korea's official history.⁶¹

Historian Charles Armstrong maintains that North Korean film departed from Russian propaganda films in that it was so clearly rooted "in melodramatic emotionalism, a sentimental attachment to the Korean countryside, and the alleged

59. The name is an acronym of the Esperanto title: Korean Artista Proletariat Federate.

60. In a speech from 1958. See Lee Hyangjin, *Contemporary Korean Cinema*, p. 64.

61. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

frihet var liten. Inom varje region av det ockuperade landet ansvarade den lokala polisen för att både filmerna och publiken och deras reaktioner övervakades. Inte ens filmatiserade versioner av traditionella folksägnen undgick censuren eftersom de kunde vara kritiska allegorier över förtryckarmakten.

På 1940-talet hårdnade kontrollen ytterligare. 1942 förbjöds all film på det koreanska språket. Från detta år och fram till befrielsen 1945 talades bara japanska inom filmen i Korea. Alla skådespelare, regissörer och andra inblandade försågs med japanska namn och varje koreanskt filmbolag kunde när som helst beordras att göra propagandafilm åt övermakten.

En grupp författare och konstnärer bildade redan 1928 gruppen KAPF, en socialistisk filmgerilla som skapade under mottot ”Konst som vapen i klasskampen”.⁵⁹ Efter att ha färdigställt sin femte spelfilm *Den underjordiska byn*, som handlade om de fattigas liv i Seouls utkanter, fängslades medlemmarna. Vid andra världskrigets slut, då landet delades, valde några av medlemmarna i KAPF att flytta norrut för att förenas med vad de uppfattade som sina ideologiska kamrater. Några stannade kvar i syd och andra kidnappades av Kim Il Sung's agenter. Kidnappning var ett legitimt medel i kampen, en praktik som Kim Il Sung ägnade sig åt redan som gerillakrigare i Manchuriet. Han var oerhört angelägen om att få igång en egen filmproduktion och ville knyta filmkunnande till nationen. ”Film ska på ett kraftfullt sätt attrahera massorna och utveckla dem mer än vad verkligheten förmår”, som han uttryckte det.⁶⁰

KAPF-filmerna hamnade snart i onåd hos partiet. Im Hwa, en av de kidnappade, avrättades anklagad för pro-japansk verksamhet. De övriga brännmärktes som revisionister och antirevolutionärer och fördes ut ur den officiella historien.⁶¹

Historikern Charles Armstrong menar att nordkoreansk film från första början avvek från den ryska propagandafilmen genom att vara så tydligt rotad ”/.../ i en melodramatisk känslomhet, en sentimental bindning till den koreanska landsbygden

59. Namnet är en förkortning i esperanto: Korean Artista Proletariat Federate.

60. Uttalandet är från 1958. Se Lee Hyangjin, *Contemporary Korean Cinema*, s. 64.

61. *Ibid.*, s. 25.

values of peasant life, and a nationalist politics centered around the person of Kim Il Sung.”⁶² The melodramatic aspect in North Korea has, indeed, given their propaganda a voice of its own; the declamatory, elevated voice. But the voice is not merely that of propaganda for it has been internalized into the North Korean language. It has a special intonation that has long been parodied in humorous programs in South Korea. During my trip to North Korea there were numerous occasions when I listened to guides at the various monuments, not least at Kim Il Sung’s mausoleum where the voice gathered in intensity until it reached the level of tears. I filmed material from the North Korean government TV channel and included the footage in my video essay. Propaganda films showed people toiling in the countryside, in steelworks, on the railways and in the paddy fields: physical labor by smiling people who move like clockwork toys. The speaker’s voice rose through the keys and there were images of people pulling a boat ashore in a storm. They threw themselves into pulling at the rope, their eyes burning. And when someone fell over in the water they laughingly regained their footing. Kim Jong Il was seen in the next sequence and the voice threatened to convulse in a mixture of tears and hysterical laughter. Kim Jong Il shook hands with people when he was not working with his soft and rapid movements of the right hand, with which he gives instructions about every imaginable problem; known in North Korea as “on-the-spot guidance.” This takes place wherever he happens to be, whether in an office or on the factory floor.

After Kim Jong Il’s on the spot guidance came a sequence showing a missile being launched. Next take: people hear about the event. They read the newspapers and rejoice. There are close-ups of people mad with joy. They bounce up and down with their arms raised and their eyes shining. The speaker is ecstatic.

One year following the death of Kim Il Sung the presidency was abolished and he was named “Eternal President of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea”. Kim Jong Il was given the more modest title of “First Chairman of the National Security Council” even if, in reality, he became the new dictator.

When a tearful newsreader announced the death of Kim Il Sung in 1994 on

62. John Feffer, “North Korea’s Dear Film Buff”, *Asia Times* 15/6 2007.

och en nationalistisk politik centrerad kring Kim Il Sung's person.”⁶² Det melodramatiska anslaget i Nordkorea har gett propagandan en egen röst; den deklamatoriska, högstämda rösten. Men rösten tillhör inte bara propagandan, den har internaliserats i det nordkoreanska språket. Det är en speciell intonation i talet som sedan länge parodieras i humorprogram i Sydkorea. Under resan i Nordkorea fick jag många gånger höra prov på den av guiderna vid de olika monumenten, inte minst i Kim Il Sung's mausoleum där rösten stegrades till gråtens gräns. Jag filmade av den nordkoreanska statstelevisionens bilder och infogade vissa av dem i min videoessä. En av dem visar hur människor sliter på fälten, i stålverken, vid järnvägen, på risfälten. Det är kroppsarbete utfört av leende människor som rör sig som uppskruvade leksaker. Speaker-rösten genomgår tonartshöjningar, och scener med människor som drar i land en båt i storm spelas upp. De kastar sig fram mot repet med brinnande ögon, någon faller men kravlar sig skrattande upp. Kim Jong Il uppenbarar sig i nästa bild och rösten hotas gå under i en blandning av gråt och upphetsat skratt. När Kim Jong Il inte skakar hand ger han med mjuka snabba rörelser direktanvisningar om allt man kan tänka sig. Det sker var helst han befinner sig, på kontor eller fabriksgolv.

Efter tv-bilderna på Kim Jong IIs direktanvisningar kom en sekvens med en missil som sköts upp. Nästa klipp: människorna nås av nyheterna, de läser tidningarna och jublar. Det är närbilder av människor som är galna av glädje. De studsar upp och ner med höjda armar, ögonen lyser. Berättarrösten är i extas.

Ett år efter Kim Il Sung's död avskaffades presidentskapet och han utnämndes till ”Evig president för den Demokratiska Folkrepubliken Korea”. Kim Jong Il fick den mer blygsamma titeln ”förste ordförande för Nationella Säkerhetsutskottet” även om han i realiteten blev den nye diktatorn.

När en gråtande nyhetsuppläsare annonserade Kim Il Sung's död 1994 i den

62. John Feffer, "North Korea's Dear Film Buff", *Asia Times* 15/6 2007.

North Korean television, mass hysteria broke out.⁶³ In the official mourning film *Death of the Father of the Socialist Homeland* the whole country can be seen weeping: in schools, in factories, on parades and at home. Veterans in wheelchairs weep and crowds of people fall to the ground, beating themselves with their fists. A film within the film shows desperate people in their homes, throwing themselves at their TV sets as the funeral is being shown. There are violent scenes and children can be seen crying, presumably frightened by the behavior of the adults.⁶⁴

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The German philologist Victor Klemperer, son of a Rabbi, wrote *Die Sprache des Dritten Reiches* in secret after being removed from his post as professor by the Nazis. The fact that he was married to a German woman saved him from the gas chamber. Klemperer's book documents how Nazi propaganda was able to shift the meaning of language, to give words a special sense that excludes every other interpretation. *Lingua tertii imperii*, the Latin for the language of the Third Reich, is the subtitle of Klemperer's book and, with the abbreviation *LTI*, he produced an ironic reference to the Nazi delight in strict abbreviations. The ideology of Nazism “/.../ permeated the flesh and blood of the people through single words, idioms and sentence structures which were imposed on them in a millions of repetitions and taken onboard mechanically and unconsciously”, Klemperer maintains.⁶⁵ A word like “fanatical” was not actually invented by Nazism but its meaning was altered. It was linked up with the word “hero” and the combination was constantly repeated. Ultimately people came to believe that one could not be a “hero” without being “fanatical”. The word *Volk* [People], Klemperer maintained in his diary as early as 1933, “/.../ is now as customary in spoken and written language as salt at the table, everything is spiced with a soupçon of *Volk*: *Volksfest* [festival of the people], *Volksgenosse* [comrade of the people], *Volksgemeinschaft* [community of the people], *volksnah* [one of the people],

63. A few years later the juche calendar was introduced in which his year of birth (1912) was reckoned as year nought while his birthday, the “day of the sun” became a public holiday.

64. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NrvIM1EncbA> (9/1 2010).

65. Victor Klemperer, *LTI, Lingua tertii imperii, The Language of the Third Reich*, Athlone Press 2000, p. 14.

nordkoreanska statstelevisionen utbröt masshysteri.⁶³ I den officiella sorgefilmen *Death of the Father of the Socialist Homeland* skildras massgråten: man gråter i skolorna, man gråter på fabrikerna, i paraderna och i hemmen. Veteraner i rullstolar gråter och människor i folksamlingar faller till marken och bankar sig själva med knytnävarna. Som en film i filmen visas hur förtvivlade människor i hemmen kastar sig mot tv-apparaterna som visar begravningen. Det är våldsamma scener och små barn gråter, förmodligen av rädsla för de vuxnas beteende.⁶⁴

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Den judiske filologen Victor Klemperer skrev *Det tredje rikets språk* som en arbetsbok i hemlighet efter att belagts med arbetsförbud under nazitiden i Tyskland. Det faktum att han var gift med en tysk kvinna räddade honom från gaskammaren. Klemperers bok är ett dokument över den nazistiska propagandans förmåga att förskjuta innebörder i språket, att ge ord en speciell mening som förintar all annan mening. *Lingua tertii imperii* – den latinska motsvarigheten till det tredje rikets språk – är undertitel till Klemperers bok och han spelar med dess förkortning *LTI*, en ironisk referens till nazismens förkärlek för de strama kortformerna. Nazismens ideologi smög sig in ”/.../ i den stora massans kött och blod genom enskilda ord, fraser och meningstyper vilka tvingade sig på människor genom miljontals upprepningar och som började användas mekaniskt och omedvetet”, menar Klemperer.⁶⁵ Ett ord som ”fanatisk” uppfanns inte av nazismen, man ändrade bara dess mening. Man band ihop det med ordet ”hjälte” och upprepade kombinationen i det oändliga. Till slut trodde inte människor att man kunde vara ”hjälte” utan att vara ”fanatisk”. Ordet ”folk” (*Volk*), konstaterar Klemperer i sin dagbok redan 1933, ”/.../ används nu i tal och skrift lika ofta som salt i maten, till allting tas en nypa folk: folkfest (*Volksfest*), folkkamrat (*Volksgenosse*), folkgemenskap (*Volksgemeinschaft*), folknära (*volksnah*),

63. Man uppfann några år senare juche-kalendern där födelseåret 1912 blev år noll, samtidigt som hans födelsedag, ”solens dag”, blev allmän helgdag.

64. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NrvIM1EncbA> (9/1 2010).

65. Victor Klemperer, *LTI, Lingua tertii imperii, Tredje rikets språk*, Glänta Produktion 2006, s. 41.

volksfremd [alien to the people], *volksentstammt* [descended from the people].”⁶⁶

LTI does not distinguish between written and spoken language, nor is there any distinction between private and public. “LTI functions only as a spell” or, as the Nazis chanted, “you are nothing, your race is everything.” This means that you are never alone, that you are constantly seen by your people.

As one reads Klemperer’s book one can feel in a disturbing manner how his linguistic analysis is activated by the North Korean system as though it were both a prophecy and a contemporary analysis. And one may ask whether North Korea, given its isolation and its existence as a state for sixty years, has not succeeded in making this linguistic poison all the more potent. On the streets and in the factories there are loudspeakers playing music and moral exhortations. Every day, at five o’clock in the evening, the radios are automatically switched on. The radios are screwed to the wall so that one cannot turn them off. The declamatory voices are heard everywhere. Not even on the countryside can one avoid the speeches and the songs: propaganda trucks with gigantic loudspeakers drive around there.⁶⁷

The North Korean version of *Volk* is *juche*. Everything can be *juche* in North Korea. Even their own artificial fiber, vinalon, is also known as *juche* fiber. What the word *juche* actually means is not easy to grasp. One might translate it as “self-reliance”. *Juche* ideology is sometimes described as a special brew of Stalinism and Confucianism but above all isolationism and archaic pan-Korean nationalism. The American Korea expert Selig S. Harrison speaks of *juche* as a Trinitarian idea with Kim Il Sung as the Father, Kim Jong Il as the Son and *juche* as the Holy Spirit.⁶⁸ Ever since Kim Il Sung launched the concept, “Truth of the Truths” as the sign on the *juche* tower in Pyonyang announces has come to infuse all activities in North Korea. This is probably an essential aspect of the permanent state of emergency that has long historical roots and that was actualized in dramatic fashion during the Korean War.

Another important element has been added to the North Korean propaganda:

66. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

67. See Hyok Kang, *This is Paradise! My North Korean Childhood*, p. 35.

68. Selig S. Harrison, p. 10. Lintner (p. 45) maintain that the *juchescr*ipts distanced themselves from Marxism in the 1990s, beginning to refer to Robinson Crusoe’s life on a desert island, to Plutarch and to Charles Dickens. For a presentation of *juche* ideology in the 1970s see Kim Il Sung, *Om Juche i vår revolution*, Bo Cavefors förlag 1978.

folkfrämmande (*volksfremd*), ur folkdjupet (*volksentstammt*).⁶⁶

LTI gör ingen skillnad på skriftspråk och talspråk och ingen skillnad mellan privat och offentligt. ”LTI tjänar endast besvärjelsen” eller som nazisterna skanderade: ”du är ingenting, ditt folk är allt”. Det betyder att man aldrig är ensam, man är alltid sedd av sitt folk.

När man läser Klemperers bok upplever man på ett kusligt sätt hur hans språkanalyser också gäller det nordkoreanska systemet, som om de vore en profetior. Frågan är om inte Nordkorea med sin isolering och sina sextio år som stat ytterligare lyckats förvärra denna språkliga förgiftning. På gatorna och i fabriker finns högtalare som spelar musik och uppfordrande tal. Varje dag klockan fem slås radioapparaterna i hemmen på automatiskt. De är fastnitade i väggen, man kan inte stänga av dem. De deklamatoriska rösterna lägger sig över allt. Inte ens på landsbygden undkommer man talen och musiken: propagandalastbilar kör omkring med jättelika högtalare.⁶⁷

Det nordkoreanska varianten av *Volk* är *juche*. Allt kan vara *juche* i Nordkorea. Till och med det egenuppfunna vinalon-fibret kallas för *juche*-fibret. Vad ordet *juche* egentligen betyder är inte så lätt att veta. På svenska skulle man kunna översätta det med ”själv tillit”. *Juche*-ideologin beskrivs ibland som en speciell brygd av stalinism och konfucianism men framför allt av isolationism och arkaiserande pankoreansk nationalism. Den amerikanske Nordkoreakännaren Selig S. Harrison talar om *juche* som en treenighetstanke med Kim Il Sung som fadern, Kim Jong Il som sonen och *Juche* som den helige anden.⁶⁸ ”Sanningarnas sanning”, som det står på *Juche*-tornet i Pyongyang – har alltsedan Kim Il Sung lanserade begreppet kommit att genomsyra alla verksamheter i Nordkorea, något som förmodligen hör ihop med ett permanent undantagstillstånd som har långa historiska linjer och som på ett dramatiskt sätt aktualiserades under Koreakriget.

Ett annat viktigt element har lagts till i den Nordkoreanska propagandan: den

66. Ibid. s. 58–59.

67. Se Hyok Kang, *This is Paradise!: My North Korean Childhood*, s. 35.

68. Selig S. Harrison, s. 10. Lintner (s. 45) menar att *juche*-skrifterna fjärmade sig från marxism på 1990-talet och började referera till Robinson Crusoes liv på den öde ön, till Plutarchos och Charles Dickens. För en syn på 1970-talets *juche*-ideologi se Kim Il Sung, *Om Juche i vår revolution*, Bo Cavefors förlag 1978.

the melodramatic narrative paired with the declamatory voice. These two are constantly intertwined, forming a single entity. The melodrama takes hold of a person's emotions with the aim of generating a flood of tears. The melodrama is not flashy but stylized. Douglas Sirk, the great American director of melodramas, claimed that the melodrama is the contemporary equivalent of Socrates' dialogues and Euripides' plays. Melodramatic films play us as though we were instruments. We feel the films with our bodies. Tag Gallagher claims, in an analysis of Sirk's work, that there is a ritual function in which fear and compassion reach a climax in the sacrifice of one of the characters of the story; a victim who purifies someone else.⁶⁹

In melodramas, artefacts have a presence, not least items of dress, acting as transitions and markers for the dramatic changes in the moods of the characters. Rainer Werner Fassbinder, in his essay about Douglas Sirk's films entitled "Imitation of Life", maintains that this is all about what it is possible to say and do in a certain space. Fassbinder saw what hardly anyone else saw in Sirk in the beginning – the German-American post-war director of *weepies* – that the figures in Sirk's films are placed in rooms that are characterized by the situation and that are precisely conceived, communicating to the viewer what each room can allow.

