

Our daily discomfort

1.

Lately, I have been living in this ethical tension.

It's like being in a constant flux or out of balance. It's a kind of dizziness as I get dressed, as I lay in bed, drink my coffee, go to work – and profit and capital floats freely, and there are words, sounds, thoughts in my head, and I cannot escape them. They are there when I shower. They are there when I dry myself off. When I sit on my bed from IKEA, rub my thighs with body-butter from Body Shop – there is this nausea. There is a dent in my mind, and my tongue starts to swell and I want to shout but I cannot.

2.

I live in the 21st century.

I can marry who I want, work where I want, live where I want.

I am not dependent on my family. I am an independent person, and if things go wrong, if I get ill or have an injury or lose my job – the state will take care of me. Shelter me as it has educated me and supported me through my upbringing.

I know that I have a choice. That I am supposed to make these choices – but I don't. I just sit here. On my mass-produced bed. On my white Ikea-sheets. I know that I have a voice. That I am supposed to use it, but sometimes it's gone. No will and no voice. I live in a democracy. I can say what I want. I have the possibility to make a difference. To have an impact. That change is possible, but I do nothing to change things.

Here I am.

I am a void. An avalanche of nothing. I lay awake. I toss and turn. I stand in the town square, at my work, in my living room with my eyes wide open – alert, but filled with inertia.

3.

Historically, we have always lived in groups. In settlements, and clans. Attached to each other through family, through neighbourhoods, the village, – and in these close-knit communities, the individual was not seen as separated from the collective. The collective secured our existence, our identity and our possibility to survive in the fight against the element. It sets us «free».

We lived interwoven socially, culturally and economically. We were been connected with ties that we could not tear ourselves away from, because our mere survival dependent upon it. We needed the others to get food on the table, the wood chopped, the animals fed, – the fire going. To put a roof over our heads. Together we buried our dead. Took care of our sick. Dug wells and fed our children.

Then, during the 1800-hundreds, the marked started taking over many of the tasks the community used to be responsible for, and over time, power shifted. From the hands of princes and kings, to the hierarchies of modernity, – and in that hierarchy the state governed and the marked gained power. This process, many claim, – weakened the ties between the individual and the collective. Between the local community and society.

During feudal times, those in power ruled over lives. The king could decide who should live, and who should die. Today, power behaves differently. It's goal is to keep us all alive, but at the same time, it tries to control how we live them. These power-based mechanism of control are called bio-politics (*Hva er biopolitikk?* Agora nmb 1 2005). The state and the

marked wants to take care of us. Building institutions like kinder gardens, mental hospitals. Building up pension funds to secure us financially in our old age. They want to “take care” of us. Keep us healthy, sane, at work. This technology, as many call it – does not eradicate the need for the local community, or the family or the clan all together, – but one are no longer totally dependent upon them.

So the clan, the family and the village is no longer the main focus point of the society or the economy. It’s been replaced by the life of the individual, and the state and in this process, the market has become this Individual lives “mother and father”.

In the time of transition, between a feudal economy and a capitalist economy – from kings and princes to democracy, major shifts happens: Women enters the public domain, the landless gets protection by the law and can now participate in society. Through democratic processes everybody become able to choose their own leaders. Humanism and individualism takes centre stage, and all this ends up with being formulated by the universal human rights.

All this creates a game of exchange. Between the individual and the state, between the state and the marked, but some say that this game comes at a price, that there is the new absolute in this new paradigm – and that it is followed by a paradox.

Detached from family and without the shelter of a small community, “the one” wins personal freedom, but at the same time, we now have to deal with a more encompassing power. For the power-balance between the individual and the state, or the individual and the market, is not one to one. The marked and the state, will manage fine without us, without me, the one, the subject. It might put the subject at the centre, but it has its own agenda and its own logic. The market can just as well underpay the workers, the state can overlook the wellbeing of one group, and emphasis the needs of another. The marked can claim to offer us, or rather sell us happiness, but when a housing-marked collapses – we are left without a roof over our heads.

Many have asked – how can we defend us against this?

What happens when a marked uses misogynist imagery when promoting its products?

What happens when a state induces racism? Many claim that that is the result of Israeli state-policy today.

