

future-PRE-positions

– a speculative essay on speculations, propositions and imaginations on individual and collective togetherness in the future

1. THE PRE

There –

before everything

IS

Something

Is the –

PRE

Not

POST

(post-industrial, postmodern, post-dance, post-industry, post-irony)

there is

THAT

which happens

right before

Constantly

HERE

– it announces itself

as A:

PRE-LUDE

as A:

PRE-FIX

as A:

PRE-CONCEPTION

Pre-conclusions

Past past

Pre future

a radically unpredictable beginning already

PRESENT

already presenting things to come

2. I M A G I N E D F U T U R E S

Siri Hustvedt has said: Future is the land of our expectations, hopes, fantasies, fears and projections. Future is fiction.

This fiction, she states – rests in our memories and it is what we know and remember that builds our expectations. And I ask myself, if what we think about the future is already shaped by the things we have experienced, what happens with our perception when we are constantly surrounded by words and concepts like crises and a post? Does this not leave us with a lingering feeling of being “late” in the world, at the end of something, or in a kind of a back loop? A place where every action is based on reaction. It is as if we are constantly looking over our shoulder. Engaging in the past instead of thinking ahead.

What does it entail to be post-industrial, post-capitalism, post-dance, post photography?.

Lately I have discovered that the question I often forget to ask is – what is yet to come? Moreover, when I ask it, I can't seem to find any answers. All I can see is a kind of blankness. A wage feeling of being out of touch.

I have made up this exercise for myself. I imagine that I put my hands on the horizon. I sort of put my hands on the horizon and I lift myself, I push myself up and lift myself so that I can peek over it. And I see how it curves. A kind of lingering light running along it – And then?

Nothing.

Sometimes, when I teach – I ask my students to do the same exercise.

What do you see? I ask

What do you see?

More than not the answer is – nothing.

And when it is not nothing – I am often met with different kinds of dystopias. The world totally covered in water or the world totally engulfed by darkness, and I wonder if this inability to look ahead makes us reactionary. That it stops us from thinking progressively or to progress, and therefore makes us shy away from every radical choice.

WHAT IS ART AND WHAT IS POLITICS?

The French philosopher Jacques Ranciere states that to be political is to imagine new possible worlds: *Political argument is at one and the same time the demonstration of a possible world where the argument could count as argument, addressed by a subject qualified to argue, upon an identified object, to an addressee who is required to see the object and to hear the argument that he or she ‘normally’ has no reason to either see or hear* (Jacques Ranciere, *Ten Theses on Politics* (in) *Theory & Event*, Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press 2001).

Worlds in which things that now seem impossible, becomes possible. The slave can be free, women can vote, homosexuals can practise their sexuality freely, we can live in a world without plastic etc.

If today we feel framed by the prefix “post”, it can be hard to imagine those other or new possible worlds. And if those new possible worlds are only produced as a reaction to what is, that might also limit our capacity to come up with real alternatives.

We might get stuck in a kind of chain reaction, where criticism exists for the sake of criticism, and the radical suggestions get stifled before they reach the surface. The result is that we leave the future to the politicians.

To be true then to Ranciere's idea of the political – it might not be enough just to imagine something else than what is. A real radical preposition would be necessary, and this radical preposition would have to be presented, even made public. Only then could it become political in the true sense of the word.

The narrative, the image and the poem has always had the potential of producing such radical different realities. But what speculative propositions surrounds us today?

S P E C U L A T I V E P R O P O S I T I O N S

New scientific research has discovered that our memory and our ability to plan, or to foresee future scenarios, are deeply connected. That our ability visualize the things that are going to happen in the future, is one of the main features that separates us humans from the other species. Humans have the ability to build a kind of mental model of what is to be, and by that predict the outcome of actions not yet put into praxis.

Per Magnus Riseng writes in an article in A-Magasinet in December 2012, that when the brain rests, it starts strolling back and forth between past and present, between experiences, memories, and possible imagined future scenarios. This pondering on the past goes hand in hand with planning, and with looking at things from other peoples perspectives, – and all these activities are situated in the same centre in our brains.

This default-mode network, as it's called, is where our experiences are stored. Facts are stored somewhere else, and in a different way, a bit like files in a computer, – but our experiences, the bases for our memories of the past, has to be recreated every time we "look" at them. (Per Magnus Riseng, Tilbake til fremtiden - <https://www.oslobrain.no/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/tilbake-til-fremtiden.pdf>). Our memory construct them. They are not stored as complete events, but as bits of information, sensation, visual signs that we then combine and put together when we think of them.

As Daniel L. Schacter and Donna Rose Addis puts it in the opening sentence of their article *Constructive memory – The ghost of past and future: A memory that works by piecing together bits of the past may be better suited to stimulating future events than one that is a store of perfect records.* (Donna Rose Addis & Daniel L. Schacter, *Constructive Memory – The ghost of past and future*, London, Nature 2007)

This makes us vulnerable. Not only can this mean that we construct what's called false memories, memories of things that never happened. That are not real, and if the default-mode network centre is damaged, this can leave us unable to foresee the future, and thereby unable to plan or to calculate the consequences of our actions. If this happens, it can make it impossible for us to come to a decision about what to do and how to do it.

In other words, how we think about the future, influences the choices we make in our everyday life. And our way of thinking about the future, will always be a based imaginary scenarios as much as facts.

O N E S E L F A S A N O T H E R

Fiction do for art what the model does for maths, states the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur. Through storytelling, we can play out scenarios, take on another person's life-choices, and bend moral dilemmas. In fiction, – I can become the other. I can bend time. I can even experience an imagined possible future (Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1994).

