

1. Bracha L. Ettinger, "Fragilization and Resistance," in *Fragilization and Resistance*, eds. Tero Nauha and Akseli Virtanen (Helsinki: Finnish Academy of Fine Arts with Aivojen yhteistyö, 2009), 118.

2. Gregory Bateson, "Part VI: Crisis in the Ecology of Mind," in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind: Collected Essays in Anthropology, Psychiatry, Evolution, and Epistemology*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 491.

3. Joyce McDougall, *Jagets teatrar: Illusion och sanning på psykoanalysens scen, trans.* Theresa Bener (Stockholm: Natur & Kultur, 1988). Originally published as *Theatres of the Mind: Illusion and Truth on the Psychoanalytic Stage* (New York: Basic Books, 1985).

Wit(h)nessing¹
A character from beyond
Grey, Austere
Fragments of an ancient presence
Silent, forgotten

S/he is here. Now
To say something about
absence and madness

The accumulation of images
Exponential acceleration
of new materials
Toxic. Tempo

Deprived of their substance
Former organic bodies
filled with artificials
Unreal, without connections
STUFFED animals

Lack of function
Lack of Life

Collective mourning

It's time to transform
To find something genuine
Perhaps even within the synthetic

A dynamic outcome
of amalgams
New, ephemeral forms,
yet timeless, immaterial
cores

"In accordance with the general climate of thinking in mid-nineteenth-century England, Darwin proposed a theory of natural selection and evolution in which the unit of survival was either the family line or the species or subspecies or something of the sort. But today it is quite obvious that this is not the unit

MARIKA MARKSTRÖM

Transportation and transmission — *From subjectivity to reshaped matter*

of survival in the real biological world. The unit of survival is organism plus environment. We are learning by bitter experience that the organism which destroys its environment destroys itself. If, now, we correct the Darwinian unit of survival to include the environment and the interaction between organism and environment, a very strange and surprising identity emerges: the unit of evolutionary survival turns out to be identical with the unit of mind."

—Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*²

Background and Context

When I began working on my Master's project, I did not know that it would take me further, into a relative digression from the direction with which I was initially concerned. The text that follows is a description of the ideas and works (most of them present in my MFA exhibition) to which this process led. I have for quite a few years been interested in the organisation of the human psyche; in the way the self is composed of different structures whose most important constituents can be traced back to the very first years of life—when the encounter between the child and the consciousness, but above all the unconscious, of the people in its immediate vicinity plays a decisive role. It is then that the ego is formed through introjections and the complexes that go with them, whose content must then be repeated in the life of the adult in the form of well-disguised scenarios, which the psychoanalyst Joyce McDougall calls "theatres of the mind."³ The repetitive nature of the ego mirrors the power of the unconscious. This power finds expression in all of our everyday lives to a considerably greater extent than we are aware of. Everything from choice of partner to work and political viewpoints are, to varying degrees, affected by our earliest experiences. That does not mean that other factors do not have their own impact, such as in

subsequent interpersonal relationships and socioeconomic, political, and cultural circumstances, but these are often easier to detect than intrapsychic blind spots. How psychological and political phenomena work together has also engaged my attention for some time now, although I have not done any extensive research on the subject. What I find really interesting, but also disturbing, is the way that subjective choices, whose validity and causes are all too rarely investigated or called into question, can impact on a larger scale on a collective level if they are given sufficient space. This can obviously be a positive thing, and that is broadly the case. But the state of the world provides evidence of the contrary as well.

The very transition from a hunter-gatherer culture to the agricultural era was the first (and perhaps the most decisive?) step towards less healthy ways of life and civilisations. This was not in itself a consequence of uncritical subjectivity. But stratification and permanent settlement created the preconditions for mindsets and the consequent injustices that were not possible in the same way during the nomadic period, which

accounts for more than 90 percent of humankind's time on Earth. The ego's desire was given an opportunity to run wild in an unprecedented manner. Disputes arose about things that had not previously existed; for example, private property and land boundaries. The population grew, which led to tougher conditions in terms of even greater imbalance and competition. The system of money gave rise to the poverty that still constitutes one of the biggest collective problems today. And, what was worse, violence, war, and dictatorship arose. But the onset of the age of settlement did not just bring unhappiness. Today, we have

achieved inestimable knowledge on several levels. Intellectual, scientific, and technological developments have brought about incredible advances; we have instituted laws and made public calls for human rights (even if they have not been followed through everywhere). The fight for democracy, freedom of expression, and equality is making progress, too. (On the other hand, there are many indications that these basic human values were more conspicuous in prehistoric hunter-gatherer societies, and thus did not have to be actively implanted in order to counteract some prevailing degeneration.) Furthermore, stratification

has also had positive consequences, such as specialisation into different professions—including the birth of the arts and constant diversification.

As a result of perpetual evolution, we are today faced with a complex world with millions of times more components to take into consideration than our stone-age brains have had time to adapt to. Many major decisions have to be made in the near future. It is no longer possible to close our eyes to the great changes in the climate, which are an indirect consequence

of the development of humankind. The forward march of the ideologies that have led to today's individualism and dominant economic systems is no longer sustainable. Endless growth is an impossible idea for which future generations will have to pay a high price. Higher than that workers in third-world factories already have to endure today in the form of poor working conditions and carcinogenic chemicals—all for the sake of Western (and now increasingly global) illusions. As Kajsa Borgnäs notes, "It is high time to talk plainly about the system that is destroying the environment."⁴ We have to learn a new



Dead end
2013
Close-up of installation
246 x 133 x 307 cm
—

4. Kajsa Borgnäs, "Därför kan klimatfrågan inte lösas vid kylskåpet" [Why the climate question cannot be resolved at the refrigerated counter], *Dagens Nyheter, Kultur*, October 15, 2013, 8. Original quote in Swedish.