And what happens when the state intrudes into our most intimate relationships. When the presence of power, the power of the marked or the power of the state, influences our sexuality, when it shapes our behaviour and our opinions? The way we live our lives?

The state is there to protect us against the marked forces, but many call the state and the marked a two-headed troll. Saying they join forces when they have to, and in the latest collapse in the USA a few years back, the state ironically enough – saved the banks, not the homeowners.

The French philosopher Foucault’s main object of study was power. He strived to locate it and then to criticise it. To unveil its strategies and its behaviour. He stated – By freeing us, the state has managed to take control over our lives.

The result is paradoxical: We are the masters of our own destiny, but we do not control it. We are unique individuals. We have our human rights, but the real power to change, and to shape the conditions we live under, lies elsewhere.

In this balancing act, between the marked, the state and the subject, things happens “freely”. We are, let’s call it «voluntaries». There is a kind of balance to this dance, but it comes at a price. There are conditions for this deal, for this understanding between the individual and the structural systems he, or she live by. Fundamentally, Foucault states – the truth is that we have to submit. That our lives, our choices we make, even our own bodies, are not actually, intrinsically our own.

4.

I am standing in front of the mirror.

I am 13 years old.

There I am.

I lay my hand on my belly, my thighs.

I feel no shame.

I caress my hips, my arms.

This is me, here in my room. In the privacy of my own space, and I like what I see. There in the mirror, I am free, I am shameless. It is when I leave this space, and go to join the others, I start feeling shame.

In the mirror, I can see myself from the waist and up.

The house I live in is full of them. There is one in the bathroom, one in my parents' bedroom. One in the hallway. Every day I face my own reflection more than once and in more than one of them. I know how I look when I brush my teeth. I know how look without my clothes, fully dressed, when I leave the house, when I come home. I even talk to myself as I stand there, and it - that cold reflection, talks back to me. Out in the street I am pale, white, chubby. Too large, too much. Magnificently unfinished. In the mirror I am me, and I touched the cold surface with both my hands, and I say to myself: You are beautiful.

5.

Lately one has discovered these neurones called mirror-neurones.

The discovery happened, so the story goes, a hot summers day in Giacomo Rizzolatti's laboratory in the city of Parma some time, early in the nineties. The scientists where doing some research on macaque-monkeys, trying to locate what parts of the brain gets activated when the monkey moved. Thin electrodes were probed deep into the monkey's brain, and as soon as it lifted a limb, the movement was transformed into sound, resonating from a speaker located at the back of the room.

While all was going on the researchers discover something unexpected: one of the researchers was having an ice cream, and soon the same sounds started coming from the speakers as the when monkey watched the researcher eating the ice, as when it lifted an arm or moved an object. There had to be a link. It seemed like the same centres in the brain was activated by watching somebody doing something, as when the monkey was actually doing something herself. A connection between moving and seeing.

It was if a strange game of interaction and mirroring has been unveiled.

Later the scientists understood that when somebody smiles at us, our brain starts acting in the same way, as if the one who watches was the one smiling. The scientists had discovered a motoric and neurologic exchange. A mirroring not only of our own actions and our observations of the actions of others, but a direct interchange. Watching you doing something, triggers the same emotive and cognitive reaction in me.

6.

Before the mirror was invented – the other was all we had: a brother, a sister, a friend. Not being able to see ourselves, we had to see ourselves through them. Only there, in "the other" could who we were and how we looked be mirrored back at us. There we could see what effect we had on each other. There we could mirror each other's actions and emotions. Like a child does, copying its surroundings. Trying to master the art of living.

Early on, the mirrors we produced were small. A piece of polished copper. A shiny stone.

In Turkey, one has found mirrors made from obsidian glass, dating 5000 years back in time. The Chinese were also pioneers when it came to mirrormaking. They even produced mirrors of a considerable size early on. These mirrors were made of bronze and were real symbols of status. It was only late in the seventeen hundreds such large mirrors arrived in Europe. For the first time, people here were able to experience themselves in full figure.

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I am not thirteen anymore.

I no longer stand in front of the mirror greeting my body with curiosity. I am on my back.