Today it seems that we live surrounded by a story making machinery that is set on producing and repeating the dystopia.

Films and television series expose us to make believe futures filled with catastrophe, loss. A relentlessly repeated end game where cities sinks to the ground, epidemics spread, and the planet become covered in ice, in sand, in freezing cold or blazing heat. A future where viruses rage, where people eat each other. Where all that's familiar is lost or unrecognizable, where humanism itself is being tested and societies are being unveiled as failed, cannibalistic, doomed, derailed, or mere shams. Where democracy is the sugar coating on a brutal state of eternal terror only benefiting the system, the ruling class, or an imperial figure gone mad.

It is as if the modern monster are the humans themselves.

It is as if these monsters have become demonic and as a result, these demons are filling our minds. They have become the driving force behind and the monarchs of our fiction. We repeatedly project them into our fictional future, and there we turn our world, our habitat,

into a landscape of terror and ruin, destruction and fear. We build a pyramid of negatives – of forsaken hope and chaos – and on the top of this pyramid stands the hero of our lost dreams, our new Gods of disillusionment – the lone survivor looking for revenge, for compassion, for love.

A D Y S T O P I A

A landscape of children.

In the lush green, they devour a lizard. Their lifespan reduced to such an extent, that only few reach sexual maturity.

This is a world inhabited by children giving birth to children. This is a world where children bury children. Teach other children. Kill other children. Surrounded by jungle, they stumble upon the hidden stones of civilization – not even realising what the word civilizations means.

Language lost. Future lost. Memory surrendered to a harsh and eternal present.

When I think about the future, my mind starts producing scenes like this. It happens automatically, and in a strange and horrid way, I even kind of enjoy it. Enjoy imagining and giving myself over to the fascination it entails. In to this hinterland of doom.

Anders Dunker quotes the Marxist theorist Fredric Jameson lastest book *An American Dystopia*, in an article in Morgenbladet in 2017. There is constant and ongoing productions of dystopia in the society we live in, Jameson states. The world we live in is too complex, too entangled, too established, and at the same time too unpredictable and incorrigible for us to free ourselves from it, so instead, we produce these catastrophes. Margaret Thatcher's words "there is no alternative", or "there is no such thing as society" hits us in the space where our dreams of the future should be, and robs us off them. Maybe, he writes – the time of utopias are over (Anders Dunker, *Håpet i nåtidens framtid*, Oslo: Morgenbladet 2016).

In the early 1500's Thomas More's mind was set on creating an alternative society through fiction. In 1516, he published the book *Utopia*, or *De Optimo Reipublicae Statu deque Nova Insula Utopia*.

U T O P I A L O S T

Thomas More was an English lawyer, writer and man of the state. He was a humanist who fought the reformation, and who was deeply engaged in questions on moral and how to better the society.

More constructed the word utopia from the Greek *eutopia*, a good place, and the Greek *outopia*, which means nowhere. In his book, originally written in Latin, More describes a society where people lead organized and rational lives, where there is no such thing as private property and all rules rests on the common good. In this society, people tend the land together, but this is also a society where the sick are eliminated and where slaves do the hard and tedious tasks.

The subtext in the book is a criticism of Mores contemporary English society. It did not intend, as many think, to portrait a perfect society, but it wanted, through describing this other «place», to make the reader more aware of the conditions she herself was living in. In this way – Mores project combines the dream of a better world, with a satirical criticism of his own society. A feature that will become prominent in the political art to come. On one hand, it takes on the task of showing a way forward. On the other hand – it criticises what is.

In the late 1800's, an explosion of utopian ideas and ideologies erupted. It was as if the air itself had become saturated with the potential of change. With the birth of the bourgeoisie came not only the need to change, but also the *will* to make change happen. This was the time of communism, feminism, anarchism, liberalism, nudism, fascism, nationalism, and modernism and with it came a will to see through the matrix and to envisage a new world order.

There was a growing incentive not necessarily to make the perfect society – but a better one. A will to undertake grand social experiments. A will based on a need to free the individual by working for what one saw as the common good for all.

The thinking was not only goal oriented, it was radical – it was all about combining political philosophy with economic theory, with science and with a new look at what was morally good or wrong, and at the same time as time gave birth to these movements and ideology, new sciences developed. We saw the birth of psychology, humanism, the idea of childhood. Finally; – this was the time that tore God out of our minds.

Then the First World War came. Then the Second World War came. Then holocaust happened, the fall of the Soviet Union, the de-masking of China, the killing fields of Pol Pot – and the dream was over. The dream of that potential future. The will to go through large social experiments. Lost. Gone. God was dead still dead, but so was the dream of a brave new world order. Only capitalism remained, saturating democracy with its relentless and merciless greed for profit.

Maybe inertia crept into our veins then, started resting in our brains, into our dreams and expectations, until we today expect no more than that which is necessary. So we can pacify our hungry hearts, our private craving, our children's private cravings, the tribe, the family – and we have started to worry. Maybe things won't get any better. Maybe we will have to defend what little we have, and the world becomes a place of fear, a horizon limited to present consumption, and our existence void of dreams beyond it.

Voiceless I am face to face with a real dilemma: I hate this society, but I know I can't change it. I fear this society – but my fear of change is greater than the fear of living in it. When I think of radical change, images appear in my mind of mass killings, of human control, of monstrous grey societies run by bureaucrats, the party, the mind controller. By totalitarian regimes. As soon as I try to imagine a society build on the idea of a common good, the ghosts of the past comes to haunt me – and I shy away from it, as if the mere thinking about it could contaminate me.