5. Félix Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, trans. Ian Pindar and Paul Sutton (London: Athlone, 2000), 5–6 and 47.

6. *Ibid.*, 7–8.

7. Guy Debord, “The Culmination of Separation,” in *Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Ken Knabb (London: Rebel, 2004), 7.

8. *Ibid.*, 10–11.

9. *Ibid.*, 8–10.

10. Bateson, “Part V: Epistemology and Ecology” and “Part VI: Crisis in the Ecology of Mind,” in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, 455–57 and 483. By no means all of these, however, come under the more pathological narcissistic personality disorder (NPD).

11. Debord, “The Culmination of Separation,” 15–16.

12. Kathrin Asper, *Övergivenhet och främlingskap*, trans. Lars W Freij (Stockholm: CJP Centrum för Jungiansk Psykologi AB, 1993), 45. Published in English as *The Abandoned Child Within: On Losing and Regaining Self-Worth*, trans. Sharon E. Rooks (New York: Fromm, 1993). Here, the post-Jungian analyst Kathrin Asper places the emphasis on the narcissistic wound (which usually comes into existence in the most important period of the formation of the self [birth to three years of age] and which lies behind the apparent self-love, which is actually a lack of real self-esteem) and a certain type of adaptation that usually has the same narcissistic wound as its source. According to her definition, both of these (which are called “grandiose” and “depressive” narcissism and often occur in one and the same person, albeit in individual variations) come under the concept of narcissistic disturbance.

way of thinking that will help to give us a broad view of the whole ecological and transgenerational situation, in order to be able to do what is necessary, and in good time, to halt the effects of what we have already set in motion. Nor can the fact that we have a technology that might be too well developed for our own good be recklessly abandoned to its own fate. This is a powerful instrument that is out of proportion in relation to the degree of psychological maturity of many of those in power.

Integrated World Capitalism, Spectacle, and Self-Estrangement

In *The Three Ecologies*, the psychoanalyst, social theorist, and radical activist Félix Guattari says that we are being mentally manipulated by the production of a collective “mass-media subjectivity.” The power of post-industrial capitalism, which Guattari calls “Integrated World Capitalism” (IWC), tends to be more and more delocalised and not led by any specific organisation or country—not even the US, despite the fact that the American Way of Life is a model with which most of the world is confronted. IWC’s best means for gaining social control without violence is the mass media.⁵ IWC is not just a major cause of environmental damage and weakened social relations, but people are also unconsciously affected by attitudes and ideas circulating within this widespread system. The “enslaving” power of television is a typical example of how IWC infiltrates and saturates the unconscious. As Guattari puts it: “Do we really use television or does it use us? Are we not in danger of becoming intrinsic component pieces in a much larger machine?”⁶ But however monstrously self-propelled IWC has become according to Guattari, we must not forget that it is a construction that has sprung from human ideas. Capitalism in itself is not all bad—the idea of the free market can be a good one, provided that we take responsibility for what is produced and consumed; to do that we have to start on the individual level, with the ideas that exist prior to its materialisation. It is the interconnectivity between the three sectors of mental, social, and environmental ecology—Guattari’s amplification of the usual definition of ecology, inspired by Gregory Bateson’s theory of an “ecology of

mind”—which came to take on the greatest significance for my work. More on this later on.

The spectacle as a social relation between people, mediated by images⁷

Not so far removed from Guattari’s harsh judgments of IWC, the cultural critic Guy Debord in *Society of the Spectacle* manages to put his finger on one of the most important phenomena associated with IWC: representation. He states:

*“The first stage of the economy’s domination of social life brought about an evident degradation of being into having—human fulfilment was no longer equated with what one was, but with what one possessed. The present stage, in which social life has become completely dominated by the accumulated productions of the economy, is bringing about a general shift from having to appearing—all “having” must now derive its immediate prestige and its ultimate purpose from appearances. At the same time all individual reality has become social, in the sense that it is shaped by social forces and is directly dependent on them.”*⁸

In its totality, the spectacle can be seen as both the project and the outcome of IWC. In all of its manifestations—ads, entertainment, news, etc.—it represents a certain *model of life*: “It is the omnipresent affirmation of the choices that have already been made in the sphere of production and in the consumption implied by that production. . . . Its sole message is: ‘What appears is good; what is good appears.’ The passive acceptance it demands is already effectively imposed by its monopoly of appearances, its manner of appearing without allowing any reply.”⁹ Since the spectacle (and the whole IWC) represents itself as a reified and ubiquitous reality, it is not surprising that we take it to be the sole territory, whereas it is no more than the outcome of a constructed map—a cultural backdrop concealing both the original territory (nature) as well as other possible maps and territories. (Bateson uses the aphorisms “the map is not the territory” and “the name is not the thing named” when discussing the way we tend to take abstractions for the actual reality, while in fact they are only conceptual or linguistic appropriations applied to things made in the mind. But here the map has almost become the territory.)¹⁰

The spectacle was initiated as a result of the world’s loss of unity, and the expansion of its modern version reveals this major loss. According to Debord, the spectacle is the official language of this separation.¹¹ Despite the fact that he wrote this more than forty years ago, it is almost even more relevant today, when we are literally overwhelmed and permeated by spectacular images. On top of that, today, in our leisure time, we have become faithful servants of the production (no longer solely of the consumption) of the spectacular—for instance, via the carefully selected images that we upload to social media, more often than not of ourselves, or more precisely, images that we want to create a certain representation of ourselves. *Being cool—the capital of young people. Seductive img. A flat and alienated selfhood. Homogenisation. Acting through, never directly there. Locus displaced. Press “Like.”*

Narcissism as wound and self-estrangement

But there are also other phenomena that both influence and are influenced by this collective alienation (which is of course not total, but only partial), some of them mental. Narcissistic personality disorder can be summed up as an inhibition of the individual’s love of self due to being emotionally abandoned as a child.¹² In many cases this occurs very subtly (and mixed with positive transference), so that an unconscious negative attitude can be communicated despite the best intentions. As a consequence of this, the child is forced to develop compensatory strategies; for example, trying hard to be liked and subordinating itself far too readily to the normative demands of patriarchy, even in its inner world.¹³ Thus, a relatively protective facade—a “persona”—is constructed. Identification with this persona, or mask, consigns the individual’s true being to the shadows.¹⁴ The individual is thus alienated, or estranged, from the self without being aware of it. According to Kathrin Asper, these problems were already very common in Western culture by the end of the 1980s, and they do not appear to have diminished since then.¹⁵ This probably has something to do with both cultural and mental factors.