Sirk has said that you can't make films about something, you can only make films with something, with people, with light, with flowers, with blood, with all these crazy things that make it worthwhile.⁷⁰

Fassbinder discusses *All That Heaven Allows* (1956), using the names of the actors rather than their names in the film: "In Jane's house one can only move in a certain way. Only certain sequences occur to you when you want to say something and certain gestures when you want to express something. If Jane entered another house, Rock's for instance, would she be able to adjust? That would be something to hope for. Or has she been so molded and messed up that in Rock's house she would miss the style that's hers, after all. That's more likely."⁷¹

69. Tag Gallagher, "White Melodrama: Douglas Sirk", <http://sprynet.com> (15/12 2009).

70. Rainer Werner Fassbinder, "Imitation of Life, On the Films of Douglas Sirk", in *The Anarchy of Imagination, Interviews, Essays, Notes*, ed. Michael Töteberg and Leo A. Lensing, The John Hopkins University Press 1992, p. 77.

71. *Ibid.*, p. 81.

melodramatiska berättelsen (i förening med den deklamatoriska rösten – dessa två är ständigt sammanlänkade och bildar ett). Melodramen bjuder in för att sedan gripa tag om åskådarens känslor, målet är att få tårarna att strömma. Melodramen är inte glättig, den är stilerad. Douglas Sirk, Amerikas stora melodramregissör, hävdade att melodramen är samtidens motsvarighet till Sokrates dialoger och Euripides dramer. Melodramatiska filmer spelar med oss som om vi vore instrument. Vi känner filmerna i kroppen. I sin analys av Sirk menar Tag Gallagher att det hos dessa filmer finns en rituell funktion där fruktan och medlidande når klimax i offrandet av någon av berättelsens karaktärer, ett offer som renar någon annan.⁶⁹

I melodramen är tingen närvarande, inte minst kläder fungerar som övergångsobjekt och markörer för de dramatiska förändringarna i karaktärernas sinne. Rainer Werner Fassbinder säger i sin essä ”Imitation av liv” om Douglas Sirks filmer, att allt detta handlar om vad som är möjligt att säga och göra i ett visst rum. Vad knappast någon såg hos Sirk, denne tysk-amerikanske *weepies*-regissör, såg Fassbinder: nämligen att figurerna i Sirks filmer är satta i rum som är präglade av situationen och har en exakthet, att man vet vad varje rum kan tillåta.

Sirk har sagt, att man inte kan göra filmer *om* någonting, utan man kan bara göra filmer *med* någonting. Med människor, med ljus, med blommor, med speglar, med blod, just med alla dessa vansinniga ting och dessas inneboende mening.⁷⁰

Fassbinder talar här om *Morgondagen är vår* (1956), och använder skådespelarnas namn och inte deras karaktärer: ”I Janes hus kan man bara röra sig på ett visst sätt. När man vill säga något där, så faller en bara vissa bestämda meningar och gester in när man vill uttrycka något. Om Jane kommer in i ett annat hus, t ex i Rocks, skulle hon då kunna ändra på sig? Det vore en förhoppning. Eller kanske är hon så skadad och präglad, att hon i Rocks hus skulle sakna den stil som är hennes. Det är mer sannolikt.”⁷¹

69. Tag Gallagher, ”White Melodrama: Douglas Sirk”, <http://sprynet.com> (15/12 2009).

70. Rainer Werner Fassbinder, ”Imitation av liv”, *Play It Again, Sam. Tjugo texter om film och TV*, Filmhäftets förlag 1984.

71. *Ibid.*, s. 43.

All That Heaven Allows is a small-town narrative about love complicated by the class difference between a wealthy, mature woman (Jane Wyman) and a man (Rock Hudson) fifteen years her junior who comes to prune her trees. Jane is inscribed in her house and the house determines what is possible. The house, populated by Jane's female friends and possessions, is a micro society where the only male is Rock. As Fassbinder points out, the chairs or the glasses are more important than the people.

In this sense the melodrama is a highly political concern. Melodrama enables one to understand something of the world and what it does to one, as Fassbinder puts it. We are limited in expression by the rooms that we find ourselves in. The room in which melodrama is acted out is that of society and of the social order and we have to move beyond it or destroy it if we are to change. There is a potential for social criticism in Sirk's films which Fassbinder saw; as did Godard.⁷² The films had a capacity for illuminating the subject – or, rather, of causing the viewer to *experience* issues of class, gender and ethnicity. But melodrama is a double-edged sword. It can also be used in the interests of those in power. Used in the right way it can serve as the ultimate tool of propaganda which the leaders of North Korea – as well as the dictators of South Korea in their day – were well aware of.

If one is to consider the language and voice of melodrama in public rhetoric and propaganda one needs to add Klemperer's words about not being able to hide ourselves behind language to Fassbinder's analysis. What one consciously seeks to hide as well as one's subconscious baggage is revealed by language. "*Le style c'est l'homme*; what a man says may be a pack of lies – but his true self is laid bare for all to see in the style of his utterances."⁷³

When Kim Jong Il kidnapped Choi Eun-hee and Shin Sang-ok, it may well have been the keys of melodrama that he wanted to obtain. He had propaganda filmmakers in his employ but they had not been able to capture the emotions of the public in a satisfactory manner. If one could win their tears one could win their hearts too. Choi Eun-hee told us that after a while as a captive she was able to express her views about film quite open-heartedly with Kim Jong Il. She explained to him that she thought that the film version of Kim Il Sung's opera *Sea of Blood* was poorly

72. See, for instance, *Godard on Godard*, ed. Tom Milne, Da Capo Press 1982.

73. Victor Klemperer, *LTI, Lingua tertii imperii, The Language of the Third Reich*, p. 10.

Morgondagen är vår är en småstadsskildring om kärlek över klassgränser, mellan en äldre välbeställd kvinna (Jane Wyman) och en femton år yngre man (Rock Hudson) som klipper hennes träd. Jane är inskriven i sitt hus och huset bestämmer över vad som är möjligt. Huset befolkat av Janes väninnor och ting är ett mikrosamhälle, förutom Rock finns inga män. Här är, som Fassbinder skriver, fåtöljerna eller glasen viktigare.

I den meningen kan melodramen vara en i högsta grad politisk angelägenhet. Genom melodramen begriper man något av världen och vad den gör med en, som Fassbinder säger. Vi är begränsade i våra uttryck genom de rum vi befinner oss i. Melodramens rum är samhällets rum och samhällets ordning och vi måste förflytta oss ut ur rummet eller förstöra det för att förändras. I Sirks filmer fanns en samhällskritisk potential, Fassbinder såg det och det gjorde också Godard.⁷² Filmerna hade förmågan att genomlysa – eller snarare att få betraktaren att uppleva – klass-, köns- och rasfrågor. Men melodramen är ett tveeggat instrument. Den kan också användas för maktens räkning. Använd på rätt sätt kan den vara det ultimata propagandaverktyget, vilket Nordkoreas ledare – och även på sin tid Sydkoreas diktatorer – var väl medvetna om.

Om man tänker på melodramens språk och röst i den offentliga retoriken och propagandan måste man till Fassbinders analys lägga Klemperers ord om att vi inte kan gömma oss bakom språket. *Le style c'est l'homme*, som Klemperer skriver. ”En människas yttranden må vara förljugna – men i hennes språkliga stil ligger hennes väsen blottat.”⁷³

När Kim Jong Il kidnappade Choi Eun-hee och Shin Sang-ok kan det mycket väl ha varit melodramens nycklar han ville åt. Han hade propagandafilmare i sin tjänst, men de hade inte på ett tillfredställande sätt fångat publikens känslor. Kunde man vinna deras gråt kunde man vinna deras hjärtan. Choi Eun-hee berättade att hon efter en tid i fångenskap kunde uttrycka sina åsikter om film ganska öppenhjärtligt inför Kim Jong Il. Hon förklarade för honom att hon fann filmversionen av Kim Il Sungs opera *Sea of Blood* dåligt iscensatt och klantigt kostymerad. Hon framhöll att

72. Se till exempel *Godard on Godard*, red. Tom Milne, Da Capo Press 1982.

73. Victor Klemperer, LTI, *Lingua tertii imperii, Tredje rikets språk*, s. 36.

staged and very badly costumed. She pointed out that there are other themes in the opera than revolution; love for example. Kim agreed with her and, on one of these occasions said to her: “We will solve it when Shin comes.” For Choi this was a cryptic answer in that, at the time, she had no idea that Shin had also been kidnapped.

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Five years before Madame Choi and Shin Sang Ok were kidnapped, Kim Jong Il wrote a book entitled *On the Art of Cinema*.⁷⁴ In the book Kim Jong Il argued that art, literature and film must be *juche*-oriented. Exactly what this involved it is not easy to say. Kim speaks of everything from manuscript, camera skills, make-up, editing, set design, music and insightful acting but his advice consists of generalized and meaningless comments: “In creative work one needs to aim high”; “Make-up is a noble art”; “Every scene must be dramatic”; “Start at a small scale and end magnificently,” and so on ad infinitum.

In *On the Art of Cinema*, Kim says that the actors’ interpretations of their roles need to be based on their own experience and insights. Here one might think that one could find an opening in the ideological wall of empty rhetoric, a situation where actors must exceed themselves and empathize with their enemies. Kim narrates just such an example with an actor who was to play a Japanese policeman, that is to say an evil character, and who tried to create an imaginary biography of the man’s life. But, according to Kim, this was wrong: characterizing an evil person should be based on a feeling of genuine hatred, a hatred that is as powerful as the love of one’s own people and the working classes.

Shin Sang-ok and Madame Choi were not the only people living in North Korea

74. Kim Jong Il, *On the Art of Cinema*, University Press of the Pacific 2001.

det finns andra teman i filmen än revolutionen, till exempel kärlek. Kim höll med och svarade vid ett av dessa tillfällen: ”Vi löser det när regissör Shin kommer hit.” För Choi var det ett kryptiskt svar då hon vid denna tid inte hade en aning om att Shin också var kidnappad.

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Fem år före kidnappningen av Madame Choi och Shin Sang-ok skrev Kim Jong Il en bok om filmkonst: *On the Art of Cinema*.⁷⁴ Det var här Kim Jong Il slog fast att konst, litteratur och film måste vara juhe-orienterad. Vad det betyder är inte lätt att förstå. Kim talar om allt från manus, kompetensen hos kameramännen, sminkning, klippning, scenografi, musik och inlevelsefullt skådespeleri, men råden består av allmänna och meningslösa utsagor: ”I kreativt arbete måste man sikta högt”; ”Sminkning är en ädel konst”; ”De bästa orden är fyllda av mening och lätta att förstå”; ”Varje scen måste vara dramatisk”; ”Börja i liten skala och avsluta storslaget”. Och så vidare, och så vidare.

Kim talar i *On the Art of Cinema* om att skådespelarens tolkning av sin karaktär måste baseras på egen erfarenhet och inlevelse. Här skulle det kunnas finnas en öppning i den ideologiska muren av floskler, tänker man, en situation då skådespelaren måste överskrida sig själv och leva sig in i sin fiende. Kim tar upp ett sådant exempel med en skådespelare som skulle spela en japansk polisman, det vill säga en ond karaktär, och försökte skapa sig en tänkt biografi över denna karaktärs liv. Men det var fel, enligt Kim: en gestaltning av den onde måste ske utifrån känslan av genuint hat mot fienden, ett hat som är lika stort som kärleken för det egna folket och arbetarklassen.

Shin Sang-ok och Choi Eun-hee var inte ensamma i sin belägenhet som kidnapp-

74. Kim Jong Il, *On the Art of Cinema*, University Press of the Pacific 2001.

who had been kidnapped.⁷⁵ But what distinguishes them from most of the anonymous victims is that they left behind something tangible – their films. We can see these as documents and as messages bearing metaphors. One of them was not actually made during their time in North Korea yet it also has a symbolic meaning. *Balgan mahura* [Red Muffler], from 1964 is set during the Korean War. The film glorifies the raids undertaken by South Korean pilots in North Korea. Shin had half of the 35mm negatives with him when he was kidnapped and taken north as well as the films *Yeolnyeomun* [The Memorial Gate for Virtuous Women] (1962) and *Pyeongyang pokgyeokdae* [Last Battle in Pyongyang] (1972). The films were confiscated but Shin managed to film the footage from *Red Muffler* with a video camera. Following his escape from North Korea the video version was paired with the part of the film that remained in the South. In this way it provides a remarkable document of the division of Korea and of Shin's own story. I saw the final version at the national film archive in Seoul. The video treatment creates a filter like a new and distant layer of history in the narrative of the war.

The title of the film refers to the red scarves that the pilots wore, a sign that they wore with pride but that also has associations with red guards and with North Korean schoolchildren. The scarf synthesizes values and worlds, not least forging a link between north and south. In *Red Muffler*, the artefact is used in a variety of ways: as a decorative detail, as a symbol of enmity as an object that saves lives and, not least, as an item that is constantly handed on. It is analogous with the way in which the woman, Chi-son played by Madame Choi, is passed from owner to owner; as wife, then prostitute and again wife.

Film historian Scott Diffrient sees a queer motif in the scarf; a feminization that is part of the pilot's realm, his ethereal status in moving through the atmosphere, a motif that can also be linked up with Oscar Wilde's *The Canterville Ghost* in which

75. It is believed that there are kidnapped people from various nations in North Korea, including Romania and Thailand. The South Koreans maintain that 485 or 486 of their citizens have been taken to North Korea against their will. Until recent years North Korea has officially denied all kidnappings of Japanese citizens. For twenty years their relatives were regarded as people harboring illusions. But in 2002 Kim Jong Il admitted to the kidnapping of thirteen Japanese citizens. Five of them were allowed to return to Japan. The Japanese government's official list includes the names of sixteen citizens who were kidnapped, though relatives claim that there are many more; in the region of 80 people. The issue is sensitive in that the right-wing Japanese nationalists have adopted it and use it as a reason for remilitarizing. See e.g. Andrei Lankov, "Body snatching, North Korean style", *Asia Times* 26/2 2005.

pade i Nordkorea.⁷⁵ Men var som skiljer dem från de flesta anonyma öden är att de efterlämnade en gärning som vi kan ta del av – filmerna. Vi kan se dem som dokument och som meddelanden fulla av metaforer. En av dem är visserligen inte gjord under tiden i Nordkorea men har ändå fått en symbolisk betydelse. *Balgan mahura* [Röd scarf] från 1964 utspelar sig under Koreakriget. Filmen hyllar de sydkoreanska piloternas flygräder mot Nordkorea. Shin hade hälften av 35 mm -negativet med sig när han kidnappades till nord liksom filmerna *Yollyomun* [Röd port] (1962) och *Pyongyang pokkyoktae* [Bombpatrull Pyongyang] (1972). Rullarna beslagtogs men Shin lyckades filma av *Röd Scarf*-delen med videokamera. Efter flykten från Nordkorea sammanfördes denna videodel med den resterande hälften i Sydkorea. På så vis bildas ett märkligt dokument över både landets delning och Shins egen historia. Jag såg den ihopklippta versionen på det nationella filmarkivet i Seoul. Videokvaliténs effekt skapar ett filter, som ett nytt distanserade lager av historia i berättelsen om kriget.

Titeln anspelar på den röda scarf stridspiloterna hade, ett tecken som de bar med stolthet men som samtidigt för med sig associationer till rödgardism och nordkoreanska skolbarn. I plagget syntetiseras värden och världar, inte minst upprättas en länk mellan nord och syd. I *Röd scarf* används plagget på ett mångtydigt sätt: som dekorativ detalj, som en symbol för en fiendeskalp, som ett objekt som räddar liv och inte minst ett ting som hela tiden överlämnas, från hand till hand. Den är en analogi för hur kvinnan Chi-son, spelad av Madame Choi, går från ägare till ägare: från hustru till prostituerad till hustru igen.

Filmvetaren Scott Diffrient framhåller ett queermotiv i filmens halsduk; en feminisering som ingår i pilotens element, hans eteriska status i rörelsen genom luft- rummet, ett motiv som också kan länkas till Oscar Wildes *Spöket på Canterville* där

75. Man tror att det finns kidnappade människor från en rad länder i Nordkorea, bland annat från Rumänien och Thailand. Från Sydkoreanskt håll hävdas att 485 eller 486 av deras medborgare förts till Nordkorea mot sin vilja. Nordkorea har ända fram till de senaste åren officiellt förnekat alla kidnappningar av japaner. Under tjugo års tid ansågs de anhöriga som rättshaverister, även i Japan. Men 2002 erkände Kim Jong-Il kidnappningen av tretton japanska medborgare. Fem av dem fick återvända. Den japanska regeringens officiella lista innehåller namn på sexton medborgare som ska ha bortförts, men anhöriggrupper hävdar att det rör sig om många fler, uppemot 80 personer. Frågan är känslig då japanska högernationalister gjort den till sin och använder den i argumenteringen för återmilitarisering av det japanska samhället. Se t.ex. Andrei Lankov, "Body snatching, North Korean style", *Asia Times* 26/2 2005.

the ghost wanders the corridors wearing a red scarf round his neck in order to protect himself against draughts. Here the artefact is a symbol for dilettante and feminized masculinity.⁷⁶

In the opinion of Scott Diffrient, *Red Muffler* should be viewed in the light of the master of melodrama, Douglas Sirk's films. Shin uses the same way of working with colours as Sirk but goes even further: "In fact, Shin frequently out-Sirks Sirk."⁷⁷ In seemingly unmotivated fashion he illuminates scenes with powerful blue or red light. But the lighting has numerous polarized significations: as an exchange between ice and fire, between capitalism and communism, between past and present, between melodrama and war film. There is also a natural allusion to the South Korean flag with its colors and its yin and yang sign which also expresses a division in which two poles form a unity.