Anders Dunker states in his article *Håpet i nätidens framtid*, that one of the place to find this inertia is in fiction. In the zombie apocalypses there is a manifestations of Hobbes natural state. In TV-series like *Westworld* or *Black Mirror*, maybe meant as criticism, but presenting a future where human kind is bereft of any solidarity or empathy. Closed up in an angst-ridden, self-sufficient existents with prosthesis and technologies that only makes the confusion greater and that eats away at the core of our social life (Morgenbladet 2016).

So I walk around in this make believe harmonizing system as if I am trapped in a maze. Dazed. Mobile, but paralyzed – inert, but filled with inertia.

INERTIA – PARALYSIS – LOSS OF VOICE

Lately –

I don't know

–

It's like – I can't find my voice

I wake up, and it's gone

I open my mouth, and it's not there

I can't find my voice and I don't own my own words

Not really

I mean in a way I do

but not really

I don't really own them

I mean – they are just words, so I try to speak and I just –

No voice – damned it

–

I mean –

there is a certain kind of framework that you are supposed to fit into

Consensus paralyses action

Like

when the idea of what you cannot do is stronger than the ideas about
what you *can* do

What is this?

What are these times we are living in?

That we are living on – that are living, feeding on us

A cannibalistic – sad – self-hating time

Sometimes I wonder

Sometime I wonder if these are days of the sniper

THE DAYS OF THE SNIPER

These are the days of the sniper

When he hits

I mean – there is the voice of reason and then the will to act and then – the sniper

–

These are the days of the sniper

That's what I think

It's all about what you do and what you say:

Cause and effect

Cause and effect

Like when the link is broken then – If what you say – does not mean anything

Like –

there is no effect

The link is broken, and you just pick it up

You just pick up that weapon

You go up on that balcony

into that schoolyard

out onto that busy street

you immerse yourself in the crowd and then:

BANG !

You get it over with

You starts shooting

At random first

then more methodically

You pace yourselves

You seek higher ground

It feels good

It feels nesecarry

It feels like this is all that is

*

A heron takes off

An artist in her studio

she sits in the dark

stearing at her art

She has no past that was pleasant but has now passed.

She has no dreams of another life, different and better

She does not have anybody

She does not have a body – and somewhere deep in the forest the Fox sniff
and snarls

(The texts are from the material produced under the collective writing process tied to the
EU Collective Plays! project)

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We are living in the time of crisis. We are living at a place that has left us no alternatives.

The perspective have become one eyed. Brutalised. Rigid. Blunt. But what if this perception of a post society in crises is just that? A perception? Maybe this existence, where we are at, in this “back loop”, at the end of the world and of society, as we know it is just a way of perceiving it. That if we changed the perspective, looked at it from another direction – then we would discover that this is not the age to end all ages. That we are living in a time that for the first time gives us a real opportunity for change, because now we have experience, scientific knowledge and tools that we did not have before, and that this perception of the state of post, – that is often said to lead to inertia – is something we have to shake off. That it is just that – a “feeling”. An idea. The idea that we are in a space that makes action impossible and where individual freedom is limited by overriding economic and cultural structures that we are unable to change or bend. Some have asked who benefits from that?

If we constantly repeat to ourselves – this is a crisis, then maybe the idea of us being in a crisis does not lead to action for most people, – but to fear. It awakes a need to preserve, save. To reactionary and reactive behaviour where old prejudices reappear like nationalism, racism, misogyny etc.

So, – to be able to produce change, we need to see our situation from another point of view. To rediscover that we are never at the end of something but in the beginning of something, in the flux of a pre. And that at times when it feels that all is lost, most likely the new has already begun.

If we look at change as something positive, to be in a back loop offers the potential to change. The question is, should we use this possibility to preserve what is already there, or to create something new. (<http://brooklynrail.org/2017/06/field-notes/Field-Notes-from-the-Anthropocene-Living-in-the-Back-Loop>)

3. DETROIT, JULY 2017

I awake to sunshine. The sound of crickets, sun across the floorboard and a kitten playing with my toes. Outside my window is a meadow littered with blue flowers. Huge oak trees. A narrow road, the surface cracked and worn. The labourers are already hard at work tailing the roof on the house across the street. Four black guys in denim and bright t-shirts balance across the roof-construction as if there is nothing too it, as the fifth keeps on tossing roof-tiles up to them with an unprecedented precision on a rhythm resembling a dance.

The atmosphere is relaxed. Sundrunk. Laid-back. Peaceful. Lazy even.

The sound of a lawnmower from a nearby garden. A few hundred meters further down the road, the impressive profile of our local skyscraper. The Fischer Building, build by the Fischer brothers in the 1920 to be a monument saluting the fine arts.

This is a Detroit morning. A Detroit morning on Horton Street. In the north end.

A car starting up.

Sunflowers in the front yard.

The dark soil between cabbage and sweet peas to the left of us.

A dog barking.

A cat licking its paws.

At the height of summer. At the end of recession. It seems lazy, but it is frantic.

Commerce, speculation, enterprise is rapidly entering this area. Houses are no longer being torn down. They are being rebuild.

Detroit was the most spread out city in the United States.

Three million people lived here. Now the population is down to around 670 000. In a period of no more than twelve years, the city collapsed. The industry broke down, the housing market tumbled and people started to move out. Unemployment soared. Violence was on the rise. The streets was no longer safe. The Detroit night rang with gunshot and Detroit, Motortown, the city that for a period had the fastest growing economy in the world, was now under administration. Bankrupt, finished – for many an example of everything that was wrong with capitalist society.