In mythological terms, the narcissist is looking for paradise. But searching for some-

thing grandiose or for a response—an echo—is problematic. If the self can “buy” admiration, then things go well.¹⁶ (This thus also applies to those whose narcissism primarily expresses itself through overadaptation.) But external acknowledgement or admiration is not a good substitute for poor self-esteem. The lack of this unnatural fuel can cause the narcissist’s defence mechanisms to dissolve. This creates a receptivity to the narcissistic norms that characterise our contemporary society, and which, for instance, IWC benefits from, whether it be a matter of achievement, representation, or some other form of prestige. The illusions that IWC promotes are not totally dissimilar to the psychic paradise illusions of narcissism. This includes the idea of the perfect body, partner, child, and, ultimately, the perfect life. Further, the narcissistic problematic finds expression, for instance, in imbalanced transitions between closeness and distance within interpersonal relationships. Together with IWC, narcissistic distance can, for instance, lead to capitalising on others and “random plays,” which are increasingly common phenomena among younger people.

In parallel with all this, predominantly good counterforces prevail. But, in order to create greater awareness of the problems, they have to be highlighted more clearly so that their harmful potential emerges in the smallest components in relation to the whole. When Guattari speaks of “the entropic rise of a dominant subjectivity,”¹⁷ he too puts this issue in the strongest of terms, so as to make clear the risks of a negative development.

Ecology of Mind and Epistemological Fallacies

Gradually, images and ideas about artificiality and environmental destruction began to pop up in my thinking. I have, in fact, for a long time had some ideas about ecology, but I have not integrated them into my artistic work before now. Among the first things that made an impact on me was the excess of artificiality in the form of supersaturated digital images. [*Cheap exotic escape, piles of digital waste.*] I worked for a while on a video triptych that I called *Digital cocktail*, but I shelved the project when I began to get other ideas and did not know how to proceed. Some months later, I resumed work on one of

13. *Ibid.*, 45–46. “The narcissistic child . . . learns to ignore its mental pain, and the adult narcissist as a rule continues to adopt the same behaviour.”

14. *Ibid.*, 46–48. Asper also draws parallels with D. W. Winnicott’s “false self.”

15. About 30 percent of Swedish infants have not formed a good attachment with their carer. Often the carer’s behaviour is based on their own attachment pattern. Increased incidences of psychic illness and increased differences between children from different socioeconomic groups are also evident. Further, there are social trends that go against the child’s interests and parental attitudes that can lead to difficulties. Several of the respondents think that children seem to live under great stress today, which has several causes. *Klara, färdiga, gå! Om de yngsta medborgarna och deras rättigheter* [Ready, set, go! On the youngest citizens and their rights], Barnombudsmanen, 2007, <http://www.barnombudsmanen.se/Global/Publikationer/Klara%20fardiga%20ga.pdf>.

16. Asper, *Övergivenhet och främlingskap*, 46. Paradise illusions are not infrequently a way of looking for the earliest relationship with “the m/Other,” since they are a consequence of larger or smaller inadequacies in this relationship, which in a natural development would be paradisiac, before the child goes from symbiosis and narcissism to autonomy through gradual confrontations with reality.

17. Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, 68.

18. Cybernetics is the science of communications and automatic control systems in both machines and living things.

19. Bateson, "Double Bind, 1969," in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, 273–74.

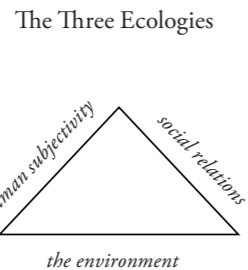
20. *Ibid.*, 408. The anthropologist and communications and system theorist Gregory Bateson is best known for his system theories—how everything exists in relation, and thus how important contexts are. This was, in the 1970s, a relatively new way of thinking, which has influenced several other areas, including family therapy.

21. "Each system contains subsystems which are potentially regenerative, i.e., which would go into exponential 'runaway' if uncorrected" (*ibid.*, 447). "In a balanced ecological system . . . it is very clear that any monkeying with the system is likely to disrupt the equilibrium. Then the exponential curves will start to appear. Some plant will become a weed, some creatures will be exterminated, and the system as a balanced system is likely to fall to pieces" (*ibid.*, 437).

22. *Ibid.*, 489.

23. *Ibid.*, 271–72.

the videos, *Collective mourning*. Now, it was toxic algae and an unusually sad whooper swan (in the film footage) that became symbols of the pollution we are spreading, so that other people, but also animals and nature, are made to suffer. *External contamination is internal contamination*, and it was the transformation between these states—from ideas (not just negative ones) to concrete physical outcome—that I would later get hooked on when I began to read Guattari's *The Three Ecologies* and Bateson's closing essays in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*. When I started, I did not know that these authors would put forward coherent theories of mental, political, and environmental ideas that were interwoven, but instead thought that they would only talk about ecology in the ordinary sense. But their definition of ecology—which is extended to encompass the whole context of both immaterial and material phenomena—has, as I mentioned earlier, come to take on great significance for my works. Their concepts have not only put a lot of what I was working with into words, but also opened up a new perspective.