Shin was provided with all imaginable resources by General Park for making this film. *Red Muffler* was to act as a recruiting film for the armed forces and as a tribute to the dictator Park. In the scenes depicting the bombing of North Korean villages there are no images of mutilated people and weeping children. The perspective is that of the pilot at the controls.

The scarf in the film has strong links with the Red Complex (or Red Color Complex), a trauma in South Korean history. Ever since the Korean war the color red has been contaminated with the constant threat of the communists in the north.⁷⁸

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Most people in Korea, north and south, are familiar with the folk tale that the film *Pulgasari* is based on.⁷⁹ But Kim Jong Il wanted to give the story a new content. To understand the meaning of *Pulgasari* one needs to turn to the original – *Godzilla*.

76. David Scott Diffrient, "Han'guk Heroism: Cinematic Spectacle and the Postwar Cultural Politics of Red Muffler", in *South Korean Golden Age Melodrama: Gender, Genre, and National Cinema*, ed. Kathleen McHugh and Nancy Abelmann, Wayne State University Press 2005.

77. *Ibid.*, p. 175.

78. See, for instance, Paula Booker, "Red Stars", *New Zealand Listener* 13-19 October 2007.

79. I base this assumption on experience from my travels and from conversations with people in South Korea between 2006 and 2009.

spöket drar genom korridorerna med en röd scarf om halsen för att skydda sig mot drag. Här är tinget en symbol för diletterteri och feminiserad manlighet.⁷⁶

Röd scarf ska ses i ljuset av melodram-mästaren Douglas Sirks filmer, menar Scott Diffrient. Shin använder sig av Sirks sätt att arbeta med färger men går ännu längre: ”In fact, Shin frequently out-Sirks Sirk.”⁷⁷ Till synes omotiverat belyser han scenerna i kraftigt blått och rött ljus. Men ljussättningen har, enligt Scott Diffrient många polära betydelser: som en växling mellan is och eld, mellan kapitalism och kommunism, mellan det förflutna och nuet, mellan melodramen och krigsfilmen. Här finns också en självklar referens till den sydkoreanska flaggan som med sina färger och sitt yin- och yang-tecken också uttrycker en delning där två poler bildar en enhet.

Shin försågs med alla tänkbara resurser av General Park för denna film. *Röd scarf* skulle fungera som en värnningssfilm för militären och samtidigt som en hyllning av diktator Park. I scenerna med bombningarna av de nordkoreanska byarna visas inga lemlästade människor och gråtande barn, perspektivet är pilotens blick vid spakarna.

Halsduken i filmen har genom åren behållit sin starka koppling till Red Complex (eller The Red Color Complex), ett trauma i Sydkoreansk historia. Färgen var alltsedan Koreakriget kontaminerad med fruktan för kommunismen i norr, det ständiga hotet.⁷⁸

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De flesta i Korea, nord som syd, känner antagligen till folksagan som filmen *Pulgasari* grundar sig på.⁷⁹ Men Kim Jong Il ville ge berättelsen ett nytt innehåll. För att förstå betydelsen av *Pulgasari* måste man gå till originalet – *Godzilla. Gojira*, som är det

76. David Scott Diffrient, "Han'guk Heroism: Cinematic Spectacle and the Postwar Cultural Politics of Red Muffler", i *South Korean Golden Age Melodrama: Gender, Genre, and National Cinema*, red. Kathleen McHugh och Nancy Abelmann, Wayne State University Press 2005.

77. Ibid., s. 175.

78. Se t.ex. Paula Booker, "Red Stars", *New Zealand Listener* 13-19/10 2007.

79. Antagandet grundar sig på mina resor och samtal med människor i Sydkorea mellan 2006 och 2009.

Gojira, as it is known in Japanese, is a character from the age of nuclear weapons. There is nothing kitschy or ironical about the original film from 1954, though the special effects may not impress a public brought up on digital effects. *Godzilla* is a dark, melancholy elegy with a highly conscious visual language and advanced sound design. One of the leading roles (Dr. Yamane) is taken by Takashi Shimura, known from Kurosawa's films. *Godzilla* is an allegorical film with a political message.

The film starts with scenes in a fishing boat that is destroyed by a beam of light. This alludes directly to an event in March of 1954: the Americans had tested a 1.5 megaton nuclear bomb on the Bikini Atoll in the Pacific. A Japanese tuna-fishing boat was in the vicinity and was covered in radioactive fallout. The crew fell ill from radiation and the event developed into an international crisis. In Japan people again became acutely frightened of radioactivity.

In the film's story, Godzilla emerges during the Jurassic period and survives at the bottom of the ocean only to have his habitat destroyed by the American nuclear tests. After absorbing the radiation, the now homeless monster begins to wander. The Japanese fleet lays down depth charges and the military erects a high-voltage line to protect the coast, but nothing can stop Godzilla. The scales on his back glow and a beam of radioactivity, transmitted from the monster's jaw, makes buildings and houses melt.

The images from the film recalled the recent past for the Japanese nation. The smoking ruins of Tokyo the day after Godzilla's attack were a reminder of the devastating bombing of the city at the end of the war. The images of burned children being examined with Geiger counters at a hospital evoked the still-vivid memories of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. A patrol boat is sent out to sea for the final battle with the monster. They make use of a new super-weapon designed by the scientist Serizawa who chooses to die together with the monster. There is nothing triumphant about the final scenes. Dr. Yamane doubts that Godzilla is the last of his species. If the atomic-

japanska namnet, är en figur sprungen ur kärnvapenåldern. Originalfilmen från 1954 har inget kitschigt eller ironiskt över sig, även om specialeffekterna kanske inte direkt imponerar på en publik som vuxit upp med digitala effekter. *Godzilla* är en mörk, melankolisk elegi med medvetet bildspråk och avancerad ljuddesign. En av ledande rollerna görs av Kurosawa-skådespelaren Takashi Shimura (Dr Yamane). *Godzilla* är en allegorisk film med ett politiskt innehåll.

Filmen inleds med scener av en fiskebåt som drabbas ett förintande ljussken vilket anspelar direkt på en händelse i mars samma år: amerikanerna hade provsprängt en 1,5 megatons vätebomb i Bikiniatollen i Stilla havet. Den japanska tonfiskebåten Lucky Dragon No 5 befann sig i närheten och höljdes av radioaktivt nedfall. Besättningen insjuknade med strålskador och händelsen utlöste en internationell kris. I Japan spred sig återigen en skräck för radioaktivitet.

I filmens handling härstammar Godzilla från Jura-tiden och har överlevt på havsbotten men fått sin livsmiljö rubbad av amerikanernas provsprängningar av atombomber. Det hemlösa monstret har sugit åt sig av strålningen och börjat vandra. Flottan sätter in sjunkbomber och militären monterar upp en högspänningsledning som skydd utmed kusten. Men inget biter på Godzilla. Ryggsköldarna glöder och en stråle av radioaktivitet skickas från djurets käft och får byggnader och hus att smälta.

Filmens bilder återkallade det nyligen förgångna för den japanska publiken: de rykande ruinerna av Tokyo dagen efter Godzillas framfart är en påminnelse om den förödande bombningen av staden under krigets slutskede. Bilderna av brända människor på sjukhuset där barnen undersöks med geigermätare sammanfaller med de färska, smärtsamma minnesbilderna från Hiroshima och Nagasaki.

En patrullbåt skickas ut till havs för den sista striden mot monstret. Man använder sig av ett nytt supervapen framställt av vetenskapsmannen Serizawa, som väljer att dö tillsammans med monstret. Slutscenerna har inget triumfatoriskt över sig. Dr Yamane tvivlar på att Godzilla var den sista av sin art. Om kärnvapenproven fortsät-

bomb testing continues, a new Godzilla will surely rise from the waves.⁸⁰

The person responsible for designing the Godzilla figure was Eiji Tsuburaya (1901–1970), the legendary special effects creator at the Toho Studios in Tokyo. Tsuburaya's figures, such as Rodan (a flying dinosaur), Mothra (an enormous moth), Booska (a forerunner of the Teletubbies), and Ultraman (a humanoid alien in an attractive red and silver costume) are still beloved by the Japanese public and have been reprised again and again in films, video games, comic books, TV series, and toys.

But none of these figures rival Godzilla – “Japan's best-known international film star,” a national monument whose statue stands in Ginza in Tokyo. The *Gojira* series is one of the most enduring in all of film history, spanning over fifty years and twenty-nine movies.⁸¹

When Tsuburaya created the monster he already had a lengthy career behind him as a photographer and director. Toho Studios was founded in 1936 by Ichizo Kobayashi who was a railway magnate, politician and leading figure in the entertainment industry. Tsuburaya was engaged the next year. During the war Tsuburaya was drafted into the imperial air force. He was ordered to produce instruction films for warplanes and himself became skilled at aerial acrobatics. The attack on Pearl Harbour had created a euphoric wave of nationalist feelings and it was believed that a large-scale film about the heroic attack would convince the Japanese people that total victory was at hand.

80. Following the huge success of *Gojira* an American version, *Godzilla, King of the Mountains*, was created two years later. With clever editing and some new scenes they succeeded in totally changing the film's political message. In the American film a minor character from the original film has been given a major role. The Japanese journalist who arrives with the investigative commission to study the beast's behaviour has been turned into an American journalist who is portrayed as a hero. Actor Raymond Burr, best known for his role in Hitchcock's *Rear Window*, acted with Asian extras in Los Angeles. Burr plays a McArthur-like father figure who manages to put everything right. Tokyo is in a state of panic and the Japanese are incapable of thinking clearly. They hang on his every word for advice. The atomic bomb motif is played down and responsibility for the spread of radioactive materials is placed on the Japanese, since they conduct atomic-bomb tests themselves. Serizawa is a caricature of a mad scientist, a madman whom the journalist, thanks to his superior vision, manages to calm, at least for a moment. It is the American who succeeds in convincing him of the necessity of employing the super weapon. There is nothing heroic about Serizawa's death. He commits suicide on account of his unrequited love of Dr. Yamane's daughter Emiko. The fateful solution to the story has, in the American version, been turned into a happy ending. The satisfied journalist notes that “the world could wake up and live again”.

81. See William Tsutsui, *Godzilla on My Mind – Fifty Years of the King of Monsters*, Palgrave MacMillan 2004, p.45.

ter kommer en ny Godzilla stiga ur havet.⁸⁰

Ansvarig för Godzilla-figurens utseende var Eji Tsuburaya (1901-1970), legendarisk specialeffektmakare vid Toho Studios i Tokyo. Alla Tsuburayas figurer såsom Rodan (flygande skräcködla), Mothra (flygande jättemal), Booska (Teletubbiesföregångare) och Ultraman (humanoid alien i snygg dräkt i rött och silver) har mångfaldigats och älskats av japaner genom filmer, videospel, seriealbum, TV-serier, byggsatser och leksaker.

Men ingen av Tsuburayas alla övriga fantasifulla figurer når upp till Godzilla – ”Japans internationellt mest kända filmstjärna”, ett nationellt monument som står staty i Ginza. *Godzilla* är den mest långvariga filmserien i filmhistorien med sitt tids-
spann på nästan 50 år med tjugonio filmer.⁸¹

När Tsuburaya skapade monstret hade han redan en lång karriär bakom sig som fotograf och regissör. Toho Studios skapades 1936 av Ichizo Kobayashi, järnvägs-
magnat, politiker och pamp inom nöjesvärlden, och Tsuburaya anställdes ett år senare. Under kriget inkallades Tsuburaya till det kejserliga flygvapnet. Han sattes att göra instruktionsfilmer för stridsflygarna och blev själv en skicklig akrobatflygare. Pearl Harbor-attacken hade skapat en våg av euforiska nationella känslor och man trodde att en storfilm om den ärorika blixttattacken skulle övertyga det japanska folket om att en total seger var nära förestående.

80. Efter den enorma succén med *Godzilla* gjordes en amerikansk bearbetning, kallad *Godzilla, King of the Monsters*, två år senare. Med listig klippning och nya scener lyckades man totalt förändra filmens politiska betydelse. I den amerikanska versionen har en bifigur från originalfilmen fått en framskjuten position; den japanske journalist som anländer tillsammans med undersökningskommissionen för att granska spåren efter bestens framfart har förvandlats till en amerikansk journalist som intar hjältepositionen. Skådespelaren Raymond Burr, mest känd för sin roll i Hitchcocks *Fönster mot gården*, agerade med asiatiska statister i Los Angeles. Burr spelar en McArthur-lik fadersfigur som lyckas ställa allt till rätta. Tokyo har drabbats av panik och japanerna kan inte tänka klart, de hänger vid hans läppar för att få råd. Atombombsmotivet är nedtonat och skulden för den radioaktiva spridningen är japanernas egen, eftersom de själva utfört atombombsproverna. Serizawa är klichébilden av den galne vetenskapsmannen, en vansinnig som journalisten med sin överlägsna klarsynthet lyckas lugna ner, om än tillfälligt. Det är amerikanen som övertygar honom om nödvändigheten att använda supervapnet. Serizawas död har inget heroiskt över sig, han begår sitt självmord på grund av olycklig kärlek till Dr. Yamanes dotter Emiko. Den ödesmättade upplösningen har i den amerikanska versionen förstås förvandlats till ett happy end. Förojt konstaterar journalisten: "...the world could wake up and live again."

81. Se William Tsutsui, *Godzilla on My Mind – Fifty Years of the King of Monsters*, Palgrave MacMillan 2004, s.45.

Five months after the attack Tsuburaya started working on an incredibly detailed reconstruction of the event.⁸² Using photographs provided by the navy, on a back lot at Toho Studios he built a large-scale, detailed model of Pearl Harbour where the battleships were set on fire, spreading black smoke over the harbor area. The title of the film was *Hawai mare oki kaisen* [The War at Sea from Hawaii to Malay].

As the war progressed, Toho became increasingly drawn into the propaganda circus and its operations ultimately coincided with those of the navy. As the plight of the Japanese forces grew ever worse, the demand for propaganda from Toho increased. In the end Toho was receiving warplanes directly from the factories. In a spirit of desperation they made ever more pompous and heroic films that were increasingly divorced from reality.

At the end of the war, when the films came into their possession, the Americans believed that the material was documentary. Some of the footage from *The War at Sea from Hawaii to Malay* was actually included in the Americans own documentary film dealing with the attack on Pearl Harbour. Tsuburaya's special effects were so technically advanced that the Americans ensured that he lost his position at Toho Studios, claiming that he must have been a spy during the war in view of his detailed knowledge of the geography of Pearl Harbour.

A few years later Tsuburaya was back at Toho Studios but initially he was obliged to remain incognito.⁸³ It was not until the American occupation officially ended in 1952 that Tsuburaya could finally appear under his own name. He had recently been rehabilitated as special-effects expert when work on *Godzilla* began.

In conceptualizing the monster, which was then built of clay, Tsuburaya enlisted the help of Tizo Toshimitsu with whom he had worked on *The War at Sea from Hawaii to Malay*. The two men studied pictures of dinosaurs, notably illustrations by the Czech illustrator Zdenek Burian. They were inspired by Burian's images of Tyrannosaurus, adding to it the armored back plates of the Stegosaurus. The rubber suit which evolved was fearsomely clumsy, weighing more than a hundred kilograms.

82. See August Ragone, *Eiji Tsuburaya: Mater of Monsters. Defending the Earth with Ultraman, Godzilla, and Friends in the Golden Age of Japanese Science Fiction Film*, Chronicle Books 2007, p. 28.

83. After the war, the situation at Toho Studios was chaotic. Two union factions fought for influence at the studios, one communist and the other anti-communist. The struggle escalated to such a point that a strike was quelled by Japanese police and American tanks.

Fem månader efter attacken började Tsuburaya för denna film arbeta med en oerhört avancerad rekonstruktion av händelserna.⁸² Efter fotografier som tillhandahölls av marinen byggde han på Toho Studios bakgård en detaljrik modell i stor skala av Pearl Harbour där slagskeppen antändes av bomber som spred sin svarta rök över hamnområdet. Filmens namn var *Hawai mare oki kaisen* [Kriget till sjöss från Hawaii till Malaysia].

Toho blev efterhand allt hårdare indragna i en propagandacirkus där verksamheten till slut flöt samman med militärens. Ju sämre kriget gick för Japans räkning desto mer växte Tohos propagandauppdrag. I slutet fick man tillgång till stridsflygplan direkt från fabriker. I desperation skapade man sina pompösa, heroiska, men allt mer verklighetsfrämmande filmer.