The city found itself in what the father of resilience theory, C.S. Holling, is calling a back loop.

LIVING IN A BACK LOOP

The term “back loop” refers to the adaptive cycle, the main heuristic used by resilience ecologists to describe the four phases of life experienced by all natural systems – a human being, a city, a society, a civilization, a swamp, a forest, or a company.

On one hand, the adaptive cycle contains a “front loop” of early rapid “growth,” leading to a “persistence” or “stability” phase dominated by a few species, and characterized by rigidity and the capture of earlier energies. But this “stable” state is not a permanent state. Gradual or sharp disturbance can cause systems to slip into a “back loop,” seemingly a crises, – but also marked by a “release phase” where energies and elements previously captured in conservation phases are set free. Many say that this is what happened to Detroit. In this time of crises, people not only showed resilience, but new types of thinking occurred. Urban farms were build, there were pop up markets, parties, cinemas. People started to produce honey from rooftops and parkinglots, and as the houses tumbled down, were set afire or bulldozed by the city. As the weed spread along the roadsides and the streets became emptied of both cars and people – new connections and new ways of hooking up came

about. Some were talking about a new time, a potential new Detroit: Detroit-open-city. Detroit maker-city. Detroit green-city. A place of agro-hoods and craft. A hub for a new form of city planning, for collaboration and fresh produce.

The resilience researcher call this back loop a face where new combinations emerge. A time where wild, exuberant experimentation becomes the modus operandi. The most understudied aspect of ecological systems, back loops are also one of the most exciting. As observed in ecological systems, the back loop is the phase of life in which individual organisms or small groups of individual organisms interact across previously unbridgeable divides, and in doing so, create something fundamentally original. In contrast to life in the regimes that are left behind, where innovation was stifled and influence limited to a few actors with the greatest power— in the modus of the back loop, beings and things are released and open themselves up to new potentials.

Hollings state that today: we are at the time of a large-scale back loop, a global situation in which each of us must become aware that he or she is a participant. “Crisis”, as seen in this perspective, brings to the surface the presence of the pre. An act of active listening where the post sinks into the background and we look for the potential of the new per se, instead of focusing on how it relates to what was.

In this potential time of change, – depending on the perspective one chooses – one is left with two options: One – to try to restore everything back to the way things were. Two – to observe and learn from what is going on at the moment, to synergise with it, and see the potential of other modes of production, for cultivation, for organisation, transportation. For distribution of power, and for living together.

The main question to ask, Stephanie Wakefield writes in her *Field Notes from the Anthropocene: Living in the Back Loop*: Is this a world coming apart, or piecing itself back together?

DON'T FIGHT THE FORCES

R. Buckminster Fuller, the American architect, system theorist, author, designer, and inventor said: Don't fight the forces.

For Fuller it was all about "doing more with less". What he wanted, was a kind of zero sum game – where what you make creates at least as much energy as what you put into it.

He visualized a future way of building and being – that was not about spending the planets resources, but being with them.

Fuller did his most important work in the 1950's and 60's, but his way of thinking is a big influence on eco-philosophy, for artists and maker societies even today.

Fuller was a pioneer in thinking globally, and he explored principles of energy and material efficiency in the fields of architecture, engineering and design.

His work bridged the gap between science and poetics, between invention and art for art's sake. For Fuller, doing was a way of thinking, – and to be able to think, you had to accept the unknown. The unknown in you and around you.

All through his life, he held on to an environmental focus. He believed in sustainability – and his influence on the art-scene has been fundamental. He saw the artist as an inventor and the inventor as an artist. At the chore of this relationship, Fuller placed neither beauty nor knowledge, – but praxis. He was not looking for a goal outside the deed, but inside the deed itself. In this respect, the artist was just as much an objective economist or an evolutionary strategist, or an image-maker, or a poet.

So, if we could say: Yes, we are the oblitors of other species. Yes, we often do not understand the consequences of our deeds. Yes, we pollute the air we breathe, destroy the space we live in – but if we listen carefully, we can open up to a new possible world. A world that we are not only living “in”, but that we are “a part of”.

In this potential world, it is our capacity for the artificial, the manmade – that gives us the tools to reassemble the cracks between “that”, the world, and “us”. To mend what's broken. To see the world as a continuum of ourselves. To see the things we make as a meeting-place between it and us. A place where the world shows itself: The poetics of the metal, the radical force in a piece of wood, the brutality and the voicelessness of movement. And then – as it is rediscovered – turn it into song.

Frederic Jameson talks about a need for revitalization. We need once more to believe in the collective. And we have to charge this belief with a kind of exalted feeling of freedom.

What Jameson is looking for, is what one can call “double power”. We have to create a society inside society. These double powers already exists, for good and for bad he states. He talks about the mafia, or organizations like the Black Panthers. The job is to make these

structures grow independent of the totality that surrounds it, for then in the end to take over society.

The idea is that through these power-enclaves, we can create independent and radical movements and power structures within the one that already exist. This can prevent us from the feeling of being paralyzed by the totality of today's ruling system, and we can use these ideas, or concepts as tools that can help us to be more progressive. To think in real radical alternatives and by that project us into a landscape that makes the impossible possible.

Many small communities, for instance eco-villages, look at themselves as experimental enclaves that strive to detach themselves from the global economy, but although today's experimental enclaves are real, I still think that Jameson's suggestions must be seen as more therapeutic than a real way forward. The question is can eco-villages, artist communities, even the maker-societies develop a real double power?

