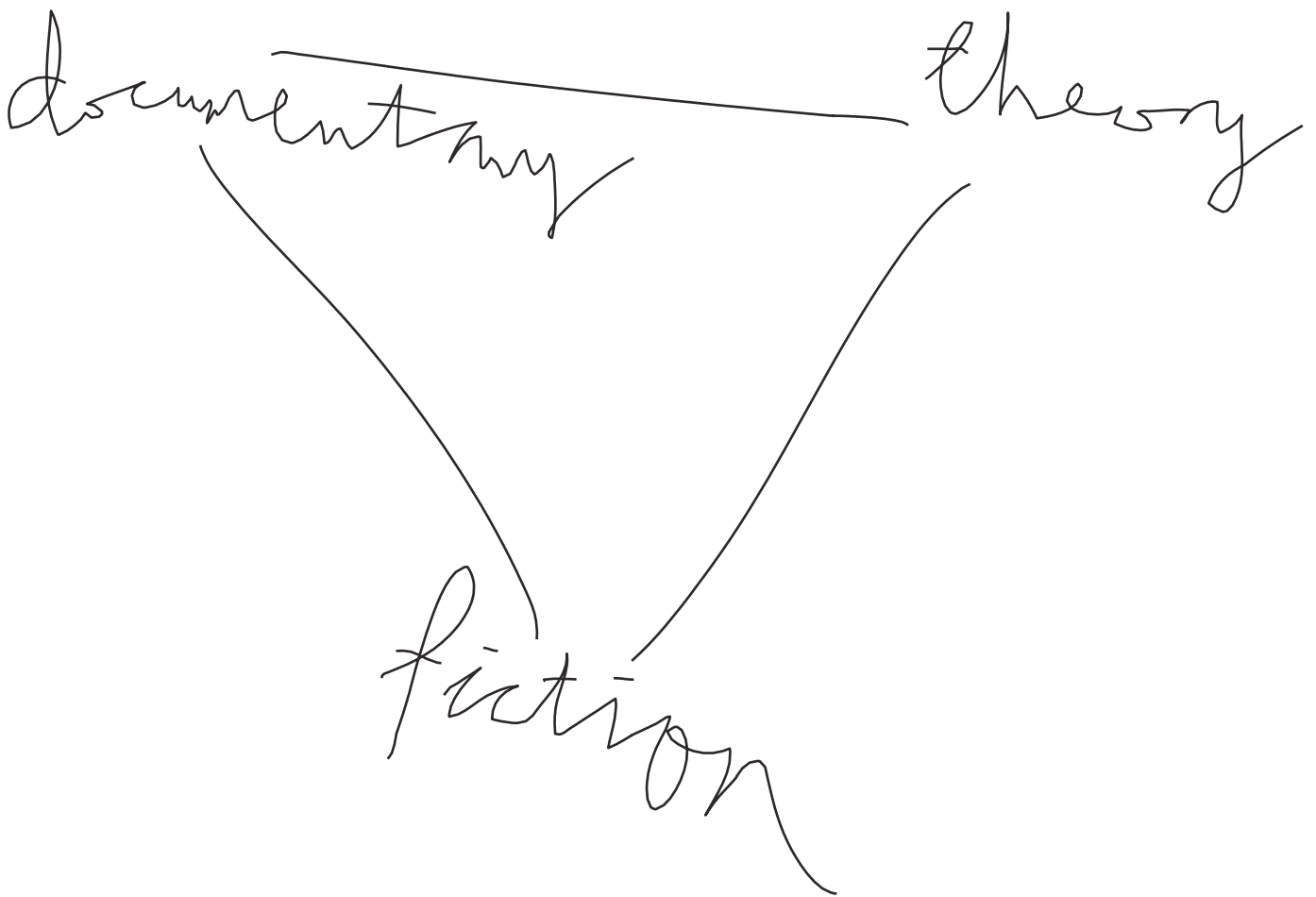


BA-thesis



Marika Markström 2012
Finnish Academy of Fine Arts

"In our inner universes Each one of us holds a number of characters; internalized images of early experiences, absorbed like figures and clustered as different parts of the self. Since we are relatively unfamiliar with these unconscious and often contradictive characters, they cause pain in our conscious psyche, and above all - they are in constant search for a stage on where to re-enact their tragedies and comedies, as well as actors willing to undertake and RE-play central roles together with themselves, or rather, together with the different parts of one's self. The different I's. As long as we don't bring these games and characters into awareness, and emotionally work their messages deeply through, they will continue to play their repeated repertoires and control a lot of what happens to us in the outer world."¹

One of the red lines seen in my artistic work is a deep interest in psychology and the human mind. How personalities take form and change in relation to *the m/Other*² - the outer world, structural similarities between each ones (defence) mechanisms and patterns of reactions in specific situations. Etcetera.