När amerikanerna efter krigets slut kom över filmmaterialet från Tsuburayas avancerade iscensättningar trodde man att det rörde sig om dokumentärt material. Man kom till och med att inkorporera vissa scener i egna dokumentärer om Pearl Harbour-attacken. Tsuburayas specialeffekter var så avancerade att amerikanerna såg till att han fick sparken från Toho Studios under förevändningen att han måste ha varit spion under kriget, med tanke på hans detaljkunskaper om Pearls Harbours geografi.

Tsuburaya var tillbaka på Toho Studios efter några år, men tvingades till en början verka inkognito.⁸³ Först när den amerikanska ockupationen officiellt upphörde 1952 kunde han öppet framträda under eget namn. Han var alltså nyligen rehabiliterad som specialeffektsmakare när arbetet med *Godzilla* inleddes.

Tsuburaya kallade in en medarbetare från produktionen av *Kriget till sjöss från Hawaii till Malaysia* – Teizo Toshimitsu – för att uppfinna en monsterfigur, som sedan byggdes i lera. Man studerade illustrationer i dinosaurieböcker, framförallt intresserade man sig för den tjeckiske illustratören Zdenek Burians målningar. Man inspirerades av Burians bilder av Tyrannosaurus och försåg den med ryggplåtar från Stegosaurus. Den färdiga dräkten i gummi var ohyggligt otymplig med sin vikt på över ett hundra kilo.

82. Se August Ragone, *Eiji Tsuburaya: Mater of Monsters. Defending the Earth with Ultraman, Godzilla, and Friends in the Golden Age of Japanese Science Fiction Film*, Chronicle Books, San Francisco 2007, s. 28.

83. Läget på Toho Studios var kaotiskt efter kriget. Två fackföreningsfraktioner började strida om makten, den ena kommunistisk, den andra antikommunistisk. Striderna eskalerade till den punkt då en strejk avstyrades av japansk polis och amerikanska stridsvagnar.

The real pioneer among the actors who had the honor of bringing the monster to life was Haruo Nakajima. He lost ten kilos while making the first film and after each session sweat could be poured from his costume. Nakajima continued to act the monster in his rubber suit for eighteen years until 1972. He fainted on numerous occasions from the toxic fumes caused by burning rags soaked in paraffin. On one occasion he was almost electrocuted and on another he was almost drowned in an avalanche of crushed ice. A later successor of Nakajima was Kenpachiro Satsuma who struggled with his rubber costume up until 1995. By that time he had also taken part in Shin Sang-ok's *Pulgasari* in North Korea (1984).

The success of *Gojira* in Japan created a new genre of kaiju-films which soon spread to neighboring countries. In 1962 South Korean film director Kim Myeong contributed the first version of *Pulgasari* to the genre. The film is lost but two posters of it have been found in recent years and they testify to its existence. The plot is based on the same folktale as the Shing Sang-ok/Kim Jong Il version but in this film it is a martial arts athlete who is murdered and reborn as an iron-eating monster. That there was then a North Korean version of the story was a new stage in the remarkable genealogy of monsters which continued with the version that Shin helped to make in Hollywood in 1996: *The Adventures of Galgameth*.⁸⁴ “Who would have thought that Godzilla, that poster boy of global commercialism, could be morphed into a proletarian liberator, a North Korean *Braveheart*, and a tool of communist propaganda?” William Tsutsui wrote in *Godzilla on my Mind*.⁸⁵ And who could have believed that Shin would make yet another version in Hollywood? The greater part of the film was made in a castle in Romania. When I contacted Kempachura Satsuma's agent in Tokyo in the autumn of 2006, he told me that Shin had tried to persuade Satsuma to act in the *Galgameth* costume but the actor had been unwilling.

One might imagine that Shin's *Pulgasari* would be a critique of the dictator's rule, that the emperor symbolizes Kim Jong Il who lives in luxury while his people suffer appalling hardships. In an important scene the women are collecting bark from the trees in order to have something to eat; a scene that seems to portend the forthco-

84. The list of credits gives Shin Sang-ok not as the director but as the author of the story. He used the pseudonym Simon Sheen.

85. William Tsutsui, *Godzilla on my Mind – Fifty Years of the King of Monsters*, p. 198.

Pionjären bland de skådespelare som skulle få det ärorika uppdraget att ge liv åt monstret var Haruo Nakajima. Han förlorade tio kilo under inspelningen av den första filmen, för varje tagning hällde man svetten ur dräkten. Nakajima stretade på i gummidräkterna i arton år fram till 1972. Åtskilliga gånger kom han att svimma från giftiga ångor som orsakades av brinnande trasor indränkta i fotogen. En gång var han nära att bli elektrifierad och vid ett tillfälle fick han ett berg av krossad is över sig, för att nämna några av nesligheterna. Nakajimas efterträdare kom att bli Kenpachiro Satsuma som skulle vara gummidräkten trogen fram till 1995. Då hade han hunnit mellanspela i Shin Sang-oks *Pulgasari* i Nordkorea 1984.

Gojiras succé i Japan skapade ny genre, kaiju-filmen, som snabbt spred sig till grannländerna. 1962 bidrog sydkoreanen Kim Myeong till genren med den första *Pulgasari*-versionen. Filmen har gått förlorad, men två filmaffischer har återfunnits under senare år och fungerar som bevis för dess existens. Historien bygger på samma koreanska folksaga som Shin Sang-oks/Kim Jong IIs version, men här är det en kampsportsmästare som mördas men återföds i gestalt av ett järnätande monster. Att den sedan fick en nordkoreansk version innebär ett nytt steg i den märkliga monstergenealogi som kom att få sin fortsättning med den version som Shin var med att göra för Hollywood 1996: *Galgameth*.⁸⁴ ”Vem hade trott att Godzilla, den globala kommersialismens omslagspojke, skulle morfas till en proletär befriare, en nordkoreansk *Braveheart* och ett verktyg för kommunistpropaganda?” skriver William Tsutsui i *Godzilla on my Mind*.⁸⁵ Och vem hade trott att Shin sedan skulle göra ytterligare en version för Hollywood? Den största delen av filmen spelades in på ett slott i Rumänien. När jag kontaktade Kenpachiro Satsumas agent i Tokyo, hösten 2006, berättade han att Shin hade försökt övertala Satsuma att agera även i *Galgameth*-dräkten. Men han hade tackat nej.

Man skulle kunna få för sig att Shins *Pulgasari* är en kritik av diktatorns makt över folket, att kejsaren symboliserar despoten Kim Jong Il, som lever lyxliv när folket går under av umbäranden. I en viktig scen samlar kvinnorna bark från träden för att dryga ut kosten, en scen som tycks förutspå den kommande missväxten och

84. I filmens eftertext anges Shin Sang-ok inte som regissör utan som upphovsman till berättelsen. Han använder sig här av pseudonymen Simon Sheen.

85. William Tsutsui, *Godzilla on My Mind – Fifty Years of the King of Monsters*, s. 198 (min övers. M.B.).

ming crop failures and famine which led to the deaths of 2.5-3 million people in the mid 1990s. But a critical perspective of this type is unthinkable in official circles in North Korea. The heroine is the Mother of Chosun, the united Korea. The oppressors are the capitalists in the south or, alternatively, Japan and the USA. The battle is with them. And it is against them that the nuclear missiles are to be directed. The weapons are created from within, from the soil, rice and blood. The food – iron – is uranium which is enriched in the smithy. The weapon undergoes various transformations and refinements to gain ever more devilish force. In the end it is only the spirit of the people that can disarm the weapon. But there is no total disarmament. A youngster is born with the potential to grow and to fight on the side of the North Korean people if this proves necessary.

In most descriptions of the film in the West it is claimed that the monster should be seen as an analogy of capitalism. Read in this way, the film becomes a warning of how an insatiable appetite for money will rebound on the people.⁸⁶ This is a somewhat improbable analysis which is also devoid of the basic motif in *Pulgasari*: that of Godzilla as an incarnation of the atomic bomb. It is more reasonable to assume that *Pulgasari* carries the same reference and that this reference is extremely important. Ten years were to pass before North Korea officially admitted its nuclear weapons program but, with the film, Kim Jong Il had admitted as much himself. In 2006 the North Koreans conducted a subterranean test and on April 6, 2009, six months after our return home, they launched a long-range missile. When the neighboring countries complained, the North Korean government was furious. The official news agency KCNA quoted a spokesman from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs who declared that North Korea would immediately re-establish its nuclear weapons program and again start to produce plutonium, “/.../ in order to deal with the increasing military threats from the hostile forces.”⁸⁷ Two months later, in May 2009, they conducted an underground test.

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86. See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pulgasari> (20/3 2010). This is the dominant interpretation of *Pulgasari* as metaphor on film websites.

87. Kim Miyoung and Jon Herskovitz, “North Korea says plutonium extraction has started”, *Reuters* 25/4 2009.

hungersnöden under mitten av nittioalet som kom att skörda 2,5-3 miljoner människors liv (det vill säga ungefär tio procent av befolkningen). Men ett sådant kritiskt perspektiv är omöjligt i det officiella Nordkorea. Hjältinnan är Chosuns Moder, det förenade Korea. Förtryckarna är kapitalisterna i Syd, alternativt Japan och USA. Det är mot dem striden står. Och det är mot dem som kärnvapenstridspetsen ska riktas. Vapnet skapas inifrån, med jord, ris och blod. Födan – järnet – är uran som anrikas i smedjan. Vapnet genomgår transformationer och förädlas till en allt mer djävulsk kraft. Till slut är det bara folkets ande som kan desarmera vapnet. Men det är inte en fullständig nedrustning. Ett yngel återföds med potentialen att växa och ställa sig på det nordkoreanska folkets sida om så skulle krävas.

I de flesta beskrivningar av filmen i väst sägs att monstret ska ses som en analogi över kapitalismen. I en sådan läsning är filmen en varning för att en omätlig penninghunger kommer att slå tillbaka mot folket.⁸⁶ Det är en ganska obegriplig analys där man också förlorar det grundläggande motivet hos *Pulgasari* förlaga: Godzilla som en inkarnation av atombomben. Det vore rimligare att anta att *Pulgasari* bär med sig samma referens och att denna referens är av högsta vikt. Att monstret gestaltar ett oerhört vapen som kan rädda folket mot förtryckarna, men som till slut också hotar den egna befolkningen. Sedd så är *Pulgasari* en förutsägelse av Nordkoreas kärnvapenprogram. Det skulle dröja tio år innan Nordkorea officiellt erkände sitt kärnvapenprogram, men med filmen hade Kim Jong Il redan gjort sitt tillkännagivande. 2006 gjorde man sin underjordiska provsprängning och den 6:e april 2009, ett halvår efter vår hemkomst, skickade man ut en långdistansraket. När grannländerna protesterade reagerade den nordkoreanska regeringen med ursinne. Den nordkoreanska nyhetsbyrån KCNA citerade en talesman på utrikesministeriet som förklarade att man prompt återupptar sitt kärnvapenprogram och återigen börjat producera plutonium, ”/.../ för att hantera de ökande militära hoten från fientliga styrkor.”⁸⁷ Två månader senare, i maj 2009, gjorde man sin underjordiska provsprängning.

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86. Se <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pulgasari> (20/3 2010). På filmsajter är detta den helt dominerande tolkningen av *Pulgasari* som metafor.

87. Kim Miyoung och Jon Herskovitz, "North Korea says plutonium extraction has started", *Reuters* 25/4 2009 (min övers. M.B.).

Initially I saw the kidnapping story as a Faust legend, a tale of two artists who choose to serve power in exchange for their freedom. Shin Sang-ok claimed in an interview that *Toraochiannun milsa* [Runaway] (1985), one of the films he made while a captive in North Korea, was the best film that he had made in the whole course of his career.⁸⁸ But after talking to Choi Eun-hee I realized that I was wrong. She emphasized the great freedom that they had enjoyed with respect to filmmaking during the years in North Korea; not least financially. They were used to brutal censorship and the difficult economic conditions in South Korea. When they were in captivity they had huge budgets and could choose their venues in North Korea, China and the whole of Eastern Europe. Kim Jong Il concerned himself with their work and insisted on there always being a revolutionary element in the films, but otherwise they enjoyed great freedom. The lack of freedom was mostly related to their being physical captives, she claimed, but also to the knowledge that ordinary citizens were oppressed and had very little to eat (even though this was prior to the great famine). And this was why they were constantly plotting to escape. Prior to this, in 1984, Madame Choi had won a prize at the Moscow Film Festival as the best actress in the film *Sogeuim* [Salt], which they had made while in captivity. I watched it at the National Film Archive in Seoul.

Salt is a Gorky-like story about a woman, played by Choi Eun-hee who is faced with a succession of afflictions. The film introduced a whole range of new ideas into North Korean filmmaking, Madame had told me the previous day. Previously films had been seen as a fruit of the efforts of a nameless collective but the new film had a list of credits with the names of the director and the actors. Dialect was used for the first time instead of the standardized North Korean language; an event that was seen as highly dramatic. Some of the scenes shocked the public. A rape scene was so explicit that Kim Il Sung himself was obliged to defend it publicly, claiming that it was artistically motivated.

The film begins on the border between Manchuria and Korea. The year is 1910 and the Japanese colonists and Chinese landowners have joined forces and more or less enslaved the Koreans. Salt is a scarce commodity and it provides a metaphor for a life of oppression. Life is dismal on every level, "like food without salt."

88. See e.g. John Gorenfeld, "The producer from hell", *The Guardian*, Friday 4/4 2003.

Till en början såg jag själva kidnappningshistorien som en Faust-berättelse, en historia om två konstnärer som väljer att tjäna makten i utbyte mot sin frihet. Shin Sang-ok hävdade i en intervju att en av hans filmer under fångenskapen – *Toraochiannun milsa* (*Runaway*, 1985) – var hans främsta film under hela hans karriär.⁸⁸ Men efter att ha samtalat med Choi Eun-hee förstod jag att jag misstagit mig. Hon betonade istället den stora frihet de hade haft vad gällde filmskapandet under åren i Nordkorea, inte minst finansiellt. De var vana vid en stenhård censur och svåra ekonomiska förutsättningar i Sydkorea. Som kidnappade hade de en ofantlig budget och kunde välja sina inspelningsplatser i Nordkorea, Kina och hela Östeuropa. Kim Jong Il var engagerad i deras filmskapande och kom med vissa anvisningar och det skulle alltid finnas ett revolutionärt inslag, men i övrigt hade de stor frihet. Hon menade att bristen på frihet handlade mest om deras fysiska fångenskap, men också om vetenskapen om att vanliga människor var förtryckta och hade ont om mat (även om detta var innan den stora svälten). Det var därför de hela tiden planerade sin flykt. Före flykten hann Madame Choi 1984 vinna ett pris på en filmfestival i Moskva som bästa kvinnliga skådespelare för sin roll i filmen *Sogeum* [Salt] som de gjorde under sin fångenskap. Jag såg den i det nationella filmarkivet i Seoul.

Salt är en Gorkij-artad historia om en kvinna, spelad av Choi Eun-hee, som får utstå lidande efter lidande. Med filmen introducerades en mängd nya grepp i nordkoreansk film, hade Madame förklarat dagen innan. Tidigare ansågs film vara en frukt av det namnlösa kollektivets ansträngningar men nu nämndes regissörens och skådespelarnas namn i filmens eftertexter. Dialekt användes för första gången istället för standardiserad nordkoreanska, en händelse som uppfattades som dramatisk. Vissa scener var chockerande för publiken. En våldtäktsscen var så explicit att Kim Il Sung försvarade den offentligt, som konstnärligt motiverad.

Filmen tar sin början i vid dåvarande gränsen mellan Manchuriet och Korea. Året är 1910 och de japanska kolonialherrarna och de kinesiska markägarna har bildat en pakt som mer eller mindre förslavat koreanerna. Salt är en dyrbar vara och blir en metafor för livet under förtrycket. Det är ett fattigt liv på alla plan, ”som mat utan salt”.

88. Se t.ex. John Gorenfeld, "The producer from hell", *The Guardian*, Friday, 4/4 2003.

After constant degradations and a life in poverty, Madame's character ends up smuggling salt in appalling conditions across the Chinese-Korean border. It is not until the final scene, when the communist rebels have annihilated the Chinese militia that had been attacking the smugglers that she is struck by the political insight that the fight is justified. She realizes that "communism is the salt of the world." In this way Shin solved an ideological problem. The *juche* ideology appeared in the final frames.

Watching Madame Choi in the role of a mother of small children was a strange experience. At the time she was 57 years old. It was even more strange to learn about the circumstances in which the film was made. Shin had just recovered from four years of eating grass in his isolation cell where he wasn't even able to fully stretch out his body lying down. He now created scenes in which Madame was thrown into prison, starved and was beaten and raped. They themselves were prisoners with a certain artistic freedom and considerable financial freedom. It was their artistry, their insights, skills and visions that Kim Jong Il longed for; their ability to produce melodramas that took a grip on people's feelings. Kim Jong Il had realized that some things cannot be bought for money nor can they be produced in a laboratory. One has to take the bodies that house these abilities and one has to hope that the abilities are not destroyed in the process. Perhaps, with the years in captivity, he wanted to test them and give them experiences that they could use in their art.