I am on the floor. I lay there, looking up at the ceiling, resting my hand on my pubic bone. I am thinking about the cheese I bought yesterday, and the fact that it cost me more than the cotton-blouse I bought on my way home, and that hangs on the chair next to my bed, and this image, it just comes out of nowhere – of white cotton sheets drying on the line. It floats up from somewhere deep in my childhood memory, soon followed by another. A shantytown. Workers on their way down to the harbour at dawn. On bikes, on foot, in beat up old busses, with their lunchboxes and their water bottles, – and down at the harbour containers filled with big roles of cotton are being lifted and lowered onto gigantic freighters. Large roll-on-ships and I am on the floor, looking at my new cotton blouse, and I can't move. My limbs are frozen, the room is so clean, and soon I will get up, shower. Dry myself with a cotton towel from IKEA. Put on my new Jeans – and the light is falling, and I pick the blouse up. The price tag is still on it, secured with a little golden safety pin at the

back of the collar, and I am struck by the thought of how many safety pins that hand that fastened this one, must have fastened.

Then there is the sleeplessness. A kind of discomfort, and I start keeping to myself. Avoiding the touch of others. Avoiding the touch of others. Avoiding being alone in the same room as others. I find myself, all of a sudden, in the middle of a supermarket screaming my lungs out.

It's like I'm choking on something. As if my chest is swelling. It's in my mouth. I awake with this metallic taste – it's my tongue – it does not fit anymore. It's too big, too harsh, too swollen.

So I leave town.

I book a room somewhere, – dark blue carpets. High up on the balcony: traffic-machines below. Riverbanks, neon, towers, the city is a living, breathing, hunting animal, and there is no way I can stay in there. The room is a trap, so I walk the streets. It is night-time, and all the stores are all closed. I try to settle in a bar. By myself a beer. I sit there, at the edge of my seat, but I can't stay there, so I leave for another bar. I don't want to pick anybody up. I do not want to strike up a conversation. All I want is a fight. A real good, old fashioned argument, but I can't seem to find anything to say, anything to argue about. I go for it, but I can't find my voice. I can't find my voice and I no longer seem to remember what it is that was bothering me in the first place.

7.

A little boy has been washed ashore on a beach in Turkey.

He is small. Three years old maybe.

He lays outstretched. Tummy down, palms open. His cheek resting against the sand.

He is dead. Drowned.

He's eyes are closed, as if he were sleeping. He is wearing a pair of blue shorts and a red t-shirt. I've only seen him on photographs. This one in particular went haywire with the press and social media when it was first published.

The light was golden. His hair wet.



The boy's from Syria. His name is Aylan Kurdi. Him, his brother Galip and his mother Riham all drowned when they tried to cross the Mediterranean sea. They were trying to get to Turkey. As I write this, two of the men making profit on their tragic crossing, has finally gotten their verdict, and are now imprisoned.

When Karl Ove Knausgård won Die Welts in 2015, he writes: *I see this photograph, and as soon as I see it I understand: These people, crossing the oceans are not a multitude, they arrive one and one* (Karl Ove Knausgård: *Virkelighetens sjokk*, Klassekampen, Oslo 2015, my translation).

In this essay, he writes about how we currently live in two parallel worlds at the same time. One that entails worldwide wars, natural disasters, economical tension – and the other, our own private world – that consist of driving, making coffee, going to the bathroom, washing, cooking, laying the table. Even though our time gives us immediate

access to that world outside the private, is it as if these two worlds only very rarely meet. Most of the time – we only register what happens out there, states Knausgård. As in a movie, in a performance, in a play.

He describes how the mass exposure to the refugee-crises in the Mediterranean the autumn of 2015, felt like a constant humming somewhere in the background of his life, – and then he writes in the newspaper *Klassekampen*: *all of a sudden I saw this picture of a little boy. Not older than three, his face down in the sand*. In an instant he realises what death is. He sees all the drowned refugees represented in that tiny body, and as this boy's death became real, the child as an individual became real. This was a real death and a real boy, on a real beach.

The narratives the media gives us, creates distance between us and the world, Knausgård writes. Soon everything looks the same. The particular becomes generalized. They do not give us what's real, but create another, fictionalized reality that appear to be real, but only rarely, as in this photograph, we discover the reality that hides behind it.