A couple of years ago I encountered psychoanalyst Joyce McDougall's "Theaters of the Mind" - a thought-provoking book where theoretical writings intertwine with documentary case studies, expressed through an almost poetical language. The postfreudian McDougall reveals typical connections between our subconscious and conscious existence; how we all carry UNCONSCIOUS MATERIAL, mostly consisting of suppressed experiences from the first years in life, which affect our decisions and everyday-life as adults, either we want it or not. She likenes the psyche with a (one of the) theater stages on where we REPEAT old plays until their more or less traumatic core is as worked through as possible. These fascinating phenomena, amongst other influences, became the starting point for a long-term art project with the same name as McDougalls book.



The process behind "Theaters of the Mind" was not only informed by readings, but came also into being as a creative flow of images in december 2009.

Initially the images emerged as oil paintings - mostly in organic colours, but with an accent of artificiality and mixed with drawing, to my inner eye. Together with the paintings I saw sculptures as well, situated in dark rooms as a space installation (*I often consider SPATIAL surrounding, as well as SOUND and DARKNESS, as necessary for the affectability to the viewer*). At this time I got my lifes first depression and was unable to work for half a year. Luckily the experiences from that void gave a lot of fruitful material to the project, and to life in general too.

Later on when I immersed into the project for a longer period of time, I started to develop these visual ideas through a kind of active imagination (a common artistic method that I often use) which also integrated - or itself created - new images. And sequences. Cinematic sequences. Then I realised that I had to transform the whole project into a more or less video based work. Despite this intention the ideas were perhaps circulating around too long as immaterials, as well as in the many notebooks they have filled, before anything fell out in physical reality. But each thing has it's time. It was in this phase demanding to translate the highly visual, emotional and wordless content of the ideas to verbal language. Henceforth I started to make up a storyboard with small ink paintings instead of a manuscript (which though became implemented in the very end of the process, in between the shootings 2011-2012). After this intermediate step it was easier to find the words, at least insofar as to create a synopsis in january 2011;

Theaters of the Mind

In this multimedial history built out of fragmented narrative elements projected into a labyrinth-like facility with rooms functioning as different sequences or chapters in a book, the viewer can follow a woman analyzing collective phenomena, as well as individual. When the subject matter of her research gets closer her private life and psychological, suppressed truths, the perspectives of narration changes; the woman becomes now herself the exposed object for analytical, possibly phallic gazes. She fragilizes as she encounters old traumas which throw her into an insecure russian roulette - an alchemical travel with potential paths leading to deterritorialized ends or vulnerable beginnings, depending on the free interpretation of the viewer.

Throughout the chronology all forms of control and safety glides away into ambiguous spheres of (un)reality, and one may even end up in confusion whether the main character is any kind of researcher or if the topics, as well as their physical surroundings, are existing only as intrapsychic pseudorealities, defending her from desintegration or overwhelming outbursts from the unconscious.

In one level the narration deals with the role of science in society, including new artistic and yet unestablished forms of interdisciplinary research. In another, deeper dimension this partly documentary fiction depicts aspects of a/ the complex human psyche such as landscapes within the self, interpersonal conditions, the formation of a personality structure and its continuous subjectivizing instants, narcissistic wounds and artificial persona constructions, boundaries, projections, psychic space, potentiality of transformation, transcendence, etc.

The title of the work, as well as some theories influencing the content, derives from a book by the psychoanalyst Joyce Mc Dougall.

Issues concerning increasing similarities between film and mind - imagery and imagination - in relation to the technological development are also conceived in this work.



One year after this first synopsis I imagined the work to be as two versions; one with video projections in a room-installation - as mentioned above, the other only as the film as such.

What would also be worth adding is the role of the language, which, in analogy with the epic narrative and the deconstruction of the main characters' persona, travels from distant, intellectual rigidity via the wordless towards something more poetical and personal. Yet with an accent of theory as a remnant of the past, but here as an atmospherical, heterogenous *poemtheorem*, partly inspired by the painterly way of writing which I have encountered in excerpts of "A thousand plateaus" by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. *NOMADIC THINKING*

Central concepts and fragments of thoughts in my process:

The **unawareness** of to what extent the UNCONSCIOUS RULES us and our daily DECISIONS

Formative constituents for the structure of a personality

INTROJECT(ION) / internalized images of early, archaic events

the obsession to REPEAT - foremostly activated in relations, even with own children; especially when they are in a certain age, which unconsciously reawaken traces of trauma from the same age(s) within their parent(s), and hence transform them to casual transmitters of their (in various degree) not-worken-through-material