Cybernetics¹⁸ and *adaptation* According to Bateson, "All biological systems (organisms and social or ecological organisations of organisms) are capable of adaptive change. But adaptive change takes many forms, such as response, learning, ecological succession, biological evolution, cultural evolution, etc. . . . Whatever the system, adaptive change depends upon *feedback loops*, be it those provided by natural selection or those of individual reinforcement. In all cases, then, there must be a process of *trial and error* and a mechanism of *comparison*."¹⁹

This is what happens in what are known as cybernetic systems. A cybernetic system is determined by "restraints"—factors that exclude certain potential pathways through a negative

reduction (of possibilities/probabilities). Of particular interest here is the relationship between *context* and its content.²⁰ In cybernetics there is no communication without context. A cybernetic system is self-corrective and strives always towards equilibrium. Homeostasis between its variables. If one variable goes beyond its tolerance threshold—i.e., goes into *runaway*²¹—it will most likely affect other parts of the system.

Difference and selection in circuit structures

The subject matter of cybernetics is neither events nor objects, but the *information*, or *differences*, "carried" by events and objects. For Bateson, cybernetics, and by extension the *nature of mind*, is one of the twentieth century's most interesting inventions. According to him, Immanuel Kant, for instance, contributed to this, through his *Critique of Judgment*, in which he states that "the primary act of an aesthetic judgment is the selection of a fact." Nature contains no facts in itself—or, you can say there are an infinite number of potential facts, out of which the judgment selects only a few, which become truly facts by that act of selection.²² Bateson explains:

*"First there was the problem of reification. Clearly there are in the mind no objects or events . . . only transforms, percepts, images, etc., and rules for making these. . . . The explanatory world of substance can invoke no differences and no ideas but only forces and impacts. And . . . the world of form and communication invokes no things, forces, or impacts but only differences and ideas. (A difference which makes a difference is an idea. It is a bit" of information.)"*²³

A difference can never be localised. A piece of chalk contains an infinite number of *differences*, but only a few of them make a difference. The unit of "in-formation" is difference. The same goes for the unit of psychological "in-put." Zero differs from one, and can therefore be a cause, contrary to what is possible in hard science. Even sameness can be a cause, since sameness differs from difference. These odd relations obtain within organisms and many machines since they are able to store energy. If you kick a stone, it moves with energy from your kick. But if you kick a dog, it reacts with its own metabolic

energy. These effects also depend upon the *circuit structure*. A circuit is a closed pathway, or network of pathways, along which *differences or transforms of them are transmitted*. These notions now give us a new way of thinking about the concept of *mind*.²⁴

What a mind is, according to Bateson

These are the essential minimal characteristics of a system that Bateson will accept as characteristics of mind: The system operates with and upon *differences*. It consists of closed loops or networks, on whose pathways differences and their transforms are transmitted. Many events within the system get their energy from the respondent part (supplied from its metabolism) rather than from the triggering part. The system acts self-correctively in various ways, in the direction of homeostasis and/or runaway. Such a process implies trial and error. These minimal characteristics of mind are generated whenever and wherever an appropriate circuit structure of closed loops of causation exists. Mind is an inevitable function of such complexity. But that complexity exists in a great many places other than inside my head and yours.²⁵

Ecology of mind, ecology of ideas

Since this sort of mind is immanent not only in those pathways of information that are located inside the body but also in external pathways, the "individual nexus of pathways which I call 'me' is no longer so precious because that nexus is only part of a larger mind. . . . The ideas which seemed to be me can also become immanent in you."²⁶ It is also here that there lies the basis for the way that ideas are spread and materialised—in all three ecologies. Our individual psyche is actually no more than a set of points (of collected ideas) in a gigantic network that are traversed by millions of currents and structures of ideas. Some of these attach themselves to us, others pass through.²⁷ And we ourselves are responsible for whatever ideas are passed on from us. We cannot be totally sure which of our thoughts are totally our own and which are internalised from outside. Since our self has largely been formed by various ideas, neither can we be dead certain which ideas are good ones.

"Perhaps 'epistemology' is only another word for the study of the ecology of mind"²⁸

I had not counted on coming across a concept I had previously sniffed around, but not researched further—by that I mean the way we all have a habit of believing that we are "right" in our views and interpretations, despite the fact that everyone has widely differing views, and without a more in-depth analysis or calling into question the factors that constitute our subjective opinions, interpretations (the *selection of facts*), and consequently the whole of our self; that is, what has shaped us into precisely the thinking, feeling, and acting subject we have become. For the most part we live totally unaware that our world is nothing other than a representation of what exists, limited by a selective filter. This subjective filter has even affected the interpretation of history, as well as scientific observations (albeit to a lesser extent).²⁹ On the other hand, the boundaries between "right" and "wrong" are by nature fluid—no one can lay claim to any greater truth, but simply has to start from his or her own subjective views. In many cases, the truth is also subjective. Despite all this, we should still be able to talk about confusing the favourable and the unfavourable from an ecological perspective.

The unit of survival
and epistemological fallacies³⁰

Here Bateson comes to one of his most crucial insights: "Let us now consider what happens when you make the epistemological error of choosing



Prima Materia
2014
Sculpture
119 x 138 x 52 cm
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24. *Ibid.*, 489–90.

25. *Ibid.*, 490.

26. *Ibid.*, 471.

27. See "components of subjectification" and the difference between subjective and individual in Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, 36.

28. Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, 401.

29. *Ibid.*, xxv–xxvii.

30. "You and I are able to get along in the world and fly to Hawaii and read papers on psychiatry and find our places around these tables and in general function reasonably like human beings in spite of very deep error. The erroneous premises, in fact, *work*. On the other hand, the premises work only up to a certain limit." *Ibid.*, 486–87.

