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Neo-worlds:

Transformative Agency through  
Fright, Rite, and Myth

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Red as a Rose.

## Introduction

### *Another We*

I am an artist, and through this dissertation I have sought to outline the interrelations between historical processes and myth from the vantage point of art, that is: Through the constructedness—artificiality—of mythic narratives, which I have learnt nonetheless predispose and orient the historical fates of humans, cultures, and societies alike. To critically acquaint myself with the mythic structures that inform our present, I have engaged in a practice of ‘active mythic thinking’ as a method of learning and of attempting to negotiate with ‘that which obliges.’ This aspiration has been inspired, in particular, by Dora Garcia, Peter Gow, Eduardo Kohn, Els Lagrou, Peter C. Reynolds, and Claude Lévi-Strauss, whose work I will be returning to throughout the dissertation.

In the first chapter I zoom in on the particular case of Denmark to show how the homogenising myth of the nation state is hinged on the oppression and forced forgetting of historical ‘ambiguities of identity.’ With a starting point in my own near-death encounter in childbirth, I explore how liminal fright experiences might (re-)connect modern subjects with such ambiguities, but also how the agency to act on these insights is systematically blocked by modern Western mythologies, rendering fright encounters a near-guaranteed recipe for trauma. This inspired the second chapter’s search for mythic structures to sustain what I label ‘authorised and authorising liminality.’ A position from which liminally ambiguous insights might be understood as transformative potential rather than disabling pathology.

Having learnt how Amazonian shamanic practices may operate to ritually affirm and reaffirm a mythological view on identity that is nested in ambiguity (rather than homogenisation), I dedicate the third and final chapter to attempt narrating forth a similar capacity ‘at home.’ Not to appropriate other cultures’ knowledges, but, on the contrary, to learn how I as artistic storyteller—active mythic thinker—might enlist mythic structures pertaining to my position in time and space to facilitate liminality as a transformative potentiality rather than disabling pathology in the cultural context by which I am obliged, and for which I am (co-) responsible: The contemporary West.

With my thesis exhibition, I have approached this task along two separate strands of work: Accessing the historical gaze of the extremely long-lived gurry shark—the ‘havkal’ or

'håkjerringa,' i.e., 'merman' or 'mermaid'—in the video installation *Rovhistorier / Histories of Predation*, I provide my audiences and myself with a deep-time perspective from which to consider the mytho-historical developments that have delivered us to our present.

The artwork traces the shark's transit zones in the North Atlantic and the White Sea, and its 'visionary capacities' may thus be approached from any location across these marine regions; different people with different heritages will see different things when engaging with the deep-time imaginary optical device that is the installation. I, however, engage with it from the outset of my East Atlantic home region in West Jutland to address the site-specific 'mythologics' that have rendered me a Dane, and which—undisturbed—will continue their operations to ensure Denmark's shock-bolstered, homogenised, and homogenising, cultural continuity into the future. To challenge this latter fact, I have devised my *Donnimaar*-project to sing forth overridden but existing ambiguities of identity in this specific geographical context; addressing and empowering another 'we' than the 'we' that sees itself demarcated through Danish (and Danifying) national mythology.



*Note on Method:*  
*Active mythic thinking, ambiguities of identity,*  
*and authorised and authorising liminality*

In 1873, the German philosopher Robert Vischer introduced empathy ('Einfühlung') as an aesthetic term in his dissertation *On the Optical Sense of Form: A Contribution to Aesthetics*. Vischer understood empathy as the human ability "to 'feel into' works of arts and into nature (...) through a process of poetic identification."<sup>1</sup> Thus, before being a term pertaining to the social, psychological, and neurological sciences, empathy was assigned to the aesthetic sphere where it designated the human ability to bridge difference: To approximate human as well as non-human others, 'feel into' them, resonate, and poetically identify, with them—in short, empathise with them—to the level of recognising axes that align self and other despite radical ontological disparity.

In this way, Vischer's aesthetic philosophy was at odds with the hegemonic tendencies of his historical context. Where Vischer emphasised the human capacity to resonate across different identities, his time was marked by national movements that conversely sought to unify and preserve identity by marking it against difference: Not only other nations, but also traits within nations and peoples that were deemed to be divergent. In this sense, Vischer's theory can be said to function as a kind of go-between or intermediary between the identitarian political reality of his time and the ability to identify human (self-) difference—to render this latter capacity thinkable and 'feelable'—through the artwork as a stand-in for human others. I would argue that the logical consequence of Vischer's thinking is that if you can empathise with an artwork, or with beings in nature (his other example)—and resonate with them to the point of poetically identifying and imaginatively merging with them—it should be possible to resonate with humans that are othered at political and systemic levels too. If such a process of ambiguous identification, as I call it in the following, does not happen, it is not because it is not possible, but because this capacity is for some reason culturally or discursively blocked.