(PARADISE)-ILLUSIONS and other **PROJECTIONS**

utopia & its heterotopic site of projection; From primary selfobject to secondary - or sublimed to i.e. art

EGO/ Persona & THE SHADOW

cut off from its roots

False self, 'true' self

Different sides of NARCISSISM - all rooting in 'the same' wound;

1 The 'classical' and generalised conception of Narcissus

2 The INTELLECTUAL DISTANCER...

Intellect & rationality

Cynicism, CONTEMPORARY CONTEMPT

All contempt is self-contempt

PHALLIC GAZE / judgement as defence

3 The more-than-good-enough helper - plagued by collective normativity and patriarchal demands

- Negative animus constellation

- PURITANISM

n

Non-space, ABOLITION OF PSYCHIC SPACE,

A deterritorialized humanity; Deprived of its substance, and originary signs

(post)anorectic systems

Instrumental modes of being

Artificialization of the body-mind, collectively as well as individually ALIENATION

Its connection to the today so common narcissistic trauma

What we all have: BLIND SPOTS / BLACK HOLES - invisible for the subject itself

Words and the wordless - UNDIFFERENTIATED, PRIMA MATERIA, abject, unimaginable

Collective needs; To gain AWARENESS, awe, gratitude, selfreflection, depth

"Know yourself, human!"

INDIVIDUATION and Alchemy as its metaphorical language

To detronize the ego Without total identification with the divinal self

LOGOS & MYTHOS - coniunctio

feel-thinking-knowledge

"YOU'RE BOTH"

/Multiplicity

"uncanny anxiety lies next to uncanny awe"

TRANSJECTIVITY, MATRIXIAL VALUES (Bracha L. Ettinger)

and the 'deepest' layer in everything

Silence, vibration, musicality

Sensibility, sense-ability TIME

and TIMELESSNESS,

ephemerality volatile, transcendent

DEATH

Reality

TRANSITIONAL SPACE: where perception and apercception merge ³

the ENDLESS POSSIBILITIES of Moving image to resemble inner life; IMAGERY and IMAGINATION, FILM and MIND

During the years "Theaters of the Mind" has remained to its basic structure, but to its form been differing a lot throughout the process. I would consider it a highly experimental project, since I haven't worked like this earlier in any sense. Now the work almost extends to a longer movie, but not a traditional drama, since I've been trying to mix it with more theoretical elements even in a direct and verbal sense. A sort of video essay or Brechtian epic theatre contained within a dramatic film.

An important endeavour in my work has been to examine whether these theorems are compatible with emotional content, without becoming mere illustrations or overloaded information. To dynamically appeal both intellect and affects. A source of inspiration for this I have encountered in works by contemporary filmmakers such as Maija Timonen and Ryan Trecartin. An unforeseen effect that I experienced in some of Trecartin's and one of Timonen's works was a bodily, almost abjective respond, which occurred when the material operated with affective and rational fields - polarised to the most subconscious as well as the hectic, respectively strictly formal language - simultaneously.

Multiple meanings. Ambiguity is something I seem to always end up into.

Regarding my intentions and the outcome there are quite many compromises taken. My initial imagined ideas had richer and more detailed visuals than I transformed to the cinematic medium. Yet there are some traces left of the original visions, seen in e.g. partial similarities with the surrealist dreamscapes of David Lynch or Kafka. Central to the structure of the script was, and is, the sequences' alternation between 'The Archive of the Subconscious' and 'The conscious mind', but this is not very clear in the actual film. I had also thoughts about high-tech and low-tech in analogy with the content, but ended up in a messy mixture of different aesthetics and cameras as a result of my unorganized and quite stressed shooting-days. This 'home-video-aesthetic' could though work in some sense, since the material, although mostly fictive, is constructed as if bordering to a documentary.

After long consideration I decided to use myself as an actor - which I think was a good choice - mostly by practical and economical reasons but also because I would have found it hard to inform anyone else to express the more or less Unexplainable or wordless parts of the content, likewise all which stem from my personal entity of images, ideas, long-term thought processes, readings and subjective experiences.

Right now the film is ready, although I may still do some smaller changes. The second version, with the objects and room installations, is yet under construction. Whether I have succeeded in my strivings with this project I can't tell. I probably need some time and distance to re-evaluate it. One thing that I actually miss in the content is different viewpoints; other than psychoanalytical and subjective. There are of course many other aspects to regard concerning our complex, contemporary era - such as sociopolitical and economical - which affect the development of a personality and living conditions in general. But those things can instead be fuel for future art projects.

1 Excerpt from my video *Theaters of the Mind* / Reformulation of a central phrase in Joyce McDougall's *Theaters of the Mind*

2 Bracha L. Ettinger, *Fragilization and Resistance*

3 Donald W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*