Marika Markström

Installation view of
three works at the MFA exhibition
(*Twofold nature, Falling into/ Rising
from gravity and Traces of Wit(h)
nessing*)
2014



31. Ibid., 491–92. Kaja Borgnäs (doctoral researcher in environmental policy and state theory) describes something similar in “Därför kan klimatfrågan inte lösas vid kyldisken,” and adds: “It is a tough adversary—the human psychological instinct for self-preservation. . . . We are equipped with a magnificent battery of defence mechanisms . . . that mean that we do not see a catastrophe as a catastrophe if it does not come abruptly, does not take human form . . . and if it does not directly affect people in our vicinity.”

32. Timothy Morton, “A Quake in Being” and “Viscosity,” in *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 1–24 and 25–37.

33. Ibid., plate 5.

34. Ibid., 1–2.

35. Ibid., 4–5.

36. Cornelia Hesse Honegger’s *Soft Bug* from Pripjat, Ukraine, 1990, watercolour, is relevant here. It depicts an insect deprived of functional body parts. See *ibid.*, plate 3.

the wrong unit: you end up with the species versus the other species around it or versus the environment in which it operates. Man against nature. You end up, in fact, with Kaneohe Bay polluted, Lake Erie a slimy green mess, and ‘Let’s build bigger atom bombs to kill off the next-door neighbors.’ There is an ecology of bad ideas, just as there is an ecology of weeds, and it is characteristic of the system that basic error propagates itself. It branches out like a rooted parasite through the tissues of life, and everything gets into a rather peculiar mess. When you narrow down your epistemology and act on the premise ‘What interests me is me, or my organisation, or my species,’ you chop off consideration of other loops of the loop structure. You decide that you want to get rid of the by-products of human life and that Lake Erie will be a good place to put them. You forget that the eco-mental system called Lake Erie is a part of your wider eco-mental system—and that if Lake Erie is driven insane, its insanity is incorporated in the larger system of *your thought and experience*.³¹

*Too coloured by culture
Collective Self-Deception*

*Fresh and white like an advertisement smile,
Or a photograph of a new, but already renovated
flat in a slick property catalogue.
How far are we willing to go in order to maintain
the flawless image of ourselves?
It takes three kilos of chemicals to produce an ordinary
cotton T-shirt.*

*Contaminated entropy
Everything that took millions of years to create . . .
Eco_oikos_home*

*Out of all
Beauty we got*

Poisonous Prime Matter

“Hyperobjects” are what Timothy Morton calls almost unimaginable entities that have such vast spatial and temporal dimensions that they go beyond traditional ideas of what a thing is in the first place.³² Global warming is a typical example of one such “thing.” Hyperobjects can be very remarkable in character; something that is expressed, for example, by Chris Wainwright’s Red Ice 3 (C-type colour print on aluminium,

2009, reproduced in Morton’s book *Hyperobjects*).³³ A hyperobject could be the biosphere, the solar system, or the sum total of all the nuclear materials on Earth, or very long-lasting plastic products, or the sum of all the whirring machinery of capitalism, etc. Hyperobjects have several properties in common. They are viscous—they “stick” to beings that are involved with them. They are nonlocal—any “local manifestation” is never directly the hyperobject. Their temporalities, like their physical *hyperdimensions*, outscale the ones we are used to, and they occupy “a high-dimensional phase space,” which makes them invisible for stretches of time. Their effects are *interobjectively exhibited*—in interrelationships between aesthetic properties of objects. Hyperobjects are responsible for what Morton calls “the end of the world,” rendering both apocalyptic vision and denialism obsolete.³⁴ According to Morton, the world has in a way already succumbed, in that we can no longer relate to the concept of “the world” in the old anthropocentric spirit, partly thanks to human-made hyperobjects.

*The Anthropocene; terraforming and the Great Acceleration.*³⁵ *Manmade hyperobjects slowly emerge. Hollow us out, outscale us, in their uncanny presence. Dissolution. Human aspects displaced. Floating objects without direction in an undifferentiated void of equal value applied to Every thing ≈ postmodern non-hierarchy taken to its very extreme.*

Cultural mash-up

As a result of the proliferation of pollutants in the “three ecologies,” we all contain a bit more artificiality now, not just with regard to immaterial creations such as ideas, personality traits, and basic collective values, but also to the hundreds of unnatural substances that have already settled like a carcinogen cocktail in our bodies. What happens when objects and organisms—in their ephemeral forms similar to their predecessors in art—emerge out of poisoned or malfunctioning material? Perhaps in the end even the external forms and patterns will be changed, as a consequence of radical gene modifications.³⁶ Nature reshaped and/or put out of action by culture. I deal with this, for

instance, in *Prima Materia*, into which I have mixed “older elements,” such as earth, wood, and wax, with newer, artificial materials, such as plastic, rubber, spray paint, asphalt varnish, and a neon-blue wig. Here I am thinking of two things: when Timothy Morton talks about *viscosity* as an uncanny aspect of the hyperobject’s presence, also within us,³⁷ and of David Douard’s exhibition *Narrow-Cold Lovel*, where I experienced a kind of melancholy that was exuded by the artificialised objects. At the same time, there was a powerful, timeless presence there in the anthropomorphic things. Almost like observing our own absence. In Douard’s own words in the exhibition text: “The eggs in the space are all empty. The beings growing inside are long gone. No bodies, only frames and containers. Remains. A deserted landscape. . . . Between the silence of the objects and the tattoo-like statements written on their skin something new is being formulated. Formless. Quiet. . . . A return. A protest. A reappearing of lost souls.”³⁸

Outwardly closeness: Beauty and Beauty.
Illusion of image(s)