This media critique unveils not only a frustration with the mass-media, but as I see it, – it also exposes an existential feeling of estrangement that I recognise. A lack realness, confronted with “the real”. The dead boy has always been dead, has always been real, but it is as if the connection between the world and us has broken down, and that when I see it once more. Like when I look at the blouse, and at the shiny golden safety pin, and all of a sudden understand that that hand that fastening a safety pin to my cotton blouse belonged to a person. One among a multitude of hands, among a multitude of safety pins. Box upon box of them, and in a glimpse it is as if I grasp it, the realness of it, the world as it is – and I gasp for air, a moment almost dizzy – and as the moment subsides, as the dizziness leaves me, and I am back in my room. For a moment its gone. The nausea. The swelling in my mouth, the ethical tension for a moment gone. As if it is easier to breath, as if just for a moment the gap has been breached, between me and the others. Between me and world. As if I have, just for an instant – become whole again.

There must be a real difference between Knausgård's psychology and my own. It probably stems from many things. When Knausgård states that it takes a photo of a drowned boy to tear down the wall between his private world and the ongoing outside it, the same does not happen for me.

I look at the picture once more.

There he lays. A dead boy. Somebodies child, dead on the beach.

Maybe there is something wrong with me. The first time I saw it was three years ago. I felt nothing then – and I feel nothing now.

There are several photos of him taken the same day. One of them is of a man, a border-guard that picks the boy up and carries him away. He is a tall man with a sombre face. Holds the child gently. The chubby arm dangling. His head tilted strangely backwards.

How carefully he holds him, and I still felt nothing. No grief but his. No massive unveiling of the world.

8.

A body floats ashore

Two bodies floats ashore

Four

Eight

Ten

*This is happening somewhere else, but I can hear them
the bodies*

Like waves hitting against the shore

It's a constant movement

like an echo

as I put aside my cup of coffee

as I kiss my husband

as I fall asleep

as I write this

I hear voices

I write

and while I write the world is whispering in my ear

I try to write a story, and their stories walks beside the one I am writing

*They say you
they say we
they say here
We are here
and I give myself over to it
I place myself in a town
on a playground
on a railway station
deep in the woods –
Play this – I say
Play it out: these houses
these streets in the order I tell you to
but whatever I do
these rooms keeps on filling up with whispers and shouts
from the streets
from the basements
they are talking to me
They say: A body floats ashore
two
four
eight
ten
Not just this body
But this one too
Not just one body, but another and another and another
A crowd watches from behind a barbwire fence
Children are sleeping on the railway stations of Europe, and we know it
and darkness is falling
their asleep
I'm asleep
I'm trying to keep them at a distance
I do not want to write this story
I myself want to decide what I write
I breath
they breath
mumble
cry
There are confessions
accusations
they won't go away – they say:
We are here
and the world comes rushing towards me*

*I write because—
I write because –
I write so that I—
I write so I won't
I write them on to my paper till I no longer am one
but many
Not one story
but many
Surrounded I ask:
Is there a we in this text?
Is there a we in this room?
Is there a us – where we are?
Is there a we
in me?*

At the most fundamental level, Knausgård writes, – all human beings are the same. You are me and I am you. This idea is at the chore of Knausgård's humanism, and in the last volume of his novel *Min Kamp*, he ties this notion to Genet's essay on Rembrandt. Seeing

Rembrandts self-portraits, Genet states, you recognize in his gaze, the gaze of the other. I am you it says, and in saying so it erases the 400 years that has passed between then and now.

This humanly shared can only be expressed in art, Knausgård writes. All art is about dissemination and communication, and this communication happens through individuals. It does not belong to the social sphere.

For art that expresses the social, can never be timeless, and after the second world war, the language that constitutes the «social we» had become corrupted. This corruption is eternal. All we have left is ourselves. The I, forced to the edge of genocide, forced beyond all meaning, and it is from this feeling of bereavement we write today.

After the massacre on the 22th of July, Kristopher Schau, a Norwegian author and comedian, chose to follow the trail of Anders Behring Breivik. He spent every day in the courtroom, and as the trial progressed, he shared his thoughts in a column in the daily Norwegian newspaper Morgenbladet.

One year later, he published the book *Rettsnotater 22. juli – rettssaken, Oslo Tinghus 2012*.