In the maker societies, we can see the influence of Fullers thought. Here people meet up to make things. For fun, for the sake of the experiment itself, or as a kind of understated political act. They create a working environment where one can make something outside of the established economy. Where preservation and innovation go hand in hand. Soft technology goes together with old fashion carpeting and metalwork. 3D printing goes together with bolts and spanners.

The maker movements cultivate shared spaces. Flux and movement. Here artists, computer geeks, hackers and artisans can meet and merge.

At the core of it is maybe a reaction to the growing sense of disconnection from the physical world. A protest against the de-valuing of physical exploration. The people inside the movement insist on falling in love with that which surrounds us. With matter. In a communal spirit, they engage in conversation with the objects that surround them. In this exchange, man and matter come together in a dialogue built on creativity, sustainability and curiosity. The maker movement sees everything as it is, not just a potential or a way to gain profit. It's all about re-alignment and communication. About striving to find ways of making it all a zero sum game. Together they combine new and old technologies.

Constituting autonomous systems that can do things dispatched from the consumer society to bring forth another kind of synergy, another mental framework than the idea that you do things for cash or for yourself. Some of the members in the maker societies have an ideology they follow – others do not. Some want to change the society, some just want to establish an alternative inside it.

For many today, the biggest challenge is to find a way to be really free from the system. To make something that exists outside of it. For an alternative future to become reality, it might be necessary to create these autonomous power structures outside the existing ones. Not so that they can finally take over, but to show that those alternatives are at all possible. That there is not just one all-encompassing reality. That there is a potential other way to go about things – and that there can be meaning and joy found in it.

A WORLD SATURATED WITH IDEOLOGY

Stephanie Wakefield puts it like this: *If we accept being in a back loop, the question becomes, how do we respond? Do we try desperately to maintain the old "safe operating space," freeze a process already in motion? Or could we let go, allow a time of exploration and experimentation, see what becomes of the pieces of us and the world?* (Stephanie Wakefield, Field Notes from the Anthropocene: Living in the Back Loop)

She continues:

Instead of looking for final answers, what if we accept that we are living in a transitional time, where things are in disarray, where the future's uncertain, but where more is now possible and authorized than ever before? From this perspective our time is a time for audacity, experiments on the same playing field where our future is already being written for us. In short, living in the back loop. This new orientation and way of life entails finding new modes of nourishing ourselves, designing and raising buildings, staying warm or cool, and accessing clean water as it is does learning to face the unknown and learning to look into ourselves and ask what kind of life we want to make live, what kind of life is worth living, and really asking previously unaskable questions. What on earth could being be? By "we" I don't just mean designers, city governments, planners, or resilience theorists who have already become back loop participants, as testified by the existence and growth of the resilience paradigm. By "we" I mean everyone: common people where they are, how

they are, people who will bear the brunt of climate change, people who already needed the world to end yesterday so they could finally get a chance to live.

Today, Detroit is once again left open to the predators. As farmers, artists and hardworking workers and middle class citizens, have tried to salvage and secure parts of their city, value on property is on the rise. This attracts the entrepreneurs, and once again buyers, the investors and developers and the entrepreneurs are moving in. Property is the new gold and money is moving fast through the cities financial food chain, leaving the big sharks with the big bites, forcing the poor out of the centre and even threatening the agro-hoods. As the value of the land grows, the city no longer want to lease the land to the farmers who have been cultivating it. It's more tempting to sell it off for profit. Yet again the landscape is rapidly changing. Forcing back the community gardens, the beekeepers and the farms to make way for big development projects that need space and speed.

Soon, some predict, the power and the property will be back on even fewer hands than before. The equilibrium will be re-established and an even stronger mono-culture will dominate as the rich grow richer – until the next collapse and the next back loop.

THE END OF DUALITY

The process, the cannibalistic behaviour of our current global economy seems unstoppable. The question is, – what can we learn in the process?

In a world where the global capitalist experiment has become the only possible reality, it is hard to think outside that framework. To remember that it is just that. That it is totalitarian, deadly, default. That people starve in it, species become extinct in it, that if set free, – this system will feed the rich and ignore the poor. The air we breath is saturated with ideology. Its just so everyday that we do not notice it. We are living inside an ideology that celebrates the individual, the human endeavour. It is all a power game. Not a zero sum game – but a game where the winner can take it all.

This is the engine of enterprise. Its winner against looser. The once who have against the once that have not. This is the age of dualism. In this world it's those who have power against the powerless. It's the strong against the week. Man against nature

In his book *Times of Crisis*, – the French philosopher Michele Serre calls for an end to duality as a way of viewing the world. If we are going to survive as a species on this planet he says, we have to understand that there are always a third party, our planet – and we have to start to understand this party as an agent. Because, he writes – we are not living *in* nature, *on* the planet and *inside* a universe. We are living together *with it*.

We have to understand and accept the world as an equal partner, even as an opponent.

The struggle in the world has never been just between rich and poor, slaves and free men, females and males. If we do not recognize the force of the storm, the brutality of the drought, the production of oxygen by the algae's in our oceans – there will be no battles to win. We, the humans, will be gone.

Serres even suggests making the world's ecosystems, forests and streams juridical agents. So that they can be represented by, and protected by the law. Something we cannot handle at whim, but that are entities treated and protected the same way as we are (Michele Serres, *Times of Crises*, London, Bloomsbury Academic 2015).

In an age of dualism – what belongs together often end up in opposition to the other – or literally torn apart. The “one” is torn away from “the many”. The individual is set apart from the common.

The unique I – becomes something that we see in opposition to the “social we” – when we all know that every we is constituted by a plural of I's. Without individualisation – no society. Without public life – no democracy. And as Hannah Arendt so rightly concludes: A public sphere is a sphere where individuals act together from their own free will.