It is somewhat paradoxical that the turquoise in the water along southern beaches and in certain swimming pools recurs in the blue-green algae, which is, in fact, a toxic result of the illusory lifestyle of luxury and affluence that pictures of pools and beaches often represent. In some aerial photographs (see page ??) of what we believe are beautiful, exotic beaches, the confusion is total—it is actually enormous carpets of cyanobacteria that fool the eye. This attitude comes out in Dead end (not present at my degree show, but at the 2014 annual exhibition at Malmö Art Academy), in which two “circles” mirror each other. The one a flat image. Illusion. The other contaminated reality. Physically tangible material. An assorted mass of painted plaster showing algae, artificial strands, and remnants of an old rope in the same cyan-green shade as the algae carpet. (Rope and other plastic waste have recently caused the death of many whales by blocking their natural food intake.³⁹) The great oceans are no longer immune to human activity: “we can have no such faith in our diseased and toxic oceans with their oil slicks and giant algae

blooms visible from space.”⁴⁰ Species are wiped out, as in the whole of the ecosystem, and the over-fertilisation is evident.



41

[anamorphosis a distorted projection or drawing which appears normal when viewed from a particular point or with a suitable mirror or lens]

Psychic projection: “a phenomenon which seems to be almost universal when man commits the error of purposive thinking and disregards the systemic nature of the world with which he must deal. . . . The man, after all, has acted according to what he thought was common sense and now he finds himself in a mess. He does not quite know what caused the mess and he feels that what has happened is somehow unfair. He still does not see himself as part of the system in which the mess exists.”⁴²

Trapped in distorted, but well-dressed values
on behalf of the animate

Values blurred; it is no longer possible to get a clear overview of cause and effect within the prevailing production system, since they are embedded in thick, non-transparent layers of complex relations, where labour is displaced (disguised) to sites invisible to the consumer’s eye. And then there is the habit of uncritical and unconscious thinking. This, I think applies specifically to two of my recent works: *Dead end and (Un)conscious production of suffering*.

TRANSVERSAL THINKING

The Earth has had enough. It is no longer possible to simply patch up the edges of the prevailing economic system. If we want to see

37. “Is . . . the problem . . . not that things are truly distant, but that they *are* in our face—they are our face? . . . *They are already here* . . . ‘The slimy is myself.’ . . . When the inside of a thing coincides perfectly with its outside, that is called *dissolution or death*.” *Ibid.*, 28–30.

38. David Douard, exhibition statement for *Narrow-Cold Lovel*, Galleri Signal, Malmö, November 22, 2013–February 9, 2014.

39. “Gray Whale Dies Bringing Us a Message—With Stomach Full of Plastic Trash,” *Realnews24*, November 5, 2013, <http://www.realnews24.com/gray-whale-dies-bringing-us-a-message-with-stomach-full-of-plastic-trash/>.

40. Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, 4.

41. This NASA Aqua Satellite image (released December 9, 2003) shows the turbid waters surrounding southern Florida and the Florida Keys.

42. Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, 442.

43. Ibid., 437. “A constancy of some variable is maintained by changing other variables. . . . Over time, the system becomes dependent upon the continued presence of that original external impact whose immediate effects were neutralized by the first order homeostasis” (ibid., 447–48). “The world became *addicted* to what was once an *ad hoc* measure and is now known to be a major danger” (ibid., 497).

44. Morton, “A Quake in Being,” 23.

45. The title of my MFA exhibition. In my earlier works and ideas I have also been interested in several concepts of transformation, e.g. the mental journey in analytical psychology called the individuation process, which uses both alchemy and the skin-shedding of snakes as symbolic languages.

46. Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, 43.

47. By “resingularisation” Guattari means approximately a re-conquest of the production of subjectivity, to become a more unique and individual one. But not an individualistic one—“Individuals must become both more united and increasingly different” (ibid., 69).

48. Ibid., 28, 33, 34, and 50.

49. See Ettinger, *Fragilization and Resistance*.

a sustainable future, we presumably need to change the whole thing, or at least to substantially rethink it. But this reorientation (if it ever comes about) has to happen gradually, otherwise there is a risk of uncontrollable “exponential runaways”—which will also probably get worse if we carry on in our current direction, which, according to the cybernetic principle of balance, can lead to collapse.⁴³ We will still have to accept temporary dips, likewise continuously renouncing excessive wealth. Postmodernism and hyperobjects may have made us cynical and misanthropic. But there is no reason to adopt a dystopian vision of the future in advance. Instead, we can try to learn something about what is happening. Even hyperobjects can open the way to new ideas, says Timothy Morton.⁴⁴ Perhaps due to their kinship with finiteness?

Time to Transform⁴⁵

We also have a lot to learn from the wisdom and ways of living of indigenous peoples. They have built their lives on totally different epistemologies. Peaceful hunter-gatherers are probably the people who have lived in the best ecological balance. Ecological, even in the extended sense of Bateson and Guattari. But it is not enough to apply their approach straight off in today’s world, which makes totally different and far more complex demands. Since our contemporary culture is founded on a great many dubious basic assumptions—which we pay a high price for in the form of environmental pollution, violence, poverty, inequality, and mental illness—what is needed is an active awareness and change of habits. We should consequently employ all our intellectual and intuitive capacities to come up with methods that can pave the way for new modes of thinking. A transversal thinking⁴⁶ that in its turn continually finds new ways. In these ways perhaps high technology, for instance, will be combined with ancient wisdom, and tri-ecological ethics with most entrepreneurship? Let us hope that this is not a total utopia. A collective change in thinking, so that production and consumption are in harmony with the larger system. Beyond the subspecies. Creating an identification with the whole and a critical awareness of our segmented epistemologies.