The book, which is an honest and sensitive chronicle, gives us the factual as well as the emotional side of events. But there was also another side his writing, – what bothers him the most, as the trial evolves, was not necessarily the horror that was unveiled, but a personal and slowly emerging feeling of boredom. And this freaks him out. He feels ashamed, taken aback by it, but there is no mistaking it. It's all the repetitions. All the witnesses going through the events repeatedly – it is as if it all is starting to be a bit every day. All the gruesome details being revisited again and again. It is as if he is getting used to it. Or as if he is starting to forget about it. It's too much. The sheer amount of it. He can keep the one from the other anymore. He describes it as a kind of fatigue. The time he spends in court room 250 is not taking him any closer to the events at Utøya, rather it's as if he is losing the grasp of it. On a human level. As if what really happened, the grand aw-inspiring drama disappears when he stands face to face with the sheer quantity, with the massively, repeated everyday life of it his empathy crumbles. Wither and weakens:

Week 6 – The testimonies just keep on coming. Six weeks into the trial, I had to face the grim truth – I had started to get used to it. The atrocities. It was probably unavoidable, but still – it was an awful feeling. It was the sheer amount of testimonies that did it. They all followed the same cruel dramaturgy... The same unbearable ingredients. Just the face of the narrator changed. And every testimony I hear would be the worst one ever, but there was so many of them, and I have no time to take it all in. That's the terrible thing about it all. I'm left with a feeling that I am not really listening. Not really getting it. It is as if I owe them that, the witnesses, but there is no time to process things. And I try to remember the survivors as they take the witness-stand. Not just how they look, but what they have gone through, how they survived. But there are so many of them, and they keep on coming and coming (my translation).

He had removed himself from it. It was as if he saw it all as from a distance. And then, he hears one story that jumps out from the bland mass of it all, and he manages to reconnect, to attach himself and *be* present again. Not in theory, but really be there. Lived life, he states. A one of a kind kind of life. And in that story, in that face rests our dignity and our humanity, he states. There can we regain our understanding of what's real. (Kristopher Schau, *22. juli-rettssaken, Oslo tinghus*, Oslo, No Comprendo Press 2012)

10.

The photo has been taken from a great height.

First, I cannot make it out. It is like an abstract orange of shapes and forms soft. Like petals carelessly thrown together in multitudes that are without numbers – but then I see what it is, and my heart skips a beat.

Later I learn, that the image is a still from a video with the title: *Flying over "life vest valley" in #Lesbos* <https://twitter.com/ilario82/status/719790054684684288/photo/2>.

I see it and I cry.

11.

As I write this, I can't stop thinking about evil. About Hitler's evil, at the evil that happened at Utøya. How it has become almost impossible to talk about it. If one is to value each human being, its psychology, its complexity, its childhood – how can one cope with the concept of evil. Understand the real content of evil deeds. Sometimes, I think – getting close is not the solution. Sometimes we need to see things at a distance to understand. Maybe evil is not a riddle hiding deep in a person's psyche, waiting to be de-masked and exposed. Maybe it is not a riddle at all, but an act and a fact. You do not need to be evil or feel evil to do evil.

Oh – this need to bridge the gap. Between ourselves, and the other. Between ourselves, and the world.

Or is it all just a form of short-sightedness? An illusion even. An idea that tells us that we humans live separate from others, from the world we live in, and that someday – and some time, this hidden other world will be unveiled. That there is a riddle to be solved. If I only get close enough, if I only see clearly, then the veil will fall, and I will understand it all. Then I can look death in the eye, de-mask evil, watch tragedy unfold, and everything that is so unbearable, will be unbearable no more.

I find that it is something deeply romantic about this notion. The idea that art, or love or religion can do this for us. Solve the riddle. Bring us openly and truthfully face to face with the world.

Getting close to something, only takes you that far.

The mountain is what it is, a mountain – but if you walk to close up to it, all you see is stone, and moss, and rock. The mountain is lost in the details. It's not there anymore.

It's all about the format. The perspective. Where you see things from.