It is an open question whether Vischer intended for his aesthetic concept to be extended with such activist agency—to call it that—to save human empathic ability and

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<sup>1</sup> See Robert Vischer: "On the Optical Sense of Form: A Contribution to Aesthetics" in *Empathy, form, and space* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 95

challenge nationalism's inwards homogenising and outwards alienating tendencies, by applying art and the artwork as stand-ins for politicised and structurally alienated others: To posit art as an arena to articulate and exercise empathic capacities in the hope that it may seep into, blend with, inspire, and even change, mainstream discourse. But I know that it is my personal ideal of artistic practice that art may function as a kind of middle ground between what is and what is not thinkable and/or utterable at a given time, in order to be able to say: "I am not quite sure what it is or how to name it, but it is possible to talk about it, because look! It happened. Can it be done again? What happens if we do it together? How should we talk about it? What does it mean? How might it signify?"

In this sense, art is both real and artificial to me: It is real in the sense that it is inspired by political reality and by wishes to renegotiate what is immediately screened-out or culturally naturalised. And it is artificial in the sense that it does not seek to itself realise the outcomes of such renegotiation, but rather to inspire conversations and ideas about it; to share the load and the responsibility of figuring out what should be done—and how—together with those who encounter the work. In this sense my art is intended more as a catalyst than an answer; as a kind of sketching of future capacities or modes of co-existence for myself and my audiences. It is an intention to be close to that which I do not quite know how to name, but—by spending time with it, being with it—to familiarise myself with it, and to allow for it to familiarise itself with me too. I would hope that my work inspires people to think of their worldly engagements through and beyond my work. Which is why—for my work with this dissertation—in addition to my home institution at the Oslo National Academy of the Arts, I opted for institutional enrolment at the Anthropological Department at Aarhus University rather than the Department of Art History, Aesthetics & Culture and Museology.

While the latter might immediately have seemed a more 'natural' home for a contemporary artist like myself, the discipline of anthropology is a practice-based mode of research revolving around the probings and (self-)reflections of the researching subject. For technical reasons related to the project's financing, I have been enrolled simultaneously at the Art Academy at the Oslo National Academy of the Arts and at the Department of Anthropology at Aarhus University. While this has not always been an easy gap to bridge, the project has been informed in invaluable ways by both contexts, just as I hope that my agency as institutional go-between may potentially have contributed to the development of artistic research as a budding discipline.

At anthropology I learnt about strategies to shift embodied practices and experiments into words, all the while respecting the inherently different nature of written and spoken language on the one hand, and practice-based experiences and experiments on the other. Attempting to write about what I had gathered in the 'field' (of art), anthropology taught me ways in which this might be done. And the Art Academy shielded me against the structural forces of the university that would seek to academicize my research, thinking artistic practice as research's negation. Art critic and media theorist Boris Groys explains that the distinction between science and art is a difference in the degree of trust in images: Where science strives to make its images of reality as transparent as possible in order to judge reality itself on the basis of these images, art focuses on its own materiality and lack of clarity; the obscurity and autonomy of images as well as the resulting inability of these images to adequately reproduce reality.<sup>2</sup> Here, too, we find ourselves negotiating a middle ground.

My project aspires to contribute to establishing artistic research as a discipline that should be built on art's own premises; not a parallel discipline that is validated by its capability to inform academic research, but which may conversely enrich, and be enriched by, scientific and academic epistemological cultures. To use a concept developed by historian Philippe Pignarre and philosopher of science Isabelle Stengers—whose book *Capitalist Sorcery* has been central for the development of this project—I consider the choice between art and research an 'infernal alternative:' That is, a structural illusion, which according to Pignarre/Stengers emanates in part from a difficulty within scientific culture to deal "with what is external to science except in the de-realising terms of 'beliefs', 'mere opinion' or 'illusions'."<sup>3</sup>

As such, I generally align myself with the analysis put forth by my fellow artist Anna Daučíková, who works as vice rector of artistic research at the Prague Academy of Fine Arts, that most art is research, even if far from all art is funded as such:

Why is not all art production recognized as artistic research? If in the process of accomplishing any art piece there is a hidden condition of research—meant here as a seeking / an inquiry / a delving into, why do we need to have artistic research singled out? What if we think about art as a possibility for stepping into a realm of "not anymore here" and "not yet there," and focus on questions of how the art piece, in the sense of its

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<sup>2</sup> Boris Groys: *Art Power* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), p. 55

<sup>3</sup> Andrew Goffey: "Introduction: On the Witch's Broomstick" in Philippe Pignarre & Isabelle Stengers: *Capitalist Sorcery—Breaking the spell* (Houndsmills and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. xiii

perception, challenges the work of the mind? And what if life turns out to be no less a “real fantasy” than art?<sup>4</sup>

Thus, having enjoyed the great privilege of carrying out a long-term research project within a well-funded and well-structured institutional framework of both the Oslo National Academy of the Arts and Aarhus University, I hope I may have also contributed to validating artistic (research) methods in their own right, and for their own purposes. And in the big picture, I of course hope that my practice can be purposeful for reflecting on, negotiating, and renegotiating the ways we live together as humans and cultures.

This entire Ph.D. project of mine can be said to be one long ‘note on method’: Throughout the project I have researched my way back to a set of intuitions I had through the experience of nearly dying in childbirth. I have dedicated the project to exploring the contemporary circumstances that render such liminal experiences largely unsharable and traumatising, as well as what it would require at the level of the cultural and social collective to change this signification (or de-signification): Instead of consigning liminal knowledge to the pathological backwaters of human experience—trauma, isolation, and other dysfunction—what would it take to render it sharable and, potentially, transformative?

In this capacity, too, anthropology has been a productive interlocutor for my artistic research to examine and unpack the reasons why, in a contemporary Western setting, what I call authorised and authorising liminality is “not anymore here” or “not yet there,” to use Daučíková’s words. This returns me to empathy and Vischer’s theorisation of the term at a time that required the co-optation and blocking of human capacities capable of bridging across disparity in order to graft and consolidate the European nation states. Exploring how these developments signified in the context of Denmark—the socio-cultural context that, nearly 150 years later, circumscribed my near-death experience—I have consulted anthropological and ethnographic theory regarding myth and ritual to understand the processes and logics according to which liminal knowledges may be either culturally sanctioned or disqualified.

In doing so, I have engaged Claude Lévi-Strauss’s, Victor Turner’s, and Arnold van Gennep’s analyses, among others; however instead of the Native American, African, and other non-European communities enlisted by these grand old men of modern ethnography, I have as my core-‘informants’ the 19th century folklore collector Evald Tang Kristensen and the early

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<sup>4</sup> Anna Daučíková: “How Do You Know? Re-visiting a poem: ‘I don’t remember the word I wished to say’” on *khio.no*, Oslo National Academy of the Arts, March 5, 2018, <https://khio.no/events/555> (accessed December 6, 2022)

20th century historian H. P. Hansen, whose research can be seen to puncture the modern constitutionality of Lévi-Strauss and others that have built their work on the presupposition of an ontological divide between so-called modern and non-modern societies. Writing from the Mid- and West Jutlandic heathlands in the wake of their rapid modernisation at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the ethnographies of both Tang Kristensen and H. P. Hansen attest to ritual and mythological features, which resemble those that Lévi-Strauss and his successors obtained from distant locations. Keeping Vischer's argument in mind—that poetic identification is possible across even great disparities—I experimentally introduce Lévi-Strauss's structuralist theories on myth and ritual to the material of Hansen and Tang Kristensen. Not to pretend that all human cultures are the same, or that such transports can be made without distortion and critical awareness, but neither to go to the other extreme and pretend that intercultural resonance, poetic identification, and thus empathy, is impossible.

While I am quite sceptical of the othering and exoticizing premises underlying Lévi-Strauss' anthropological research in the Americas—and which I suspect play a not insignificant part in marking and othering colonised Native peoples and cultures against 'modern' Europeans—I think he may have formulated an interesting imaginary tool through his 'mythologies'; one which, if lifted out of the past, out of the archive, off the over-coded body of the exoticised Other and reworked into what I term an active mythic thinking, may be valuable for us today. Through this dissertation I have thus tried to see what it would mean to shift Lévi-Strauss' mythologies to an active mode and apply it onto my 'home' European and Jutlandic material; to see if this may allow for the manifestation of axes of poetic identification against Western national-, capitalist-, individualist-predicated contemporaneity.