Nomadic art, nomadic life. RESINGULARISATION⁴⁷

What we hope for, from the three ecological registers: an ethico-political articulation; *an ecosophy*. According to Guattari, “In the final account, the ecosophic problematic is that of the production of human existence itself in new historical contexts.”⁴⁸ Creating *existential territories* where *resingularisation of subjectivity*, *decentralisation*, and *dissensus/critical re-evaluation* are promoted. But powerful counterforces have already been set in motion on several levels, as is evident, for instance, in political engagement and in cultural offerings. (The practice of art in itself, as it appears today, is also in its very nature an example of much of this, partly thanks to the ambient discourse that places the emphasis on free research, individuality, and critical thinking. The question of what it would mean to apply the methods of contemporary art to other domains in society is something that comes up in conversation with other students.) These shifts are also evident in the longing that many people have for more profound values, beyond economic demands for efficiency and *bureaucrazy*. A meaningful and mindful existence in which mind, body, and soul exist in better balance with each other and with the external circumstances. This is also the precondition for the unit of survival—organism plus environment. *Let the grid melt into a smooth flow, beyond the dialectical.*

Beyond the Personal

How to transform from Homo aeconomicu\$?

Ω π ∞ ♡ ☉ ☼ ☽



Taking back the body from the image.
Being from surface. Reattuning⁴⁹

We have proudly conquered measurable facts in the physical world; we can explain count-

less external phenomena, but we do not know much about the depths of our own self. What happens then to our notions about our self and the world? The most important instrument we have in all of viewpoints and actions is, in fact, the subjective mind. These questions were also explored by the philosopher, mystic, and journalist Paul Brunton. He was one of a number of people who saw as their mission in life to introduce certain traditions of Eastern wisdom to the West during the first half of the twentieth century. In a number of his writings, he addresses Westerners’ general inability and unwillingness to think beyond the ego⁵⁰ and the material realm. This underpins an individualism that is not quite so possible if we identify ourselves with a greater whole—whether it be Bateson’s larger mind, the *spiritual Self* (as a part of a universal consciousness), or some comparable entity that lies beyond the emotional and intellectual, i.e., beyond the personal plane. But this is easier said than done.

EGOCIDE OR ECOCIDE

That is the question

Matrixial transsubjectivity, com-passion,
and response-ability⁵¹

An archaic figure with a face of clay. A grieving, grey-clad character who appears in *Collective mourning* and in a sense also in *Traces of Wit(h)nessing*. These two works incorporate the above-mentioned lines of thought, which also recur in *Twofold nature and Falling into/Rising from gravity*, in which feathers, bones, ash (in the video sequence), and colour pigments constitute the representative material. Here the interaction between gravity and lightness, material and immaterial is of central importance.

*Always, beyond the particular object whatever it may be, we have to fix our will on the void—to will the void. For the good which we can neither picture nor define is a void for us. But a void fuller than all fullness.*⁵²

Fragmented Narration and
(Im)material Shifts

After several years of slow work with video and ideas, I felt a powerful need to express myself

sculpturally. To get to work practically with my hands and to realise ideas more or less directly. That is how several of the sculptures of recent years came about. The materiality and the colours in all the works, not just the sculptures, have been of great significance. The bentonite clay in *Wit(h)nessing*, which proved to be a detoxicant, the archaic connection between clay, light, and water in the same work. The colour grey as an anti-overload, back-to-basics desaturation. [*The revival of a transparent simplicity.*] Certain materials and colours recur in several works, e.g., various kinds of powder and the shiny asphalt varnish. For a couple of the works, I have borrowed the language of material and form from the surrealistic symbolism of my earlier ideas, in which material correspondences to mental processes were fundamental. This has presumably happened totally intuitively, but later on I have thought that it was perhaps what was needed to get the rather political content to (hopefully) be more emotionally engaging. To charge them with mental affectivity. *Amorphous, shiny black, sculptural, organic, as in the system of pipes in Dead end.*

I gradually began to get more video-based ideas. I suddenly saw that it was possible to work with film in a different way than I had previously attempted. A freer and simpler way that did not require so much planning, actors, props, or long hours in front of masses of unedited material. This was to be the beginning of what I came to call “fragmented narration.” But once I had accumulated the footage I got caught up in the editing and was forced to shelve the video project for a bit. I wanted to do something simpler in between. If something can be expressed in a single image or object, then it should be possible to do the same thing with video. To strip everything down to the minimum possible expression for what you want to communicate. It was then that a couple of film loops consisting of only a single clip came about. Almost like stills, apart from some minuscule movements. Of the works on display in the MFA exhibition, *(Un)conscious production of suffering and Falling into/Rising from gravity* are kinds of video fragments. But they are also incorporated into spatial installations together with physical material. When I subsequently carried on with *Collective mourning*, I had the idea that the content would be

50. See *Den hemliga vägen [The Secret Path] or Vägen till Överjaget I och II [The Quest of the Overself I and II]* by Paul Brunton. A total dethroning of the ego is never feasible, even if, for example, Indian yogis can get very close through their lifelong spiritual devotion. Such people can inspire us to turn our gaze inwards (however often we lose sight of it), without for that matter running away from the reality of the external world. This is not a question of some omnipotent puritanism—on the contrary, it is about facing the ego’s shadow sides, instead of projecting them onto others.

51. See Ettinger, *Fragilization and Resistance*.

52. Simone Weil, *Tyngden och Nåden* (Stockholm: Artos, 2010), 55. Published in English as *Gravity and Grace*, trans. Emma Crawford and Mario von der Ruhr (London: Routledge, 2002).



Opposite page:

Traces of Wit(h)nessing
2014
Close-up of installation
with sound and objects
290 x 142 x 68cm

Twofold nature
2014
Close-up of installation
322 x 114 x 56 cm

stripped down to what are essentially remixed variants on the other works—an extended amalgam of their separate existences. Kinds of simulacra, or recurring elements. But in the end, the film did not turn out to be so stripped down, nor does it incorporate more than a couple of fragments of the other works. Its wide-ranging content had to go through several transformations in order to be able to be put together, so the process was quite extended, too.