In the mass grave, a human is robbed of her humanity. It's been said so many times, and it's true. But it is also true that when the mass-graves of the massacres of holocaust were opened, it was not only the end of all meaning, something else begun. When we stood face to face with it, this evil, this fact that somebody and someone had done this. When we saw the multitudes, the heap of nameless bodies so brutally bereft of dignity and future – nameless, reduced to numbers, haphazardly executed – their bony bodies, the gruesome faces – when all this was documented and exposed, when this documentation reached Europe and we saw it, then we could finally understand what an extermination camp was. That it was real. That this could happen. People saw it in newspapers, on broadcasts. Films were shown in schools. Little schoolchildren watched hundreds of bodies piled on top of each other, like I myself did as a child – and it was in that moment I understood it. What had happened. That it could happen. People saw it in newspapers, on broadcasts. Films were shown in schools. Little schoolchildren watched hundreds of bodies piled on top of each other, like I myself did as a child – and it was in that moment I understood it. What had happened. That it could happen. I sat there, face to face with evil as fact, as event. Men did this, a leadership commanded this, a state-apparatus executed this. This is what we humans, given specific circumstances, are able to do to each other.

I am staring at a mountain of life-wests.

A whole area covered with them. Miles upon miles. I see them and I cry.

Seen from above they resemble rose-petals, strewn across a green carpet. Their numbers so vast, that they are uncountable.

I did not cry over the boy on the beach, but now I can't help myself. Maybe because of the sheer multitude of it all. Maybe because the image is so beautiful? Maybe just because somebody actually took this picture? Maybe because it remind me of something else?

So even here – I think. In this cold registering gaze, in the world seen at a distance – no witness, not human face, nothing answering back – there is emotion. But it's there, in me.

12.

Lately I haven't been sleeping.

On my way home from work, I didn't feel right. I had to throw up. I vomited behind a signboard behind a 7-eleven kiosk.

At night, I push myself against my husband's back. Are you there, I say? – and his back feels hard and cold as marble.

I try to eat a Big Mac too large for my mouth, I chew and chew, but I can't seem to swallow.

I'm trapped in a labyrinth and it's inside me. I try to move forward but am constantly pulled back to the place where I started.

I am on the floor.

I just lie there.

There is no «real» freedom for us to act in the private sphere, the German philosopher Hannah Arendt states. In the private, everything is conditioned by our needs. We have to take care of what's primary: look after, make sure, take care so our dearest and nearest gets all they need.

Love is never a revolutionary power, she continues in her groundbreaking book *Vita Activa*. Love is a feeling that belongs to the private. It ties you down. It never changes anything. First when all these needs are fulfilled – when we know that the ones we love are fed, dry, warm, protected – when we know that we have a roof over our heads, that we can afford to give our children an education, that we are going to be safe in our old age – then we are free to act. Love might be *good*, but it is when we finally step out of the private sphere and into the public to act, freely – that change can happen. Then we can uphold that part of our lives she calls «vita active». There, detached from dependencies, lies freedom, and combined with courage, we can see beyond our own needs. See beyond family, beyond our lifespan even, and start to consider the needs and want of the people of the future. There and then we become – political. There and then, we can act politically (Arendt, Hannah, *Vita Activa*, Oslo, Pax Forlag A/S 1996).

13.

We are not one, we are many – *men, not Man*, live on the *earth* writes Hannah Arendt from a time in history that we call the past.

Hanna Arendt sees the public sphere as a free space. A polyvocal space. A space for different meanings, thoughts, ideologies, cultures, attitudes. A space for meetings and confrontations. *Free* meetings and confrontations.

In the private, in the contained spaces of our private lives, these differences disappear. We all have the same basic needs. We all have to do what we have to do. We are who-ever, visible, as recognizable as another. This is the space of the mother, the father, the office-worker, the consumer. There, with those we hold dearest, we wash the dishes, put our children to bed. Survive our adolescence. Face to face with the game-console, deep inside all his pubescent issues – the unhealthy relationship with his mother, his hate for his father, Anders Behring Breivik is not vitally disparate from millions of other white, western man. A product of his time, his race, his class. It's what he does out there, out in the public domain that sets him aside. It's his understanding of the effect it has. His clear intention. There, as he blasts his way into history, he becomes what he is. This is the strategy that sets him aside. This is his revenge, as he tears himself away from his private self. Informed he enters the heart of our shared community, of our democracy, and there, whether we like it or not – he becomes – history. It is through this public and deranged act, that he changes Norway. In the privacy of his out-grown adolescence, he was nobody and anyone. There, in his act, as he acts – at the chore of our society, actually and symbolically, he becomes political.