In their book *Our Escape is not Over* that the couple published in 2001, Shin maintains, just as Madame did in our conversations, that one must take the dictator's understanding of the film medium seriously.⁸⁹ Shin talks here at length about the function of Kim's private film archive. The building appears as a super-brain or motherboard that is temperature regulated, guarded and maintained by a staff of 250 people. Situated behind massive steel gates in the heart of Pyongyang its symbolic importance could not be greater.

Shin was introduced to the archive for the first time on March 14, 1983. The three-story building may well be the largest private film archive in the world. The staff consists of dubbing actors, translators, subtitle writers, projectionists and sound

89. Kim is also knowledgeable about music, according to Shin. The leader can readily point to an instrument that is out of tune in the orchestra.

Efter ständiga förnedringar och ett liv i fattigdom slutar Madames karaktär som saltsmugglare under fruktansvärda omständigheter över den kinesisk-koreanska gränsen. Först i den sista scenen, då de kommunistiska rebellerna dödat den kinesiska milisgrupp som attackerat smugglarna, drabbas hon av den politiska insikten om det rättmätiga i kampen. Hon inser att ”kommunismen är världens salt”. På så vis hade Shin löst det ideologiska problemet. *Juche*-ideologin kopplades på i sista rutan.

Det var märkligt att se Madame Choi i rollen som småbarnsmor i *Salt*. Hon var vid denna tid 57 år gammal. Ännu märkligare var det att föreställa sig omständigheterna kring denna filminspelning. Shin hade just återhämtat sig efter fyra års gräsdiet i en isoleringscell där han inte ens kunde sträcka ut sig raklång. Nu skapade han scenerna där Madame kastades i fängelse, svalt, misshandlades och våldtogs. Själva var de fångar med viss konstnärlig frihet och stor ekonomisk frihet. Det var själva konstnärligheten, deras inlevelse, färdigheter och visioner som Kim Jong Il traktade efter, deras förmåga att göra melodramer som grep tag i människors känslor. Kim Jong Il hade förstätt att vissa saker inte kan köpas för pengar och inte framställas i laboratorium. Man måste ta kropparna som hyser förmågan och man får hoppas att deras förmåga inte bryts sönder. Kanske ville han, genom åren av fångenskap, både testa dem och ge dem erfarenheter som de kunde omsätta konstnärligt.

I *Vår flykt är inte över än* – den bok som filmparet publicerade 2001 – menar Shin, precis som Madame under vårt samtal, att man måste ta diktatorns filmkunnande på allvar.⁸⁹ Shin berättar här utförligt om det privata filmarkivets funktion. Byggnaden framstår som en superhjärna eller ett moderkort, som tempereras, vaktas och vårdas av 250 anställda. Beläget bakom massiva stålgrindar i hjärtat av Pyongyang kan dess symboliska betydelse knappast vara större.

Shin introduceras till arkivet första gången den 14:e mars 1983. Den tre våningar höga byggnaden kan vara det största privata filmarkivet i världen. Här arbetar röstskådespelare, översättare, textare, biografmaskinister och ljudtekniker, förutom all

89. Kim är också en stor musikkännare, berättar Shin. Ledaren kan utan problem plocka ut det instrument som spelar falskt i en symfoniorkester.

engineers as well as security staff and other assistants. Every North Korean film ever made is preserved in a special room. In due course, Shin and Madame were granted free access to the archive.

In our conversation Choi Eun-hee mentioned a sound recording, a two-hour monologue that Kim Jong Il held in October 1983, that the couple secretly recorded. The recording is considered by military intelligence services as one of the foremost sources for understanding the dictator's psychology. It also says a lot about how Kim regards soft power, the role of culture in winning the people's sympathy.

We send our people to East Germany to study editing, to Czechoslovakia to study camera technology, and to the Soviet Union to learn directing. Other than that, we cannot send our people to go anywhere since they are enemy states. No France, no West Germany, no Great Britain. We especially have to have conduct exchange with Japan, but we cannot even allow [North Korean] people to Japanese films. We end up analyzing foreign films to imitate them but there is a limit to what we can do, but our efforts have brought no progress. I have been struggling with this problem for 5 years [since 1978]. All we ended up doing was to send a couple of people to the Soviet Union after the liberation and to establish a Film Institute, but they are not that impressive after all. I acknowledge that we lag behind in film-making techniques. We have to know that we are lagging behind and make efforts to raise a new generation of filmmakers.⁹⁰

Theater historian Kim Suk-young is one of the few theorists who has tried to analyze the history of their time as filmmakers in North Korea at a serious level. In her view, Shin and Choi's time brought about certain changes in North Korean films but also a certain form of subversiveness.

Although covered in the veil of revolutionary ideology, there are fissures and gaps in the productions Shin and Choi produced, which allows for subversive readings

90. Kim Suk-young, "Guests' of the Dear Leader. Shin Sang-ok, Choi Eun-hee, and North Korea's Cultural Crisis" which refers the reader to p. 249 in part 1 of *Uriui talchulun kkutnaji natta*, Wolgan Joseonsa 2001.

säkerhetspersonal och alla andra tjänsteandar. Varje nordkoreansk film som någonsin gjorts förvaras i ett speciellt rum. Sedermera fick Shin och Madame fri tillgång till arkivet.

Choi Eun-hee nämnde i vårt samtal en ljudupptagning, en två timmar lång monolog som Kim Jong-il höll i oktober 1983 – vilken paret spelade in i hemlighet. Ljudupptagningen anses av militära underrättelsetjänster vara en av de främsta källorna till diktatorns psykologiska disposition. Den säger också mycket om hur Kim ser på *soft power*, kulturens roll för att erövra folkets sympatier.

Vi skickar vårt folk till Östtyskland för att studera redigering, till Tjeckoslovakien för att studera kamerateknik och till Sovjetunionen för att lära sig regi. Förutom det har vi inga möjligheter att skicka vårt folk någon annanstans, eftersom de andra länderna är fiendestater. Inte Frankrike, inte Västtyskland, inte Storbritannien. Vi tvingas upprätthålla utbyten med Japan, men vi kan under inga omständigheter låta folket titta på japanska filmer. Vi hamnar alltid i situationen att vi analyserar utländska filmer för att sedan imitera dem. Men det finns en gräns för vad vi kan göra, våra ansträngningar har inte gett resultat. Jag har kämpat med det här problemet sedan 1978. Enda resultatet är att vi efter befrielsen har skickat en och annan person till Sovjetunionen och skapat ett filminstitut. Men det är hur som helst inte så imponerande. Jag medger att vi hamnat på efterkälken när det gäller filmskapandets teknik. Vi måste bli medvetna om att vi hamnat efter och anstränga oss för att fostra en ny generation filmskapare.⁹⁰

Teaterforskaren Kim Suk-young är en av de få teoretiker som försökt analysera historien om Shin och Chois tid som filmmakare i Nordkorea. Den innebar en viss förändring av den nordkoreanska filmen, men också en viss form av subversivitet, menar Kim.

Det finns sprickor och hålrum i produktionerna som Shin och Choi gjorde – visserligen täckta av en slöja av revolutionär ideolog – vilket ger utrymme för subver-

90. Kim Suk-young, "'Guests' of the Dear Leader: Shin Sang-ok, Choi Eun-hee, and North Korea's Cultural Crisis", vilken hänvisar till s. 249 i del 1 av *Uriui talchulun kkutnaji anatta* [Vår flykt är inte över än], Wolgan Joseonsa 2001 (min övers M.B.)

challenging conventional ways of understanding their works as faithfully serving Kim's regime. It is undeniable that the changes Shin and Choi brought to the North Korean film industry were often limited, but their story of North Korea opens up the possibilities of discussing most of the crucial moments in the development of North Korean theater, film, and performance history and offers tales of misplacement in time and space, the place of the state patriarch in North Korean society, gender relations, and the everyday performance they were to display as model citizens of Kim Jong Il.⁹¹

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As tourists in North Korea we were subject to strict rules. Our guide, Mr. Kim, explained the rules on the bus into Pyongyang. The authorities kept our mobile phones and our passports. We were not allowed leave the group by ourselves, to photograph anything without asking for permission, we were to show respect to the people whom we met and respect the photographs of Kim Il Sung. We were absolutely forbidden from folding or sitting on newspapers containing his portrait.

We were driven along giant boulevards with very little traffic. The flat geography of Pyongyang meant that all the buildings seemed to rise from the same level. There was a great deal of greenery, large public parks, enormous monuments, colossal public housing complexes; and everywhere there were mosaic portraits of Kim Il Sung. The apartments, façades and streets were worn but clean. People moved about the streets in a coordinated manner. Many of them were in uniform with the brown, civil-defence uniform most in evidence.

All the package tours have followed much the same route covering the same mo-

91. Ibid.

siva läsningar som utmanar konventionella sätt att tolka deras arbeten som troget underkastade Kims regim. Det går inte att förneka att de förändringar Shin och Choi införde i den nordkoreanska filmindustrin ofta var begränsade men deras nordkoreanska historia skapar förutsättningarna för att diskutera de flesta avgörande moment i utvecklingen av den nordkoreanska teatern, filmen och performancehistorien och erbjuder berättelser om förskjutningar i tid och rum, statspatriarkens ställning i det nordkoreanska samhället, könens relationer och det vardagliga framträdande som de förväntades uppvisa som Kim Jong Ils modellmedborgare.⁹¹

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Som turister i Nordkorea hade vi strikta förhållningsregler. Vår Guide Mr Kim förklarade dem genast i bussen på väg in till Pyongyang. Man behöll våra mobiltelefoner och våra pass, vi fick aldrig lämna gruppen på egen hand, vi fick inte fotografera något utan att fråga, vi skulle visa respekt för människorna vi mötte och också visa respekt för fotografier av Kim Il Sung. Vi fick absolut inte vika, eller sätta oss på tidsningar som innehöll hans porträtt.

Vi färdades på jättelika boulevarder med få bilar. Den platta geografin in Pyongyang gjorde att alla byggnader tycktes resa sig från en och samma nivå. Här fanns mycket grönska, stora öppna parker, enorma monument, klossliktande lägenhetskomplex, överallt mosaikbilder av Kim Il Sung. Bostäderna, fasaderna och gatorna var slitna men rentvättade. Människor rörde sig koordinerat på gatorna, många hade uniformer, dominerade gjorde de bruna hemvärnsuniformerna.

Alla turistresor har rört sig längs ungefär samma snitslade bana mellan samma

91. Ibid. (egen övers.)

numents for the last thirty or forty years as I discovered from reading various reports.⁹² In keeping with all the other tours we visited the tower, Kim Il Sung's mausoleum, the "Memorial to the Fatherland's Victorious War of Liberation" and Kim Il Sung's birthplace at Mangyondae, some distance from the city center. We went down into the subway where one was only shown two of the seventeen stations and we visited the American spy-ship Pueblo in the Taedong River that was captured by the North Koreans in 1968 and that is now the foremost trophy in Pyongyang.

I looked at the spinning wheel in Kim Il Sung's birthplace. It seemed really too perfect. The subway, which is deep beneath the earth, was impressive with its candelabras and mosaics. Besides the numerous uniforms, many of the men were dressed in a special Mao-style suit when they were not wearing suit pants and untucked shirts. The women wore blouses and skirts.

The spinning wheel was not there by accident, I realized later. It has a central position in the mythology surrounding Kim Il Sung's mother Kang Pan-sok. His mother was remodeled during the 1960s to become the ideal figure for all women in the country. In the official biography *Korea's Mother* she appears like some character from Greek mythology. According to Kim Suk-young the spinning wheel is a symbol that links together the generations; femininity and motherliness coincide with

92. Almost exactly 30 years prior to our trip, three leftwing radicals visited North Korea. Villy Bergström, Kurt Wickman and Arne Hjort had links to the periodicals *Tiden*, *Vietnambulletinen* and *Marxistiskt Forum*. Villy Bergström was later to become editor of the daily newspaper *Dala-Demokraten* and vice-head of the Bank of Sweden from 1999 to 2006. *Bilder från Nordkorea* has haunted Bergström. The book has been claimed as a grotesque idealization of an appalling dictatorship. The three leftwing radicals had been officially invited to visit North Korea. They were naive enough to believe that they would be able to meet Kim Il Sung, to walk about freely in Pyongyang and to discuss with workers and peasants. But they were led along an official route from one staged setting to the next. From other travelogues like Peter Hyun's *Darkness at Dawn, a North Korean Diary*, from 1981 one realizes that little of importance has changed over the years. Visitors have followed the same routes and listened to the same rhetoric for almost forty years. *Bilder från Nordkorea* is by no means the idealized portrayal that its critics insist. Rather, it develops into an ironical report on the cult of Kim Il Sung and his family which had already assumed massive proportions in 1971. True, the three radicals wanted to find what was positive in the North Korean model. But the book was written before famine struck the country at a time when South Korea was a regimented military dictatorship and when North Korean industries were highly productive. Despite the fact that the three radicals wanted to find a utopian country on the other side of the world, a place where socialism had proved successful, they were soon appalled by the evasive behavior of their guides and the mechanical, tiresome speeches about Kim Il Sung's achievements. See Villy Bergström/Kurt Wickman, *Bilder från Nord Korea*, Tidens förlag 1972.

monument de senaste trettio-fyrtio åren insåg jag när jag läste olika reserapporter.⁹² Som alla andra besökte vi bland annat Juche-tornet, Kim Il Sungs Mausoleum, ”Minnesmuseet över Fäderneslandets Segerrika Befrielsekrig” och Kim Il Sungs födelseplats Mangyondae någon mil från centrum. Vi gick ner i tunnelbanan där man bara fick se två av de sjutton stationerna, och besökte den amerikanska spionbåten Pueblo i Taedong-floden som beslagtogs av nordkoreanerna 1968 och nu fungerar som den främsta trofén i Pyongyang.

Jag betraktade en spinnrock på Kim Il Sungs födelseort. Den såg alltför perfekt ut. Tunnelbanan, som ligger väldigt djupt ner under jorden, var imponerande med kandelabrar och mosaiker. Förutom de många uniformerna var många män klädda i den speciella nordkoreanska kostymen med enkelt slag, när de inte hade kostymbyxor och utanpåskjortor. Kvinnorna bar blus och kjol.

Men spinnrocken var inte där av en slump, förstod jag i efterhand. Den har en central plats i mytologin runt Kim Il Sungs mor Kang Pan-sok. Modern modellerades under 1960-talet till idealfiguren för alla kvinnor i landet. I den officiella biografien framstår hon som en karaktär ur den grekiska mytologin. Enligt Kim Suk-young är spinnrocken en symbol som länkar samman generationer — här sammanfaller kvinn-

92. Nästan på dagen trettiosju år före vår resa var tre svenska vänsterradikaler på resa i Nordkorea. Villy Bergström, Kurt Wickman och Arne Hjort var knutna till tidskrifterna *Tiden*, *Vietnambullentin* och *Marxistiskt Forum* (KFML:s tidskrift vid denna tid). Villy Bergström kom senare att bli chefredaktör för *Dala-Demokraten* och vice riksbankschef mellan 1999 och 2006. *Bilder från Nordkorea* har förföljt Bergström. Man har hållit upp boken som en grotesk skönskrivning av en horribel diktatur. De tre vänsterradikalerna var officiellt inbjudna av den nordkoreanska staten. De var naiva nog att tro att de ska få träffa Kim Il Sung, vandra fritt i Pyongyang och föra diskussioner med arbetare och bönder. Men det blev en snitslad bana mellan kulisser. Av andra reseberättelser, till exempel Peter Hyuns *Darkness at Dawn, a North Korean Diary*, från 1981 förstår man att inget väsentligt har förändrats under åren. Samma rutter, samma retorik under närmare fyrtio års tid. *Bilder från Nordkorea* är inte alls den skönmålning som kritikerna vill göra gällande. Snarare utvecklar den sig till ett ironiskt reportage över den personkult kring Kim Il Sung och hans familj som redan 1971 hade tagit monumentala proportioner. Visserligen finns en vilja hos de tre radikalerna att se det positiva i den nordkoreanska modellen. Men boken skrevs före svältkatastroferna, vid den tid då Sydkorea var en hård militärdiktatur samtidigt som den nordkoreanska industrin gick på högvarv. Trots de tre vänstermännens vilja att hitta en utopisk plats på andra sidan jorden, en plats där man lyckats med socialismen, drivs de snart till vansinne av guidernas undvikande manövrar och malande, mekaniska tal om Kim Il Sungs bedrifter. Se t.ex. Villy Bergström/Kurt Wickman, *Bilder från Nordkorea*, Tidens förlag, 1972.

productivity. There are innumerable tales about how Kim Il Sung's wife inherited these skills and sewed innumerable uniforms for the soldiers during the guerrilla war against the Japanese.⁹³

Our guide Mr Kim provided no explanation as to why we and the other tourists were only shown two of the subway stations. Were these two the only one's worth seeing? According to some journalists, the other fifteen stations only exist in the imagination and all the well-dressed travelers we saw were merely extras riding backwards and forwards between the two stations. But this seems highly improbable. Defectors have claimed that there is a parallel system with other lines than the two official ones.⁹⁴ The unofficial system is supposed to be for the benefit of the elite and it links important buildings with the airport. In this way the top echelons of the party could easily be evacuated in the event of a war. The same defectors maintain that the subway is linked up with an underground military system of bomb shelters, a road along which one can transport weapons and troops, and a gigantic bunker. The public square of this bunker is as large as the Kim Il Sung square with room for 100 000 people.