SPACE. Audiovisual and spatial experience.
LED in darkness

When I began envisaging several of my works (the ideas for them—they had not yet crystallised) in relation to each other, I understood that they should all adopt the same method of fragmentation—stripped down and spotlight like islands scattered in the encircling darkness of the space, I saw them in front of me. Now, with Bateson's system theory in mind, I also see how they are not just fragments of the narrative context constituted by my mental world, but also of other, more or less shared, contexts. What I previously thought of as frames of reference have now been expanded to encompass even wider contexts. Every object or occurrence stands in relation to one or more contexts/references (and yet more in the contemplation/interpretation of it, and even more when it is presented as a displaced element, cut out of its original context). *A map of multiplicities, network of transconnections; of different structures superimposed, interlinked, and criss-crossed—all following a similar type of organisation, whether abstract/immaterial or concrete/material. A part is always in reference. Everything is inside everything. One, yet many. Henceforth the immanent quality of the fragment.*

Untouched nature. But now there is only a fleck left. And that fleck is shrinking, like the Arctic

Several of the materials in my work come from a place on the outskirts of civilisation, where the cottage of my childhood is situated. I collected the eagle feathers in *Twofold nature* over several years when I was small. The bits of bone in the same work come from a beached seal skeleton. The video loop of cotton grass in *(Un)conscious production of suffering* was recorded on the same

island, as were a couple of sequences in *Collective mourning*. I also believe that the place itself influenced my ideas. In nature you can see the marks of environmental changes much more clearly than when you are surrounded by the signs of culture.

Smooth blue and the presence in things

A certain shade of blue has also popped up several times in my process. The first time, in my internal imagination; then, as the blue pigment powder in front of the video projection in *Falling into/Rising from gravity*; and, finally, in the blue light on the bits of skeleton in *Twofold nature*. When I test lit the bits of bone for the first time, it was as if a kind of serene presence flowed out of them. (Whether this happened inside or outside my mind, or in the relationship between object and mind, I cannot say.) Perhaps it is from dynamic combinations of the artificial and the natural that something new yet ancient will emerge?

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HELENE NYMANN

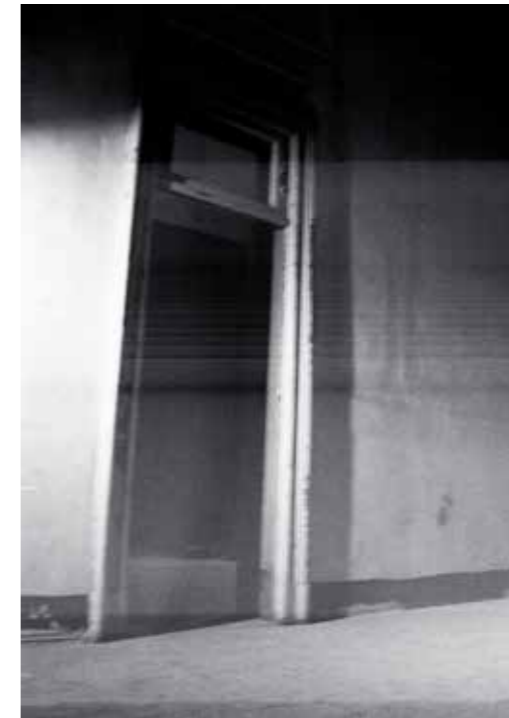
RUNAWAY GIRL

In the mid sixteenth century the French writer Madeleine de Scudéry created for one of her novels a map named "Carte du Tendre," or in English, "Tender Map."¹ In this fictional yet cartographically detailed map, she depicts a woman's emotions and desires on her voyage toward love and self-realisation, thus acknowledging the exterior as an interior through an embodied sense of self. For a woman in the sixteenth century to be both well educated and living independently off her work as a writer and artist, as de Scudéry did, was exceptional and something that, to this day, should be celebrated. To follow the trajectory put forward by de Scudéry, I will construct my own Tender Map in order to investigate the territory of my artistic process and my deep interest in the psychological and metaphysical

room within and between people, and between people and an artwork. I will join up with thinkers and artists with whom I have a feeling of belonging and who inspire me in my art practice, and, last but not least, intertwine personal memoirs of an artwork that I undertook in Cairo.

I understand the need for women's voices to be heard within the contemporary art world. I shall not refrain from mentioning that in dealing with a highly political situation such as a revolution, in this case the recent Egyptian revolution, the psychological and existential effects are of utmost importance.

I pack my bags and set out with the desire to reach beyond my well-worn comfort zone. A new artwork starts in my subconscious, where memories, associations, and images emerge, and through dreams, meditative states, or through simple everyday acts, the pieces fall into place. I collect them, write or sketch them, and suddenly



a new territory forms. Cartographically, on my map, I am walking on a road outside of town; the road is called "Matter" and an intuitive state of mind is evoked as I search for clues and abandoned materials, remembering the words of Roland Barthes: "Magic is the sudden transformation of nature."² My steps quicken and my mind begins to recall the emotions of a woman.

Egypt: She was a dancer, and the presence of her body changed the entire

room when she entered. Unlike the other rooms in the abandoned hotel this one had a window that couldn't open, as someone had nailed it down, pierced it through to show its tragic fate—for if it was it ever to be reopened, it would have to be broken down and replaced.

From childhood to adulthood, dreams, intuition, and visions, to the endless reading and rereading, drawing and writing. Forming one's language through the ability to express oneself freely in order to liberate and evolve. So that the presence of a consciousness may be applied

Door
2014
Inkjet black and white
print
47 cm x 64,3cm

1. Giuliana Bruno, *Atlas of Emotions: Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film* (New York: Verso, 2002), 2–12.

2. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (New York: Noonday, 1972), 97.