As Arendt sees it – we are pluralism. We are multitudes. This is the human condition – Man – not men, inhabits the earth. The life in the public is the political life. Living together is the fundament for all human activity. Hanna Arendt state that for an act to be political, the act has to be free and, it has to be performed in public. Arendt separate the private from the public life. She says that the life of action, vita activa – takes place in the private sphere. Here a human acts outside the frame of the private, and for an act to be political it does not only need to be free, to be present outside the private – it needs to see beyond a person's life, or situation. Maybe one can put it like this – for an act to be political – one needs to choose a perspective that makes it possible to envisage possible imagined future. (Hannah Arendt, *Vita Activa*, Oslo: Pax Forlag A/S 1996)

Plurality is our essence. We can forget about it. Walk around in it, feel apart from it, like an island in our unique “I”. After all, that’s where our senses are situated. This is where our experience are stored. Whether we like I or not, we have to experience this plurality through one gaze, ponder about it through this one mind, touch it, smell it, feel it with this one body.

WE ALL KNOW IT’S GOING TO HELL – AND THERE IS NO
ALTERNATIVE
OR
INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE TOGETHERNESS

Living late in capitalism is living in a global economy. This has been described as living in a limbo-like state somewhere between inertia and nostalgia, but living together is what we do and freedom and action is a necessity. Without it, there would be no politics. For Arendt, the world would only be a pile of objects. Through our senses and our interaction, through language – we can connect with them and see them, and make them into something.

Today we know that our existents and survival is connected to the existence and survival of other species. Nothing lives in isolation. Maybe the way forward is to understand the limitations of individualism per se – because as new science suggests – we are not so much different, but mainly the same. The art of the future is not about living apart, but living together with each other and *with* other species. Our senses limits us. We have to see beyond them – and maybe the stories we tell can set us free.

THE END OF CRITICISM

When Jacques Ranciere says that a political act is the act of creating new possible worlds, this gives art a special place in the “political” per se. For a long time, political art has been almost synonym with criticism. The idea has often been that art should unveil the power structures of society. Through criticism, “we”, the artists, will awake people from their slumber, and this will give them the tools and energy to fight the system.

In his book “Utopia”, Thomas More described an alternative world to make visible the challenges and problems he saw in his own time. Like in Mores case, – satire, fables can expose power. Through mirroring what we know, we can feel for those who have been wrong and want to fight the wrongdoers. The parable, even in its hidden and subtle form, can be the harshest kind of criticism.

The idea is that by identifying the enemy, you expose the problem. Or the other way around: By identifying the problem, you expose the enemy.

By exposing the problem and by making people aware of it, you can awake the will not only to solve the problem, and to fight the enemy or the system. In this way, political art that uses criticism, has been seen as a way of liberate the freedom fighter from his chains.

To make people aware of what suppresses them is, and will always be important.

Today many Sami artists produce radical and critical art that exposes the mechanisms of suppression inside the Sami society and from the Norwegian state. At the same time, – European political art seems to be in crises. In the introduction to the book *Not Just a Mirror – Looking for the Political Theatre of Today*, the German curator Florian Malzacher takes a close look at political theatre of today, and he claims that theatre is struggling to find its place in the current events and debates.

His arguments are familiar. We find ourselves deep in crisis: *The time seems out of joint. Economical disasters, outrageous social imbalance, growing right wing populism, millions of people forced into migration, various religious fundamentalisms, and an unprecedented ecological catastrophes to come* (Florian Malzacher, *Looking for the political theatre of today, Not just a Mirror – Possibilities in political theatre of today Berlin: Alexander Verlag 2015*).

The crises in democracy has hit the representational machine of the theatre at its core, but our strategies prevail.

Maybe, if the system is already unveiled, then we need new strategies?

If we know who the enemy is, if we recognise the powers changing forms, shapes and sizes – then art that produces criticism only confirms what we already know. We see it, we acknowledge it, we went our frustrations and then the world goes on like before.

Maybe critical art even just oils the machine and keeps us busy while preaching for the choir.

Maybe we are at the end of criticisms capacity for change.

Maybe you do not achieve change by exposing that which is, but in the potential of the new.

Political art does not only limit itself to criticism. It can be interventional, action based or even take form as hidden theatre – but since critical art is always based on the reaction against something that already is – it might have become a blunt tool in a time that hungers for radical, alternative visions.

Maybe our work is not to “show” art as an “autonomous” alternative – but as a potential for radical alternatives per se?

Lately I have even asked myself: Maybe our time offers the end of criticism.

What really makes us human – states Yuval Noah in his bestselling book “Sapiens” – is not our ability to walk on two, to speak or, our ability to use tools. It’s our ability to create stories. Fiction. That is what unites us.

Maybe what the art needs today is to change the focus from criticising what is, for a more productive strategy. To make the stories to form the tomorrow to come.

Each time has its consensus and stories that confirms them. Once the story was that of the black man being a mere animal. Once the story was that of women not having a soul. Once the stories confirmed our right to beat the slave, to look at women as property. That the king was closer to God. Even chosen and instated by divine powers. Today it is the story of humanism and individualism that connects us all. This is a story of dualism. But if we no longer believe in that story – what story is going to replace it and what stories are we going to tell in the future?

THE RETURN OF THE POST AND THE PRESENCE OF THE PRE

What we see is also, what exists.

What we see and what we repeat is what we give importance.

By repeating a story, a term, a fact I give it relevance. We give it weight. What we see as relevant shapes our agenda. That which is on our agenda makes us prioritise what we do. Doing is thinking.