In the private, we can recognise and sympathize with each other, but in the public, we can free each other or enslave one another. Instate democracy, or dissolve it. Inside the private space, in the everyday of the individual. In our childhood, youth, in ur morning and nights, we connect as humans, but *humanism* reigns elsewhere.

We know that that lonely boy, spending winters and summers gaming his life away – was a human being like you and me, but we also know that he was also a political assassin. Not just a crazed mass-murderer, but a man who massacred people on the bases of a political manifesto. Not just a man with a ruined childhood, – but a man that wanted do demolish the very foundations of our society, as we know it.

To recognize the essential difference between the private and the public. To recognize that difference and the potential for political change they represent, has been the fundamental analytical tool for all critical thought and organized resistance. One can never underestimate – Hanna Arendt points out to us, the importance of a vital and functioning public sphere. In her own time, she pointed out several threats to that sphere. Totalitarian, political tendencies for one, and the raise of the consumer economy on the other. Both, in very different ways, seemed -to try to merge the boundaries between the two. Letting the private invade the public (consumer economy), and the public, through state-power, invade and dominate the most intimate corners of our lives.

The conditions we live under are historical. Even I am a historical phenomenon. The society that conditioned Hitler, gave him and his political accomplices a unique possibility to execute their ideas. To turn thoughts, even political fantasies into action. Not in the privacy of their home, but on the world arena, and with devastating consequences. These historical conditions does not exist today. Let's hope they never will. We can understand Hitler, – his childhood, his pain and frustration. We can even recognise some of his traits, the dilemmas he was in, thoughts he had – but we can never be Hitler, and we will never do what he did.

Soon my story will be over.

Most of my deeds will be understood as private, but some will not.

It's the political choices we make, the imperative of our public choices that makes social, economic and political change possible.

14.

Some say that we humans are not suited to live in community that number more than 150 people. We can only relate as long as we can gossip about each other.

The only thing that can hold larger social communities together, some modern social scientists suggests, – are shared grand narratives or fictions as shared stories. The story about us – the Norwegians, or about we – the Europeans. The idea that there is something unique, something special that only we have in common, – and these stories make up the mythologies that creates our societies. They constitute the ideas on which we fight our wars, write our constitutions, build our institutions, state our legal principles, and build our understanding of law and art. Through these stories, we choose our agendas. These narratives shape our public life and our ideas about and expectations for the future.

As history became science, the historians, like the botanist, zoologists and astronomers, started looking for laws and principles. What historical laws did a society follow? What constituted them? In sketching out these laws, historians developed a kind of historical determinism. An idea of progress, or development in stages, a kind of natural process of progress from tribal communities, to feudal communities. From feudal communities to a democratic, capitalist society and the world as we know it today (Edward Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishing 1996).

The idea that there exists a historically determined path, that the societies of the past have to follow to become society we have today: From an agricultural based economy, to local industry. An evolutionary view that a society naturally will develop from local industry to nationalism and colonialism and at the end of this development a global capitalist economy. For Marxists, socialism and communism would then be the next stages in the development of societies in world-history, communism being the end goal. The ultimate just society.

Today we are tied together in this global economy. Capital keeps us afloat. It hold us, but a certain uncertainty has arisen. What comes after this? Something better, or is this the best of the best? Are we stuck here? Is there no other alternative? Communism are not on the agenda anymore for most Europeans. Many live with a feeling of inertia, of being out of place, – lost in our global economy, in a kind of nostalgia. A need to look back at better times, when things were simpler. Where God ruled, or where women new their place. A place where one could regain once supremacy, maybe. As white, or as mail. To societies that could offer more authoritarian, or comprehensible ways of governing. A place where power shows its face, where it was easily located and something to admire. To a stable order of things.

The economic logic of our time is always double. It is global and local at the same time. Today, a continued expansion and growth seems impossible – but our economy still aims for it. Our time is paradoxical. Some has given this new world order a name: They call it the empire.