The segment of the populace with the best living conditions is to be found in Pyongyang. Indeed it is considered an honor to be able to live in the capital. All adults wear a little pin featuring the Great Leader's portrait. This is how little we know about life here and how little one can make out with one's own eyes. There are numerous reports that handicapped people from Pyongyang are sent out to the countryside in order not to spoil the image of prosperity.⁹⁵ People who are not sufficiently loyal are deported to work camps. And three generations of the families of people who manage to escape from these camps and to leave North Korea are punished for

93. Kim Suk-young, "For the Eyes of the Dear Leader: Fashion and Body Politics in North Korean Visual Arts", lecture at the Library of Congress, Washington, 27 June 2007, www.youtube.com/view_play_list?p=8FA0A3359E858D1A (17/3 2010).

94. See <http://www.pyongyang-metro.com/> (an unofficial website that collects information about the subway system, 12/2 2010).

95. See Nicholas Kristof, "North Korea's Secret", *New York Times* January 14, 2003 and Kim Yong Hun, "City of Revolution With No Warmth of Human", *Daily NK*, 28 October 2005.

lighet och moderlighet med produktion. Otaliga är berättelserna om hur sedan Kim Il Sungs hustru tog över skickligheten och för brinnande livet sydde uniformer till militärerna under gerillakriget mot japanerna.⁹³

Vi fick däremot ingen förklaring av Mr Kim till varför vi och övriga turister bara fick se två stationer av tunnelbanan. Är de här två stationerna de enda värda att visa upp? Enligt vissa journalister är de övriga femton bara ett påhitt och alla välklädda passagerare som vi såg bara statister som åker fram och tillbaka. Men det verkar helt osannolikt. Avhoppare har berättat att det finns ett parallellt system med linjer utöver de två officiella.⁹⁴ Det inofficiella systemet skulle vara till för eliten och binder samman viktigare palats med flygplatsen. På så sätt skulle partitopparna snabbt kunna evakueras om kriget bryter ut. Samma avhoppare har berättat att tunnelbanan är sammanlänkad med ett underjordiskt militärt system med skyddsrum, en större väg där man kan transportera vapen och trupper samt en gigantisk bunker. Torget i denna bunker ska vara lika stor som Kim Il Sung-torget och kunna samla hundratusen människor.

I Pyongyang bor den del av befolkningen som har det bäst, det anses i själva verket som en ära att bo här. Alla vuxna bär en lite knappål med Den Store Ledarens porträtt. Så lite vet man om livet här och så lite kan man avgöra med blotta ögat. Det förekommer många uppgifter om alla handikappade i Pyongyang skickas ut på landsbygden för att inte störa bilden.⁹⁵ De som inte uppträder lojalt nog deporteras till arbetsläger. I själva verket behöver inte ens en nordkoreansk medborgare vara oppositionell för att skickas till läger, de få som lyckats fly från dessa läger och ta sig ut

93. Kim Suk-young, "For the Eyes of the Dear leader: Fashion and Body Politics in North Korean Visual Arts", föreläsning vid Library of Congress, Washington, 27 juni 2007, www.youtube.com/view_play_list?p=8FA0A3359E858D1A (17/3 2010).

94. Se <http://www.pyongyang-metro.com/> (en inofficiell sida som samlar information om tunnelbanesystemet, 12/2 2010).

95. Se Nicholas Kristof, "North Korea's Secret", *New York Times* 14/1 2003 och Kim Yong Hun, "City of Revolution With No Warmth of Human", *Daily NK*, 28/10 2005.

“unreliability.”⁹⁶

We stayed at the Yanggakdo hotel where we were isolated from the rest of the city. The 54-storey building towers above its island site in the Taedong River that divides the capital. We were not allowed to leave the island by ourselves. On the island are greenhouses for growing vegetables, a golf course and a cinema complex. The hotel mixes black marketers, diplomats, businessmen, so-called shock tourists and ordinary tourists with politicians and emissaries from the margins of the leftwing. Many of the guests had come to see the mass performances and parades that were organized in celebration of North Korea’s sixtieth anniversary.

As a visitor to North Korea one does one’s utmost to see what one is really seeing. Everything seems to be taking place at a distance and to be cut off. (One is effectively separated from “ordinary” citizens.) In the countryside we saw thin children collecting something in the grass in plastic bags. On the coast there were salt beds and high-tension cables in the water by the beach. On the fields there were billboards with Kim Il Sung quotations and nationalist slogans: “Korea is the best country in the world” and “Forward in joy despite all our sufferings.”

When I looked out of the open window at the Yanggakdo hotel in the early morning I was confronted by thick mist. Loudspeaker voices could be heard in the distance. I could perceive vague movements on the boulevard on the other side of the river. When my eyes began to be able to distinguish the details I noticed a queue of hundreds of armored vehicles gently moving along like a parade of woodlice. At the same time there were streams of people moving along in the opposite direction, many of them carrying red flags. The people hurried along and I could vaguely hear loudspeaker voices exhorting them, interrupted from time to time by revolutionary music.

In North Korea everything is broken down into controllable small units. People are not allowed to leave their villages and towns without permission. There are no

96. For information on North Korea’s work camps for political prisoners, see e.g.: Bertil Lintner, pp. 171–187, Miranda Prynne, “North Korea Uncovered: Palaces, Labour Camps and Mass Graves”, *The Independent*, 21/6 2009, Kang Chor-hwan & Pierre Rigoulot, *The Aquariums of Pyongyang. Ten Years in the North Korean Gulag*, Basic Books 2001 and Andrew Salomon, “Child Born in a Secret Labour Camp Tells of Torture and Beatings”, *The Times* 30/10 2007.

ur Nordkorea berättar att man straffar familjer i tre generationer för ”opålitlighet”.⁹⁶

Vi var inhysta i hotell Yanggakdo där vi hölls åtskiljda från den övriga staden. Den femtiofyra våningar höga byggnaden tronar på en ö i Taedongfloden som klyver Pyongyang. Denna ö fick vi inte lämna på egen hand. Här finns växthus med grönsaker, golfbana och ett filmpalats. I hotellet blandades svartabörshajar, diplomater, affärsmän, så kallade chockturister, vanliga turister med politiker och sändebud från vänsterpolitikens randområden. Många hade anlänt för att se mass-spelen och paraderna som genomfördes för att fira Nordkoreas 60 år som nation.

Som besökare i Nordkorea försöker man anstränga sig till det yttersta för att se vad man egentligen ser. Allt tycks ske på avstånd eller avskärmat. (”Vanliga” människor är man effektivt avskiljd ifrån.) På landsbygden såg vi magra barn samla någonting i gräset i plastpåsar. Vid kusten fanns saltbassänger och högspänningsledning i vattnet intill stranden, på fälten skyltar med Kim Il Sung-citat och nationalistisk åkallan: ”Korea är det bästa landet” och ”Framåt med glädje trots alla umbäranden”.

När jag en tidig morgon tittade ut från det öppna fönstret på hotell Yanggakdo möttes jag av kompakt dimma. Högtalarrösterna hördes från fjärran. Jag uppfattade obestämbara rörelser på boulevarden på andra sidan floden. När ögonen började urskilja detaljer upptäckte jag en kö av hundratals pansarfordon som sakta rörde sig framåt likt en parad av gråuggor, samtidigt som en ström av gående människor, många med röda flaggor, rörde sig i motsatt riktning. Människorna hastade fram, jag hörde svagt hur högtalarrösterna manade på med avbrott för revolutionsmusik.

I Nordkorea har man brutit ner allt till små kontrollerbara enheter. Människor får inte resa från sina byar och städer utan tillstånd, det finns inga restauranger och

96. Om Nordkoreas läger för politiska fångar, se t.ex.: Bertil Lintner, s. 171–187, Miranda Prynne, ”North Korea uncovered: Palaces, Labour Camps and Mass Graves”, *The Independent*, 21/6 2009, Kang Chor-hwan & Pierre Rigoulot, *The Aquariums of Pyongyang: Ten Years in the North Korean Gulag*, Basic Books 2001 och Andrew Salomon, ”Child Born in a Secret Labour Camp Tells of Torture and Beatings”, *The Times* 30/10 2007.

bars or restaurants where the populace could meet and everywhere there are military checkpoints. We were flown to various destinations by military aircraft since there are no regular domestic flights. At Pyongyang's airport, the arrival and departure boards were completely empty on the day we were to fly to Chongjin.

On one occasion, at Kim Il Sung square, I felt that it was not necessary to try so hard to see and interpret every detail. Was it not enough to cast a glance at the square and to note the scale and size of the portraits of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il that flanked the square? Did not this tell one everything?

In the mass games at the May Day Stadium in Pyongyang, approximately thirty thousand schoolchildren created a giant screen in which each individual corresponded to one pixel. Each schoolboy held a 170-page catalogue of colored paper. The Arirang event is performed every year on a different theme. In 2008 it was titled *Prosper Ye Motherland*.

I visited the stadium twice. On both occasions I was absolutely bowled over, feeling that this was the most extraordinary thing that I had ever seen. On the second occasion, during a mass gymnastics display, I secretly filmed the scenes that are included in the video *Madame & Little Boy*. The start of the display was also the introduction to my video essay: the children stamping to a beat. They gave a blood-curdling yell that could be felt like a wave of sound on the terraces. The children changed the pages of their catalogues and a giant image of a mountainous landscape appeared. It was all a matter of synchronization, of being able to act as a single organism for it is only then that one can create the "world's largest image."⁹⁷

What I experienced was a staging of the words of the propaganda about a people ".../ firmly united like a monolithic organism, breathing, thinking, and acting in accordance with the Great Leader. /.../ a human, historic example of ideological unity at a high level which is without precedent in any other society in the East and the West and in all ages and which can only be realized in the land of Kimilsungism."⁹⁸

97. According to the information brochure that I bought at the stadium, there are special factories that do nothing but produce costumes and props for the annual Arirang display. The colored paper pages of the catalogue alone amount to some 2.2 million sheets of paper according to the brochure.

98. Peter Hyun quoting *The Peoples Korea*. See also Jonathan Watts, "Welcome to the strangest show on earth", *The Guardian* 1/10 2005. The director of the display, Song Sok-hwang, comments: "The US imperialists are trying to stifle us. They create a negative image of North Korea. I hope Arirang helps to counter that".

barer där den inhemska befolkningen kan samlas, överallt finns militära checkpoints. När vi skulle flyga mellan olika platser använde man militärflygplan. Det fanns ingen inhemsk, reguljär flygtrafik. På Pyongyangs flygplats var tavlan för ankommande och avgående flyg helt tom den dag vi skulle flyga till Chongijn.

Vid ett tillfälle, vid Kim Il Sung-torget, tänkte jag att det var onödigt att försöka anstränga sig för att se och tolka varje detalj. Räckte det inte att slänga en blick på torget och uppfatta storleken på porträtten av Kim Il Sung och Kim Jong Il, som flankerade torget? Sa det inte allt?

I mass-spelen på Rungrado May Day Stadium i Pyongyang bildade trettiotusen skolbarn en jättelik levande skärm där varje individ motsvarade en pixel. I händerna hade varje skolpojke en 170-sidig katalog med färgade ark. Arirang-spelet, som det kallas, uppförs varje år med olika teman, 2008 hette det *Prosper Ye Motherland*.

Två gånger besökte jag denna stadion. Båda gångerna var jag fullkomligt andlös och tänkte att det var det märkligaste jag någonsin sett. Vid det andra tillfället, under en massgymnastikuppvisning filmade jag i smyg de scener som ingår i *Madame & Little Boy*. Uppvisningens inledning fick bli inledningen till videoessän: Barnen stampade taktfast. De gav ifrån sig ett blodisande vrål som böljade fram över läktaren i en ljudvåg. Barnen växlade blad på sina kataloger och en gigantisk bild av ett bergslandskap framträdde. Allt handlade om synkronisering, att fungera som en enda organism, först då kan man skapa "världens största bild".⁹⁷

Vad jag upplevde var en iscensättning av propagandans ord om ett folk "/.../ strikt sammanhållet som en monolitisk organism som andas, tänker och agerar i enighet med Den Store Ledarens revolutionära idé. /.../ ett mänskligt, historiskt exempel av ideologisk enhet på hög nivå, utan motsvarighet i något annat samhälle i Öst och Väst och i någon annan tid, enbart möjlig att realisera i landet av Kimilsungism."⁹⁸

97. Enligt den broschyr med information jag köpte på stadium sägs att speciella fabriker enbart ägnar sig åt kostym- och rekvisitaproduktion för de årliga Arirang-spelen. Bara det färgade pappret i katalogerna med vilka skolbarnen skapar jättebilderna består 2,2 miljoner blad enligt broschyren.

98. Peter Hyun citerar *The Peoples Korea*. Se också Jonathan Watts, "Welcome to the strangest show on earth", *The Guardian* 1/10 2005. Regissören Song Sok-hwang säger: "The US imperialists are trying to stifle us. They create a negative image of North Korea. I hope Arirang helps to counter that".

But I was also reminded of how Don DeLillo described a mass wedding among members of the Moon-cult in *Mao II*.

When the Old God leaves the world, what happens to all the unexpended faith? He looks at each sweet face, round face, long, wrong, darkish, plain. They are a nation, he supposes, founded on the principle of easy belief. A unit fuelled by credulousness. They speak half a language, a set of ready-made terms and empty repetitions. All things, the sum of the knowable, everything true, it all comes down to a few simple formulas copied and memorized and passed on. And here is the drama of mechanical routine played out with living figures. /.../ This really scares him, a mass of people turned into a sculptured object.⁹⁹

Roughly 100 000 people took part in the Arirang display according to the information we were given. And how many more were involved in transportation, catering, costumes, sets and props, music, medical staff, security and engineering? Five days later there were nearly as many participants present at the gymnastics display. A considerable proportion of Pyongyang's population must be involved in these displays either on stage or behind the scenes or in producing the events. The rest of the population must make up the audience since the stadium holds 150 000 spectators and the events last for a month.

It was only when I looked at my material while editing that I was able to see what I had not noticed at the stadium: the expression on the participants' faces, how the schoolchildren's heads appeared behind the colored pieces of paper, that a girl made a mistake in a skipping-rope sequence providing a small, almost invisible departure from the perfect pattern of movements.

*

In 1958 Chris Marker made a trip to North Korea. This resulted in a book of photographs – *Coréennes* – which was published the following year.

99. Don DeLillo, *Mao II*, Penguin Books 1992, p. 7.

Men jag tänkte också på hur Don DeLillo i *Mao II, den stora massans ensamhet* beskrev ett massbröllop mellan anhängare av medlemmar i Moon-sekten:

När den Gamla Guden lämnar världen, vad händer då med all oförbrukad tro? Han betraktar varje ansikte, sött, runt, fult, fel, mörkt, vanligt. De är som ett folk, samlat kring den enkla trons princip. En maskin som drivs av naiv övertygelse. De talar ett halvspråk, en uppsättning färdigstöpta uttryck och tomma upprepningar. Allting, summan av det vetbara, det som är äkta reduceras till några enkla fraser som kopieras och präntas in och förs vidare. Och här uppförs detta mekaniskt malande drama av levande aktörer. // Det skrämmer honom verkligen, att se en hel folkhop förvandlas till ett levande föremål.⁹⁹

Ungefär hundratusen människor agerade i Arirang-spelet, enligt vad vi fick veta. Hur många var dessutom inblandade i själva organisationen med transporter, catering, dräkter, scenografi, musik, sjukvårdspersonal, säkerhet och teknik? Fem dagar senare var nästan lika många deltagare på plats i massgymnastik-uppvisningen. En ansevärd del av Pyongyangs befolkning måste vara involverade i dessa föreställningar på eller bakom scenen, eller i produktionen. Den resterande delen deltar som publik med tanke på att stadion tar hundrafemtiotusen besökare och föreställningarna pågår under en månads tid.

Först när jag tittade på mitt material under redigeringen kunde jag se vad jag inte kunde uppfatta på stadion: uttryck i de deltagandes ansikten, hur skolbarnens huvuden tittade upp bakom de färgade arken, att en flicka misslyckades under en sekvens med hopprep, som en liten, nästan osynlig avvikelse i det annars perfekta mönstret av rörelser.