Now we are stuck in terms like post–humanism, even post-history.

If humanism is no longer the story we tell – If historicism can do no more for us? If we are past all that – then it is time to look at what the void exposes. Who are we, the humans that are living inside “post-humanism”? Who are we, if we no longer see history as history?

If we measure things by what is no more – we also have to take on the task of discovery.

Sitting on that porch in Detroit – history was everywhere. In the house I was living lived the grandson of a slave owner. Let us call him Joe. The descendent of poor Polish and poor Italian farmers – now buying up the houses in the area. This black area. This black street. This black community, slowly bought up by a white man.

We stand over by the sweet-pies across the street from where we live. The light is low and golden. The air fresh from the last rain-shower.

The showers come heavy and sudden in Detroit.

Sabina, a black girl in her late forties, with a plain, purple uniform is standing by the curb. She is taking pictures with her iPhone. Of the rows of sweet pies, of beat and different coloured cabbages.

– Isn’t it lovely?

We agree. It is lovely this stretch of green land, of food and hope stretched out on this elongated piece of land that once was urban wasteland.

Then we get talking.

She works with animals. She loves horses. She wants to leave the city and travel down south.

She wants to raise horses there – down in Alabama, and I ask – why Alabama? – and she looks at me, this European in her nice white singlet and her lime green silk scarf.

– I have folks down there, she says.

– Family.

And then she says:

– Have you heard of the time of slavery?

– That’s what they were. And some of us came up here for work, she says – when we were freed.

Joe is a developer. He has 16 cars and trucks and runs several companies. He is into real estate. He rarely talk of the tobaccofarm back in Virginia. How his great grandparents lost

it when the slaves were freed and his whole family had to come up here. To Michigan.

In the evenings, we have a beer together.

Looking at pictures of this lakeside property he is thinking about buying – and here we stand.

On the other side of the street is one of the first urban farms in Detroit. Established some 11 years ago. Just a few hours go I stood at the rim of it, admiring the blossoming sweet-pies in those last, golden rays of sun, together with a woman my own age, the great grandchild of a freed slave, and I think of Joes ancestors. The tobacco-farm in Virginia. And I think of those sugar-plantations in Alabama. And I think of the cotton-pickers, the bent backs, the whips, those ships filled with slaves off the coast of Africa, with poor European farmers of the coast of Europe. Of how the oceans connected us then, and how they connect us now. Oceans of water and oceans of time. Slave-ships crossing them. And I feel an anger growing inside me. Against that prefix of the post. Nothing is over. It is still here.

Engrained in the tarmac on the pavement in Horton Street and I want to tear it all loose. I want to jump out of this framing. I can feel the events of the past moving, and shifting and I can feel the will for change and something new as well. Something unfamiliar as I sit on this porch with Joe, and my beer, in this city torn between different stories and different potential futures. It is a fight, – and I think this neighbourhood, this farm is going to lose it.

Joe is an energetic man. A man of the moment. A man of ambition. A funny man, a brutal man – a man with no time for thinking about the consequences of his actions.

He demolished some houses, and he buys them.

He takes on the hardest work. The most dangerous. He used to be in fights. Some say he still is. He has more than 30 properties, but he lives in none of them.

For what?

For profit? Because he can? Maybe is just not able to stop. Buying, selling, working, fighting – hoping to last as long as possible. That he will be able to keep on bringing in the cash – and my fantasy is there again. My dystopia. There he is. In it: A young boy. A survivor. Now with a stone in his hand. Running through the jungle, shouting, screaming, – searching for his name.

CHANGE OF PERSPECTIVE AND OBSERVATION AS A TOOL RE-ALIGNMENT

The dystopias feed our fantasies and fear. The stories of the good life, the happy endings are supposed to soothe and comfort us, but they are growing fewer. We believe in love – but can a kiss save this planet? We believe in families, but know that this system we live in, tear families apart. So we believe in that which is there.

Dystopias are a part of who we are, and in a way I will always enjoy them. I love allegories. Even the darkest once. Sometimes I think that dystopias might even calm us. They give some sense to it all. Maybe even a feeling of recognition. We need our demons. They are a part us.

I can see them in Joes eyes. As I can see those horses galloping in Sabina's mind as she longs to raise horses in Alabama.

In the anthology *Deleuze and the City* – the editors ask – what can a city do? (Hélène Frichot, Catharina Gabrielson and Jonathan Metzger, *Deleuze and the City*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press 2016) A city is not just one thing, it's an assemblage. It interacts with itself. It behaves (Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, New York, Bloomsbury Publishing PLC 20131980).

The “assemblage” of the city, is not just something we live in, a dead “milieu”, a mis-en-scene – it's an organism. It does something too us. It is all about fluidity, exchangeability, and it has multiple functionalities. The relationships of component and parts within the city are not stable or fixed; rather, they can be displaced and replaced within and among other bodies. It's all about relations interacting within a systems.

In theatre, that which happens is at the chore of the drama. Where things happens, there is potential for drama to unfold. If the city is not just a place, but also an event – it can function not just as a setting, but as an agent. It performs actions. One can even say that it has a will. The question then is – what has the city of Detroit done with Sabina. What has it done to flatmate Joe. What does it do to them right now, and what it can do to them in the future.

Will Sabina still wear her purple uniform?

How long can Joe go on working the hours he does, make the kind of money he does?
How old will he be before he gets a second, a massive and deadly heart attack?

Will they still go on planting multi-coloured cabbages here in Horton Street?