All though an economy based expansive colonialism is in the past, as is an economy based solemnly on industrial production, colonialism and industrialism in its various forms, still exist. It is as if several types of economies, several world-orders exist as ones, and interchange and exchange with each other. For sociologists and philosophers like Foucault and his contemporaries, to understand the new operating mechanism of power and economy of the 21st century has been essential. To isolate power and the way it operates, is to understand the conditions for our lives, socially and culturally. In his article *From politics*

of «life» to bio-politics (my translation) in the magazine Agora, Egil Hjelmervik writes, that in Foucault's analysis, everything boils down to tension and conflicts. Power and power-struggle (Agora 2005).

In our day and age, Hjelmervik states, production is subjected to reterritorialization and global conditions. In a situation like this, it gets harder to build and defend institutions and welfare systems. Systems to safeguard us against an aggressive, global economy. An economy that still strives to consume competition and increase its capital. Through this process, – the worker gets absorbed by the “game”. The result is a more calculated and disciplined workforce. The worker herself gets tied up in, and reworded by the power that binds her.

The economy of today accepts no borders, no limitation. Power cannot be recognized as European, or American or Chinese. It's a trans-national. A hybrid. Its borders are undefined and continuously expanding and terms like national integrity, and “nations” are starting to lose its meaning. As a result, colonialism might be a period of the past, but in the time of the empire, imperialism exists. We are in what is called, post-colonial times.

When philosophers like Hart, Negri, Guattari og Deleuze pick up the glove after Marx, – they get labelled post-Marxists. Their urgency lies in finding new paths for resistance. With their feet firmly planted in a Marxist tradition, but within a postmodern paradigm, they seem to be facing one overall dilemma. In the society of today, the suppressed becomes a part of a system of suppression, and through that, also a suppresser. Power is not just to be found outside ourselves, it's immanent. Even our bodies are filled with it, invaded by it, and tied to it. Our bodies have become political fields. *Polis, the political, has in some way or other disappeared, all that prevails is a controlling and omnipresent power – bio-politics. The suppressed, and the power that suppresses it, the power-agent, is so to say – out of sight* (Agora 2005, my translation).

The power is «out there» and it is in us. It is omnipresent and self-regulating. It has become a part of life itself. We are not just victims of power – we are its accomplices.

15.

A body floats ashore.

One, two, many...

The Chinese artist Wei Wei fills Charlottenburg Art Museum in Copenhagen with life-vests. It looks as if the building itself is about to burst at the seams. The sheer amount of these red and orange vests is too much. The museum is a body invaded. It can neither consume, nor devour it.

Later, he piles life vests around the pillars of Minneapolis Institute of Arts.



I think of cotton. Of all the cotton t-shirts in my wardrobe. I feel sick. It does not go away. The nausea has become chronic. It is attached to me like that safety-pin on my blouse.

16.

It was the German chemist Justus von Liebig that «invented» the glass mirror. 200 years ago, he found a way of producing it. He put glass on one side, and a thin layer of silver on the other side, and there it was. A reflection as clear, and visible as the day.

Soon, the mirror became a part of mass-production and a part of the consumer economy. A part of our households and our everyday existence. Now every morning I can study my own reflection. Judge how I look: Have I aged? Whom do I resemble? My mother, my uncle my grandmother? Is it still me I see, but before the mirror existed – how did we see ourselves? At time when reflection more often than not happened by chance. When we suddenly, from time to time, caught a glimpse of ourselves in a puddle, in a windowpane – did we understand and relate to that mirrored reflection of me the same way as we do today? When we could not look to the mirror to check that all was alright, to seek approval, did we have to look for that in the confirmation of the other? A friend, a relative: No, you have not aged. Yes, you are beautiful.

I stand in the hallway facing it.

I close my eyes and try to visualise somebody else in there, another face. Another persons eyes, nose, body.

I smile, and my reflection smiles back at me.

I am a macaque-monkey. Someone has mounted electrodes into my brain. I eat an ice, I tie my shoes, I wave my arms, I shout: Look at me! Look what I can do!

By mirroring you, I become me.

On the chair beside me hangs a cotton blouse. It's been hanging there for days. I still haven't worn it. The price-tag is fastened to the fabric by a golden safety-pin.

Sun through the window.

My heart is beating aloud.

I am like this shirt. I'm sown together. I am slices of thin fabric. I am dismantling myself. I am falling apart. Now it begins. Now you can piece me back together.

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