*

1958 reste Chris Marker i Nordkorea. Resan resulterade i en fotobok – *Coréennes* [Koreanskor]– som gavs ut året därpå. I början av texten föreslår han:

99. Don DeLillo, *Mao II – den stora massans ensamhet*, Wahlström & Widstrand 1992, s 10-11.

There are different ways of traveling – the Barnabooth way, the Genghis Khan way, the Plume way (invented by Henri Michaux). For example: accepting the disorder of rhymes, waves, shocks, all the bumpers of memory, its meteors and undertows. Chance has intuitions, which shouldn't always be taken for coincidences.¹⁰⁰

I imagine that when Marker talks about Barnabooth's approach he talks about the dandy's or the *flaneur's* heedless gaze, sometimes preoccupied and sometimes curious,¹⁰¹ while Djingis Kahn stands for the ruthlessness of the imperialist and Michaux's Plume for the person who regards their travels as an excuse for a journey that basically takes place in the author's own preconceptions and his own language. Plume, who is a literary figure¹⁰² and possibly Michaux's alter ego, might well be a cross between Gérard de Nerval and Raymond Roussel.

Which of the three approaches did Chris Marker adopt? What did he see in North Korea? The answer is that Chris Marker primarily saw things of beauty. Marker looks at faces, at shifts in expression and details. He does not want to create a sense of the exotic and he distances himself from the clichés about the cruelty of the Koreans that the Americans established during the Korean War. Through Marker's eyes everything in North Korea becomes beautiful, especially the women.

Korea, *Korai*... On my first image of Pyongyang, the same curling lips, the same playful, tranquil smile that I had photographed a year before in the Athens museum. Language has its reasons.¹⁰³

North Korea (with China, Italy and the land of the Boro Indians) is one of the politest countries in the world, Marker writes, and this politeness can be found in the beauty of the people. And the workers struggling to refurbish an ancient Japanese locomotive at a factory in Sonsan are indefatigable. True, as early as 1958 the pro-

100. <http://www.markertext.com/coreenes.htm> (10/3 2010). The book was seen as an attempt to transfer film into a book and the subtitle of the book was Court-Métrage [short film]. *Coréenes* was first published by Editions du Seuil in Paris in 1959. The book was republished by a South Korean publisher (Noonbit Publishing) in a Korean translation in 2008.

101. A character invented by the French author Valéry Larbaud (1881-1957).

102. Henri Michaux, *En viss Plume*, Sanatorium Förlag 2006.

103. <http://www.markertext.com/coreenes.htm> (10/3 2010).

Det finns tre sätt att resa — Barnabooth-sättet, Djingis Khan-sättet, Plume-sättet (uppfunnet av Henri Michaux). Till exempel: acceptera ramsornas, vågornas, skakningarnas oregelbundenhet, alla minnets stötfångare, dess meteorer och bakströmmar. Slump har ingivelser, som inte alltid bör tas för sammanträffanden.¹⁰⁰

Jag antar att Barnaboths sätt står för dandyns och flanörens obekymrade, ömsom förströdda ömsom nyfikna blick,¹⁰¹ Djingis Kahn för imperialistens hänsynslöshet och Michauxs Plume för den som tar resan som förevändning för en resa där allt väsentligt utspelar sig i de egna föreställningarna och det egna språket. Plume, som är en litterär karaktär¹⁰², och kanske Michauxs alter ego, skulle kunna vara korsning av Gérard de Nerval och Raymond Roussel.

Så vilken av de tre sätten anslöt sig Chris Marker till? Vad såg han i Nordkorea? Svaret är att Chris Marker framför allt såg sköna ting. Marker tittar på människornas ansikten, på skiftningar och detaljer. Han vill inte exotisera och han tar avstånd från schablonerna av de grymma koreanerna, som amerikanerna mejslade ut under Korea-kriget. Allt i Nordkorea blir vackert i Markers ögon, framför allt kvinnorna.

Korea, *Korai*... På min första bild av Pyongyang, samma krökta läppar, samma lekfulla, stilla leende som jag hade fotograferat året innan på Atens museum. Språket har sina skäl.¹⁰³

Nordkorea (tillsammans med Kina, Italien och Boro-indianernas land) är ett av de mest artiga länderna i världen, skriver Marker, och denna artighet står att finna i människornas skönhet. Och arbetarna som kämpar med att rusta upp ett gammalt japanskt lokomotiv på en fabrik i Sonsan är outtröttliga. Visserligen är propagandan redan 1958 ”omutlig” men det förmörkar inte Markers syner. Han befinner sig i ett

100. <http://www.markertext.com/coreenes.htm> (10/3 2010) Boken sågs som ett försök att överföra film till bok, undertiteln var Court-Métrage [kortfilm]. *Coréenes* gavs ut första gången på Editions du Seuil, Paris 1959. Boken återutgavs 2008 på ett sydkoreanskt förlag (Noonbit Publishing) med koreansk översättning av texten.

101. En karaktär uppfunnen av den franske författaren Valéry Larbaud (1881–1957).

102. Henri Michaux, *En viss Plume*, översättning: Jonas Rydin, Sanatorium Förlag 2006.

103. <http://www.markertext.com/coreenes.htm> (10/3 2010, min övers. M.B.)

paganda was irreconcilable but this did not obscure Marker's vision. Marker is in a politically charged area but his essay is strangely non-political. He travels "the Plume way" and it is striking how he constantly relates his impression to what he already knows, to his own experiences: "The smell of the fields had already brought me back to Italy, even before the tombs of Kanso brought me back to Caere and the Etruscan tombs."¹⁰⁴

His impressions give rise to positive images, pleasant memories and references. On a visit to a market in Kaesong everything reminds him of Mexico. There are few unpleasant experiences in his report. An old man shows him a snake and is reprovved with a blow by another man. The old man with the snake disappears among the crowds:

/.../ what I felt there, the way a foot laid inadvertently on a tomb makes you feel the cold of death for one second, was a flash of hatred (so Mexican!). Toward me? Toward him? Blame, shame, fear? A critique of bad country manners, exasperation at my desire for the picturesque while they're trying to build a modern Korea – or is it just that ophiolatry is prohibited in this town? I'll never know.¹⁰⁵

In 1997 Chris Marker commented on his own report. In the light of the catastrophic famine North Korea appeared as a gigantic mistake. Marker claimed that, following the publication of *Coréenes*, both sides were against him. The communists accused him of not mentioning the Great Leader by name while in the South his book was shown behind glass in an "anti-revolutionary museum" with a sign calling him a "Marxist dog."

Marker realized that the "/.../ balance sheet to which most of the texts and images on this disc bear witness is totally disastrous." He produced a sort of ideological accounting:

What you call the errors of socialism *is* socialism, what you call unbridled capitalism *is* capitalism. /.../ Much has been made of the resemblances between the two totalitarianisms, communism and Nazism. They are undeniable, with this one dif-

104. Ibid.

105. Ibid.

av de mest politiskt laddade områdena men hans text är märkligt avpolitiserad. Han reser ”the Plume way” och det är slående hur han hela tiden återför sina intryck till det han känner till, till sina egna erfarenheter: ”Doften av fälten hade redan tagit mig tillbaka till Italien, redan innan Kansos gravar tog mig tillbaka till Caere och de etruskiska gravarna.”¹⁰⁴

Intrycken ger upphov till ”medbilder”, angenäma minnen och referenser. På ett besök på en marknad i Kaesong påminner honom allt om Mexico. Här finns en av de få obehagliga upplevelserna. En gammal man visar upp en orm och blir för sitt tilltag tillrättavisad med ett slag av en annan man. Den gamle med ormen försvinner snabbt i mängden:

*/.../ vad jag kände där, liksom när en fot som oavsiktligt stiger på en grav för en sekund får en att känna den kalla döden, var en blyxt av hat (så mexikanskt!). Riktat mot mig? Mot honom? Anklagelse, skam, fruktan? En kritik av dåliga landsortsmanér, förargelse över mitt traktande efter det pittoreska när de försökte bygga ett modernt Korea – eller är det bara så att ormdyrkan är förbjuden i den här staden? Jag kommer aldrig att få veta.*¹⁰⁵

I ett tillägg från 1997 kommenterar Marker sin egen text. I ljuset av svältkatastrofen framstod Nordkorea som ett gigantiskt misstag. Marker menar att han efter publiceringen av *Coréenes* fick båda lägren emot sig. Kommunisterna klandrade honom för att inte en enda gång ha nämnt Den Store Ledarens namn. I syd visades hans bok upp i en vitrin på ”anti-revolutionsmuseet” försedd med lapp med texten ”marxistisk hund”.

Marker inser att hans ”/.../ balansräkning som de flesta av de texter och bilder på denna disc vittnar om är helt katastrofal”. Han gör ett slags ideologiskt bokslut:

Vad man kallar socialismens misstag är socialism, vad du kallar otyglad kapitalism är kapitalism. /.../ Mycket har gjorts om likheterna mellan de två totalitära systemen, kommunism och nazism. De kan inte förnekas, med den skillnaden att kom-

104. Ibid.

105. Ibid.

ference, that the communists committed their crimes in betrayal of the values on which they founded themselves, and the Nazis, in fulfillment of theirs. Maybe that difference is the wrong question. Or maybe it's the whole question."¹⁰⁶

*

In the autumn of 2007 I happened to be at the SF-88 Nike Missile Site on the Martin Headlands to the north of San Francisco. The Marin Headlands had been a restricted military area with no public access until the beginning of the 1980s. I had a grant from the neighboring Headlands Center for the Arts and I attended several tours with veterans as guides. There were official times for the tours but, on occasions, they just waited for a sufficient number of visitors to turn up and then started the tour. The veterans told us about the missiles with nuclear warheads that were intended to defend the bay. "I had no idea, then, that until 1974, when the Nike site here was decommissioned, there were nuclear missiles ready to fire just a few miles from my childhood bed," one journalist wrote in 2008.¹⁰⁷ This is the only place in the USA where they have preserved a missile site and opened it to the public.

I heard the veterans' stories on several occasions. They talked about how the safety rules had to be very strictly maintained and about how someone had casually lit a cigarette on the site and had immediately been killed by a guard dog. Many of the people who visited the site were well aware of the nuclear weapons program; some of them had worked at other missile sites. I noticed that there was a strong feeling of affinity among people who had previously shared these secrets as functionaries in the Cold War apparatus.

One of the veterans explained that he had worked at a similar missile site in South Korea ("for three years, ten months and three days"). I realized that I was not aware of the fact that there had been missiles with nuclear warheads in South Korea targeting

106. Ibid.

107. Daniel Terdiman, "Unseen Nike Missiles Once Protected S.F., other U.S. cities" 23/5 2008. http://news.cnet.com/8301-13772_3-9951001-52.html (3/2 2010).

ministerna begick sina brott i förräderi mot de värden på vilka de var grundade, och nazisterna i uppfyllelse av sina. Kanske den skillnaden är fel fråga. Eller kanske det är hela frågan.¹⁰⁶

*

Hösten 2007 befann jag mig på SF-88 Nike Missile Site på Marin Headlands, strax norr om San Francisco. Hela Marin Headlands hade varit militärt skyddsområde, otillgängligt för allmänheten, fram till början av 1980-talet. Jag hade ett stipendium på Headlands Center of the Arts alldeles intill, flera gånger besökte jag visningarna som genomfördes av militärveteranerna. Man hade tider för visningarna, men ibland väntade man bara på att lite folk skulle dyka upp och när tillräckligt många var där gjorde man en rundvandring och veteranerna berättade om de kärnvapenbestyckade missiler som skulle försvara San Francisco-bukten. ”Jag hade ingen aning om att det fanns till 1974, då Nike-anläggningen avvecklades, avskjutningsklara kärnvapenmissiler bara några mil från min barndomssäng”, skriver en journalist 2008.¹⁰⁷ Det här är den enda platsen i USA där man behållit missilanläggningen, vårdat den och gjort den tillgänglig för allmänheten.

Jag hörde veteranernas historier flera gånger. Man pratade om hur de hårda reglerna för säkerhet inte fick äventyras, om hur någon tänt en cigarett inne på området och omedelbart blivit dödad av en vakthund. Flera av dem som besökte platsen var insatta i kärnvapenprogrammet, några hade själva jobbat på andra missilanläggningar. Jag märkte att det fanns en stark känsla av samhörighet mellan de som tidigare delat sina hemligheter som funktionärer i det kalla krigets apparat.

En av veteranerna berättade att han arbetat på en liknande anläggningen i Sydkorea (”i tre år, tio månader och tre dagar”). Jag insåg att jag inte kände till att man haft avfyrningsklara missiler med kärnvapen i Sydkorea. I själva verket riktade man sina

106. Ibid.

107. Daniel Terdiman, "Unseen Nike Missiles Once Protected S.F., other U.S. cities" 23/5 2008. http://news.cnet.com/8301-13772_3-9951001-52.html (3/2 2010).

the north up until 1991.¹⁰⁸

A hatch in the ground was opened and a missile ascended from below. One could then climb onto a platform and accompany the missile down into the rock silo. It was all very undramatic. One held onto the missile with one hand and was lowered into the silo where a further five Nike-Hercules missiles were laid out, seemingly unspoiled by the passage of time. The veteran talked about the history of the place and he showed us where the nuclear device used to be fitted into the missile. On one occasion there were some children in the group who listened attentively while I filmed the occasion. When I later looked at the film it struck me that the story of Madame, the kidnapping, *Pulgasari* and the bomb could be told to children. I felt that this could be done in emblematic fashion by relying on the pictures which could be shown and commented on in the same way as the kamishibai narrator who announced his arrival with wooden clappers and was then prepared to offer stories and candy for a small charge. A kamishibai narrator does much the same thing as a narrator in a video essay: speaking and listening to pictures (Harun Farocki).

When one came up out of the silos and looked around one could see the artists' studios which now occupied what had once been the quarters for the staff of the missile site. When I recorded Will Oldham's voice and actions in the building I was not aware of the fact that a film entitled *Fatman & Little Boy* had been filmed on the base (with Paul Newman, John Cusack and Laura Dern) in 1989. The film dealt with the Manhattan Project and it ended with a mushroom cloud formation in New Mexico.

In my view, the story of Madame & Little Boy took the form of a geographical triangle involving the USA, Korea and Japan. Between these three points during the 20th century there were currents of influence, political exchanges, the exercise of power and there were conflicts. In the middle of the triangle was the atomic bomb.

Japan colonized Korea but was crushed by the USA. The cultural influence of the USA on Japan and Korea was strong after World War II, but today the influence goes

108. Both Eisenhower and Truman threatened to use nuclear weapons against North Korea on several occasions. See e.g. Brian Frederick, *The United States and the Security Council. Collective Security Since the Cold War*, Routledge, New York 2007, p. 119 and Lee Jae-bong, "U.S. Deployment of Nuclear Weapons in 1950s South Korea & North Korea's Nuclear Development: Toward Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula", *The Asia Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*, http://www.japanfocus.org/-Lee-Jae_Bong/3053 (5/2 2010).

kärnvapen mot Nordkorea ända fram till 1991.¹⁰⁸

En lucka i marken fälldes upp och en missil kom upp ur underjorden. Man fick sedan ställa sig på plattformen och följa med missilen ner i bergsrummet. Det hela var väldigt odramatiskt. Man höll ena handen på missilen och sänktes ner i förvaringsrummet där ytterligare fem Nike-Hercules-missiler låg upplagda, och verkade oanfrätta av tidens gång. Veteranen berättade om platsens historia, han visade var bestyckningen med kärnvapen tidigare var fäst i missilen. Vid ett tillfälle fanns barn med som lyssnade uppmärksamt och jag filmade det hela. Jag tänkte när jag såg på dessa filmade sekvenser att historien om Madame, kidnappningen, *Pulgasari* och bomben kunde berättas som för barn. Jag tänkte att det kunde göras på ett emblematiskt sätt, genom att utgå från bilder som man visar upp och kommenterar likt den japanske kamishibai-berättaren som annonserade sin ankomst med träklappor för att sedan mot en liten slant erbjuda berättelser och godis. En kamishibai-berättare gör ungefär vad en berättare i en videoessä gör: att tala och lyssna till bilder (Harun Farocki).

När man kom upp ur bergsrummet och höjde blicken såg man konstnärsateljéerna, inhyrda i vad som en gång var kasernerna för missilanläggningens personal. När jag spelade in Will Oldhams röst och agerande i byggnaden visste jag inte att en film med titeln *Fatman & Little Boy* hade spelats in i kasernerna (med Paul Newman, John Cusack och Laura Dern) 1989. Filmen handlade om Manhattanprojektet och slutade med en svampmolnsformation i New Mexico.

Berättelsen om Madame & Little Boy hade figuren av en geografisk triangel, som jag såg det. USA – Korea – Japan. Mellan dessa tre punkter fanns under 1900-talet strömmar av influenser, politiska utbyten, maktutövning och konflikter. I mitten av triangeln fanns atombomben.

Japan kolonialiserade Korea men krossades av USA. USA:s kulturella påverkan på Japan och Korea var efter kriget stark men idag går påverkan också åt andra riktningar

108. Både Eisenhower och Truman hotade flera gånger att använda kärnvapen mot Nordkorea. Se t.ex. Brian Frederick, *The United States and the Security Council: Collective Security Since the Cold War*, Routledge 2007, s.119 och Lee Jae-bong, "U.S. Deployment of Nuclear Weapons in 1950s South Korea & North Korea's Nuclear Development: Toward Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula", *The Asia Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*, http://www.japanfocus.org/-Lee-Jae_Bong/3053 (5/2 2010).

in other directions too with the Japanese *kawai* culture being exported to the USA and Korea, for example, while Korean films, music, food and entertainment – the “Korean Wave” or *hallyu* – are powerfully influencing Japan and becoming visible in the USA.¹⁰⁹ In addition there is a strong Korean presence in most American cities.