In Sabina's memories and in Joes memories, lays the knowledge of once being a slave and once owning one. Maybe even a decision never to be a slave again. Never to own a slave again. Never to live in a world that allows a man to own a slave. For a human to be a commodity that one can sell off.

I will remember Sabina for a long time.

She worked with animals. Animals in danger and animals in need.

– It must be hard I said.

– The animals, no – she said. It's the people. All those people self-medicating, – not being able to take care of themselves, of their animals of anything.

I might not remember her directly.

If I saw a photograph of her, I might see that her uniform was blue, not purple. Maybe it was no uniform at all.

As mentioned earlier, episodic memory – the kind that allows us to remember our personal experiences – is not a literal reproduction of the past. It's an ongoing construction in which we piece together different types of information from different sources. (Donna Rose Addis and Daniel L. Schacter, *Constructive Memory – The ghost of past and future*" NATURE 2007)

People draw on experiences in order to imagine and simulate episodes that might occur in their personal future. In this way, we project ourselves into the future based on what we recall of the past. We extract, combine and reassemble.

One could say that present and past walk hand in hand.

To change the perspective, to force oneself to think differently about the future – even imagine a time beyond our own lifetime, should not only be within our reach, but actually a part of what makes us human. We are made to do it. The way our memories are operating conditions us to do so.

This is, according to Hannah Arendt what makes the human into a political animal, that is what makes us able to live together with other people. To create societies. And that is what makes us able to act outside and beyond our personal gain.

Everything we do is personal, but we project it into the public. Public life is as much an imagined field, a field of fantasies, hopes and predictions. Of simulated and possible futures as it is "real". That is why, the way I see it – a preposition about a common future must always be both political and personal.

Before, I thought of the revenge of the post. How it would always come back and get me. But now it's the pre staring me in the eyes.

What do you see?

What do you lose and what do you win?

Do you see the beginning, or do you see the end?

P R E – F U T U R E – P O S I T I O N S

We all live our lives in such different circumstances.

I do not live in Detroit, I live here. In Norway.

To understand the other – is to take on a different perspective.

To change once perspective, can entail changing once point of view. Changing ones point of view can lead to changes in once framework, even in once value system.

We humans can do that. It is in our reach. We have always done it.

We make up the story of what it is to be human as we go along.

The word humanism might be dead, but humanism is not.

We might not be able to place the human being at the centre of the universe anymore, but we might be able to expand that valuesystem that humanism entail. Not cast it aside, but widen it.

Grow flexible. Grow wider.

The way our mind works is not a one-way street.

There is always room in us for more. More languages, more knowledge, more stories, more perspectives, more love.

To write – is also to think. Every text is based on an exchange – between people, events, other texts, past and present.

These experiences forms our cognition. It shapes our access to language and the way we use it. It defines the borders for our understanding of our self, and the role we play in public life.

To think differently – is to act differently.

A new time – need new praxeses.

Matter is matter – has always been matter and we have always been a part of it.

It's just that now – we can see it.

Now we can recognize how entangled we are. How plural we are.

We have to discard that old story where Man is both the hero and the villain. The victim and the thief.

Anders Dunker states in his article that “the future” is an ideological construction. And not least an imagined reality. A mental image.

That this mental images have consequences. There is a fundamental relationship between hope and action, he states – and also between hope and our ability to act. This relationship bears witness to the fact that humans are more than the circumstances we are given.

THE ACT OF LISTENING

I am convinced that artistic practise, given the right circumstances – can create its own field of experience. That it, when it bumps into and rub shoulders with reality can create a field where experience no longer belongs to the one, but is shared. Where what “I” have can be met by and merge with that which belong to the other.

Where other stories can set the agenda. Where the unique I are at one with the communal we, and were we see ourselves as living together with our surroundings.

In my texts, I want philosophy to merge with pain and politics to merge with pleasure.

I want to stop being afraid.

I want to stop being so afraid of the world I live in. I want to stop being afraid because it stops me from seeing it as it is.

I do not want to go blindly into the future.

I want to stop up and listen.

Just listen.

Just ask – what do you see?

Is this the enemy?

This tarmac, these walls, your face, that weed growing at the curb, those children playing, that aeroplane cutting across the sky, that puddle of rainbow-coloured oil, that first snow in November? The snow that does not come? My hands deep in my pockets, your hand reaching for the butter, birds migrating, people migrating, letters being thought, languages being forgotten, a new star being discovered? Our telescopes reaching deeper into space. The realisation that space might not end, that this might not end, that this, this is not the end – A mice in the undergrowth, a war about to break out, the discovery that the structure of some of our cells are the same as the structures of the cells in some distant star, the realisation that we are all matter, that matter matters, a girl showing her tits to a boy she likes.

To stop up and listen.

To see : A boy putting down his weapons deciding that he wants to grow wheat, starvation, demolitions, a single white man on a shooting-spree, a transportation of bread, of weapons, of grain. The heaviness of the plain as the rain fall – all that which goes on when all the other things go on. A writer writing his poem, a dancer stretching his arm out – a bird dying, a day dying, a star dying – this not the end – this is only beginning?

To stop up and listen.

To turn my listening into language.

To force myself to say – this is just the beginning – this is it. This is what we have. To brace myself for the yes, for the now, for the consequences.

We are a continuation.

This is where we're at.

Even if all of this disappear.

Even if I disappear.

Even if art disappears.

This is just the beginning.

We are here – not at the end of times. We are at the edge; we are at the point where the current turns. We are the current. We will not bend our heads. We will not look up. We will not be stargazing – this time – I say.

This time, I repeat – this time I will not get lost in the unknown.

It's time to embrace it.

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