The Godzilla figure underwent a journey with a number of transformations from Japan to the USA via North Korea. Atomic weapons were sent from the USA to Japan and Korea. It was these sequences of remakes, imitations and metamorphoses that I wanted to develop in my video essay.

The three nodes also house a number of narrative forms. In Japan there is the monster film and the *kamishibai* tradition. In both North and South Korea there is the melodramatic form of propaganda. And in the USA there is the narrative tradition that can be termed *Americana*. And so I let Will Oldham (aka Bonnie ‘Prince’ Billy) act as the narrator and thus to color the narrative and it was not until I had decided to work with him (and managed to arrange this) that I succeeded in finding a way in which to write the story. I wanted the narrative to give the impression of having been “taken over,” “transferred” yet not actually “owned” by anyone. By removing the sound of Madame’s voice I wanted to create an insecure situation in which Oldham’s voice would, at times, appear to translate her words while at other times be independent, as though Madame herself was listening to her own story at certain moments.¹¹⁰

When Johnny Cash made his version of ‘Prince’ Billy’s *I See a Darkness* in 2000

109. See Aaron Han Joon Magnan Park, “Remember Me, Remember Us, Remember Korea: Hallyu; Flashbacks and the Transformations of South Korea Into an Unforgettable Nation”, *Towards Sustainable Economic & Security Relations in the East Asia: U.S. and Rok Policy Options*, Joint U.S.-Korea Academic Studies 2008.

110. Will Oldham, who is a musician and actor (born 1970), grew up in Louisville, Kentucky where he still lives. At an early stage he was discovered by a talent scout who happened to visit the theater in Louisville where he was performing. At the age of seventeen he was given a part in John Sayle’s film *Matewan* which deals with a miners’ strike in West Virginia. Oldham has had a number of roles in American independent film, for instance *Julien Donkey-Boy* (Harmony Korinne, 1999), *The Guatemalan Handshake* (Todd Rohal, 2006) and *Old Joy* (Jonathan Raymond, 2006). He has also acted in music videos by Kanye West and R’Kelly (who is one of his most esteemed colleagues, along with Leonard Cohen).

med japansk gullighetskultur till USA och Korea. Koreansk film, musik, mat och underhållning – ”the Korean Wave” eller *hallyu* – påverkar sedan en tid Japan starkt och börjar också märkas i USA.¹⁰⁹ Dessutom är den koreanska närvaron stor i många amerikanska städer.

Godzilla-figuren genomgick en resa med ett antal omvandlingar från Japan till USA via Nordkorea. Atomvapnet färdades från USA till Japan och Korea. Det är dessa sekvenser av *remakes*, imitationer och förvandlingar jag vill låta verka i min videoessä.

I de tre noderna finns också ett antal former för berättelsen: I Japan: monsterfilmen och kamishibai-traditionen; i Korea (nord som syd): den melodramatiska formen av propaganda; i USA: den berättartradition som kallas *Americana*. Jag lät Will Oldham (alias Bonnie ’Prince’ Billy) framträda som uppläsare och färga in berättelsen och det var först när jag bestämt mig (och lyckats få till stånd) ett samarbete med honom som jag hittade ett sätt att skriva berättelsen. Jag skrev den för en speciell röst. Jag ville att berättelsen skulle ge intryck av vara ”övertagen” och ”förflyttad” men inte ”ägd” av någon. Genom att ta bort ljudet av Madames röst ville jag skapa en situation där Oldhams röst ömsom verkade översätta hennes ord och ömsom var frikopplad, som om Madame själv i vissa stunder lyssnade till sin egen berättelse.¹¹⁰

När Johnny Cash gjorde sin version av ’Prince’ Billys *I See a Darkness* på coverski-

109. See Aaron Han Joon Magnan-Park, "Remember Me, Remember Us, Remember Korea: Hallyu, Flashbacks and the Transformations of South Korea into an Unforgettable Nation", *Towards Sustainable Economic & Security Relations in the East Asia: U.S. and Rok Policy Options*, Joint U.S.-Korea Academic Studies 2008.

110. Musikern och skådespelaren Will Oldham (född 1970) växte upp i Louisville, Kentucky där han fortfarande bor. Tidigt upptäcktes han av en talangscout som besökte teatern i Louisville där Oldham uppträdde. Som sjuttonåring fick han en roll i John Sayles film *Matewan*, som handlar om en gruvarbetarstrejk i West Virginia. Oldham har haft roller i ett antal amerikanska independentproduktioner, t.ex. *Julien Donkey-Boy* (Harmony Korine, 1999), *The Guatemalan Handshake* (Todd Rohal, 2006) och *Old Joy* (Jonathan Raymond, 2006). Han har också agerat i musikvideor av Kanye West och R’Kelly (R’Kelly håller han tillsammans med Leonard Cohen högst av alla sina kollegor).

Oldham was the only one of the artists who took part in the recording.¹¹¹ The event can be seen as a symbolic handing over from the iconic representative of *Americana* to the (progressive) representative of the new era.¹¹²

Will Oldham's voice and his presence in my video were taken from a source with which I had a closer relationship (though perhaps not full understanding of) than with the Korean narrative tradition. There is an imperialist logic to this: that a Korean story with its individualization and myth creation is filtered through American culture (like the Hollywood model that Shin created in Seoul). This was my choice rather than the supposed objectivity of the documentary film with its notion of a neutral voice.

At the Marriott Hotel in Seoul we took a break from our interview and I put my camera on a tripod and asked Choi Eun-hee to look into the lens for as long as she was able to. This caused her distress. She had been acting all her life and an actor does not look into the camera without good reason. She found the situation difficult, not acting and not having any instructions. It was these scenes of her distress at the situation that I later used in my video essay.

Kim Jong Il called Choi Eun-hee the "Mother of Chosum." Perhaps he meant that her roles were representative of all women in Korea; that the history of Korea came to life in the various figures she portrayed: the daughter of a *giaseng* (geisha)

111. The album was a part of the American Recordings series encompassing six records by Johnny Cash with Rick Rubin as producer that were released 1994–2010 (the last two posthumously). Will Oldham had met Rick Rubin at a Leonard Cohen concert in New York. Rubin told him that Cash wanted to make his version of *I See a Darkness* and wondered if Will would come to the studio in Los Angeles and make some piano additions, and Will immediately said yes. So flattered was Will that he didn't think to mention that he does not play the piano. Instead he traveled to Los Angeles and arrived at the studio just as Cash was busy working on his vocals. Cash had made many attempts but wasn't pleased with the result and asked Will to give him instructions. Will said that this was one of the most surreal moments in his life: to sit in Johnny Cash's studio and give him instructions on how to best sing his own song.

112. "Any modern music connoisseur worth their salt knows how vital and influential singer-songwriter Will Oldham's melancholic, Americana-tinged output is to the indie-rock pantheon, whether he's recording under his own name or one of his countless monikers: Bonnie 'Prince' Billy, Palace Brothers, Palace Songs, Palace Music, et al." (Michael Truly, "Q & A with Actor-Musician Will Oldham", <http://bentenfilms.com/Will-Oldham-interview.shtml>) See also: Tom Sutcliffe, "Bonnie Prince Billy: The Grand Fromage of the Americana Scene", *The Independent* 7 February 2009. For an unorthodox take on Americana, see James Dunkerley, *Americana: The Americas in the World around 1850*, Verso 2000.

van *American III: Solitary Man* (2000) var Oldham den ende artisten på skivan som också deltog i inspelningen.¹¹¹ Händelsen kan, för den som vill, ses som ett symboliskt överlämnande från den ikoniske representanten för *Americana* till den nya tidens (progressiva) representant.¹¹²

Will Oldhams röst och närvaro i min video hämtades alltså från en källa som jag själv hade ett närmare förhållande till (om än inte full förståelse för) än koreanska berättartraditioner. Sedan många år hade jag fascinerats av Will Oldhams musik, röst och uppenbarelse. Det finns en imperialistisk logik i detta – att en koreansk berättelse, med sin individualisering och mytologisering, får gestalt via det amerikanska (liksom den Hollywood-modell som Shin skapade i Seoul). Detta var mitt val i motsats till dokumentärens förmenta objektivitet med idén om en neutral röst.

När vi filmade sekvenserna På hotell Marriott i Seoul gjorde vi ett avbrott i samtalet och jag ställde upp kameran på ett stativ och bad Madame titta in i kameran så länge hon orkade. Det var plågsamt för henne. Hon hade varit skådespelare hela sitt liv och en skådespelare tittar inte in i kameran utan anledning. Hon hade svårt att inte agera och inte ha några anvisningar. Det var dessa scener, med hennes vända inför situationen, som jag kom att använda i videoessän.

Kim Jong Il kallade Choi Eun-hee för Chosuns moder. Kanske menade han att hon genom sina roller representerade alla kvinnor i Korea, att historien om Korea spelades upp genom hennes olika gestalter: dotter till en *giaseng* (geisha) i det feodala

111. Albumet ingick i skivbolaget American Recordings serie om sex skivor av Johnny Cash och med Rick Rubin som producent som kom ut mellan 1994–2010 (de två sista postumt). Will Oldham hade träffat Cashs producent Rick Rubin på en konsert med Leonard Cohen i New York. Rubin berättade att Cash ville göra sin version av *I See a Darkness* och undrade om Will möjligen ville komma till studion i Los Angeles och göra några pianopålägg och Will tackade genast ja. Will var så smickrad att han inte kom sig för att berätta att han inte spelade piano. Istället reste han till Los Angeles och anlände till studion just när Cash höll på att arbeta med hans sång. Cash hade gjort många försök men var inte nöjd med resultatet och bad Will att ge honom instruktioner. Will berättade att det här var en av hans mest överkliga stunder: att sitta i Johnny Cash studio och instruera honom hur man bäst sjunger hans egen sång.

112. "Any modern music connoisseur worth their salt knows how vital and influential singer-songwriter Will Oldham's melancholic, Americana-tinged output is to the indie-rock pantheon, whether he's recording under his own name or one of his countless monikers: Bonnie 'Prince' Billy, Palace Brothers, Palace Songs, Palace Music, et al." (Michael Truly, "Q & A with Actor-Musician Will Oldham", <http://bentfilms.com/Will-Oldham-interview.shtml>) Se också: Tom Sutcliffe, "Bonnie Prince Billy: The Grand Fromage of the Americana Scene", *The Independent* 7/2 2009. För en ovanlig ingång till Americana se James Dunkerley, *Americana: The Americas in the World around 1850*, Verso 2000.

in feudal Korea, the indomitable teacher in a village school during the Japanese occupation, *yanggongju* (“UN lady,” i.e. prostitute) in poverty-stricken Seoul after the Korean War, the eloquent defence attorney for a woman who murdered her husband after years of humiliation, the virtuous widow during the 1960s during the struggle between tradition and modernity, the daughter of an office worker in an insurance company who is sacked but refuses to accept the market logic of the new era... David Scott Diffrient claims that, in unique fashion, Choi Eun-hee “/.../ parlayed her screen iconicity as both “new woman” and traditional wife into a complex evocation of Korean femininity during a post-war era characterized by competing cultures and values.”¹¹³

More than two years elapsed after the interview at the Marriott and before the video essay was finished. It was first shown at the exhibition *Void of Memory/Platform Seoul-09* organized by Samsuo, Space for Contemporary Art in Seoul (curated by Kim Sunjung and Mami Kataoka) in September 2009. The exhibition was held in Kimusa, the former premises of the Korean Defense Security Command which also housed a military hospital.

The exhibition sought to be a link between “open,” “folded” and “hidden” memories and the building itself is a monument to all three forms: It overlooks the Gyeongbok Palace and the National Folk Museum and is less than a kilometer from the Blue House which is the presidential palace. Thus it is a centrally placed building, walled in yet still prominent – a visible exterior and an invisible interior. The West-inspired building was erected in 1928 during the Japanese occupation and for decades the premises were not open to the public. It was here that suspected spies from North Korea were interrogated and tortured. And it was here that the elite troops sang a song called *Kimugoonga* every morning: “After crushing the pack of red devils we will lead the glorious unification of the mother country.” It was to this building that General Park was taken – and where he died – following an assassination attempt at the Blue House in 1979. “When spaces like this that were not a part of our subconscious are suddenly revealed, we are once again made self-conscious of the voids

113. David Scott Diffrient, “Cinematic Spectacle and the Postwar Politics of Red Muffler” in *South Korean Golden Age Melodrama*, p. 157

Korea, kämpande lärarinna på en byskola under den japanska ockupationen, *yang-gongju* [”UN lady”, det vill säga prostituerad] i det fattiga Seoul efter Koreakriget, väl-talig försvarsadvokat för en kvinna som mördat sin man efter en lång tids förnedring, dygdig änka under 1960-talets brytningstid mellan tradition och modernitet, dotter till kontorsmannen på ett försäkringsbolag som får sparken men vägrar inse den nya tidens marknadslogik... David Scott Diffrient menar att Choi Eun-hee på ett unikt sätt ”/.../ förräntade sin ikoniska status på filmduken som både ’ny kvinna’ och traditionell hustru till en komplex framställning av koreansk kvinnlighet under en efterkrigstid som präglades av konkurrerande kulturer och värden.”¹¹³

Det dröjde över två år efter samtalet på hotell Marriott innan videoessän var klar. Den fick sin premiär i utställningen *Void of Memory/Platform Seoul -09* som arrangerades av Samsuo, Space for Contemporary Art i Seoul (med curator Kim Sunjung och Mami Kataoka) i september 2009. Utställningen hölls i Kimusa, den sydkoreanska säkerhetspolisens (Korean Defense Security Command) före detta lokaler Seoul, vilket tidigare också rymt också ett militärsjukhus.

Utställningen ville tala om förbindelser mellan ”öppet”, ”veckat” och ”gömt” minne och byggnaden i sig är ett monument över dessa tre former: placerad med utsikt över Gyeongbok-palatset och National Folk Museum och mindre än en kilometer från Blå Huset, presidentpalatset. En centralt placerad byggnad, muromgärdad men ändå framträdande – ett synligt yttre, och ett osynligt inre. Den västerländskt inspirerade byggnaden uppfördes 1928 under den japanska ockupationen och under alla år var den otillgänglig för vanliga medborgare. Det var här man förhörde och torterade misstänkta nordkoreanska spioner, det var här elittrupperna varje morgon sjöng en sång kallad *Kimugoonga*: ”Efter att ha krossat de röda djävlarernas pack ska vi leda enandet av vårt ärorika moderland”. Det var också hit General Park togs och avled efter att ha blivit skjuten i ett attentat i Blå Huset 1979. ”När platser som dessa som inte är en del av vårt omedvetna plötsligt öppnas, blir vi återigen självmedvetna

113. David Scott Diffrient, ”Cinematic Spectacle and the Postwar Politics of Red Muffler” i *South Korean Golden Age Melodrama*, 2005, s. 157 (min övers. M.B).

that surround us,” Mami Kataoka wrote in the catalogue.¹¹⁴

Madame Choi could not understand that it took me such a long time to make a film. She was used to a much faster pace, completing at least two feature films each year. She also wondered why the film was to be shown in the former military headquarters and not at a proper cinema. She sent Shin Sang-ok’s son to check up and make sure that everything was above board.

During the opening days of the exhibition I came to realize how little the younger generation of South Koreans actually knew about her having been kidnapped and taken to North Korea. Her pioneering work in the film industry has not been handed down. But one was constantly reminded of the nuclear threat from North Korea by the media. People were not used to seeing everyday street scenes from North Korea; the sort of scenes that I filmed in Pyongyang and that show a sort of normality. Close-ups of people walking along the street, attending an exhibition of flowers or making their way into the subway system.

Was this really normality or did these pictures merely show the everyday lives of the North Korean elite? I still do not know the answer.

114. *Platform in Kimusa*, ed. Kim Sunjung, Platform -09 2009.

om de tomrum som omger oss”, skriver Mami Kataoka i katalogtexten.¹¹⁴

Madame Choi förstod inte att det tagit så lång tid för mig att göra en film. Hon var van vid en betydligt högre takt, minst ett par långfilmsproduktioner om året. Hon undrade också varför filmen skulle visas i ett före detta militärhögkvarter och inte i en riktig biograf. Hon skickade Shin Sang-oks son för att försäkra sig om allt stod rätt till.

Under utställningens öppningsdagar förstod jag att den yngre generationens sydkoreaner bara vagt kände till historien om hennes kidnappning till Nordkorea och att minnet av hennes gärning som pionjär inom filmen inte förts vidare. Om kärnvapenhotet från Nordkorea blev man däremot ständigt påmind genom medierna. Men man var inte van vid att se vanliga gatuscener från Pyongyang, de scener som jag hade filmat och som beskriver en form av normalitet. Närbilder av människor som promenerar på gatan, går på blomsterutställning och är på väg ner i tunnelbanan.

Men var det verkligen bilder av den vanlige nordkoreanens vardag eller visade de bara vardagen hos Nordkoreas elit? Jag vet fortfarande inte.

114. *Platform in Kimusa*, ed. Kim Sunjung, Platform -09 2009.

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