This is also where we take leave of Vischer, who largely isolated the alterity-promoting affordance of empathy to the realm of high culture, fine art, and the natural sublime. Besides, his theory addresses neither the deep negativity of fright, nor those liminal subjects and peoples whose stories and mythologies have historically accommodated a thinking- and feeling-with fright. In my attempt to render fright productive as an other-directed capacity that extends beyond the hierarchies and blind spots embedded in Vischer's notion of empathy-as-Einfühlung, this dissertation thus attempts to dialogue with, and engage the knowledges of, some of those others who have been structurally deterritorialised by Western science—in Europe's backyard, as it were, but also further afield. Vischer has served as a relevant lead-in, however, whose aesthetic assertion of the possibility of identification across ontological

disparities echoes throughout the dissertation, where it is subjected to all sorts of pressure and distortion, mythical transformation, and re-embodiment through other figures and figures of otherness.

## *A Night of Death*

In her largely autobiographic novel *En Dødsnat* (in English: 'A Night of Death'), Marie Bregendahl unfolds the double narrative of her mother's death in childbirth and of the rapid cultivation of the heath- and heathen populations of Mid- and Western Jutland at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>5</sup> Central to this double narrative is a dream that the mother had had during her pregnancy that if the doctor was called during her birth, she would be doomed.<sup>6</sup> The mother's strong belief in the veracity of such premonitions meant that despite the protraction and stalling of her labour, she would not allow her birth helpers to call for a doctor. When they eventually defied her and called the doctor anyway, it was too late, and she died.

The elegance of the plot rests in its ambiguity: While the mother's death from a modern viewpoint may attest to the danger of adhering to such superstitions, these were simultaneously verified by the course of events—the doctor was called, and the mother died: She was right. Engaging with this second point of entry, not against but in addition to, a modern interpretation that denounces the visionary capacity of the mother's dream, could be called a case of active mythic thinking. By allowing for conflicting narratives to co-exist, and re-positioning the narrative's gaze from an invested location on either side of the conflicting interpretations to regard instead their dynamic interplay, Bregendahl provides her reader with an opportunity to witness the contingency of existence: The mother is both right and defeated. The advancing Danish national modernity simultaneously fails and prevails.

To anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss—whose study of mythology in the Americas has re-inscribed history on the mythological continuum—mythic thinking is characterised by functioning as a “shock absorber for the disturbances caused by real life events,”<sup>7</sup> ensuring cultural continuity against historical developments, according to anthropologist Peter Gow.<sup>8</sup> Following Lévi-Strauss' “Structural Study of Myth,”<sup>9</sup> myths are organized in what he calls ‘transformation groups,’<sup>10</sup> each consisting of a set of isomorphic variations of the same myth of

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<sup>5</sup> When it peaked around year 1800, the heathlands were covering 90 percent of Hammerum Herred in Midwestern Jutland and were expanding far beyond the sandy West Jutlandic regions with which we associate them today, thus also to the regions surrounding Bregendahl's native Fly. See: Hugo Matthiessen: “Første Kapitel: Heden paa sit Højeste” in *Den Sorte Jyde* (Copenhagen: Gyldendals Forlagstrykkeri, 1939), pp. 14-20

<sup>6</sup> Marie Bregendahl: *En Dødsnat* (Copenhagen: Gladiator and Læseforeningens Forlag, 2013) (1912), pp. 51 and 83

<sup>7</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss: “One Myth Only” in *The Naked Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990) (1971), p. 607

<sup>8</sup> Peter Gow: “Introduction” in *An Amazonian Myth and its History* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 10-11

<sup>9</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss: “The Structural Study of Myth” in *The Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 68, No. 270, Myth: A Symposium (Bloomington: American Folklore Society, 1955), p. 439

<sup>10</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss: Op.cit. (1971), p. 27

which none can be said to be more true or archaic than others. Together these myths attest to the contingent and differential quality of Being through a structure of transformation, understanding “difference as disequilibrium and dissymmetry, but not opposition.”<sup>11</sup> Even if the aim of mythic thinking, according to Lévi-Strauss, is the obliteration of history, myths are in no way to be considered ahistorical. On the contrary “we can look to the very myths themselves to tell us what historical events and processes they might be seeking to obliterate,” Peter Gow explains of the Lévi-Straussian approach.<sup>12</sup>

And as artists we can take their telling into our mouths as tools for shaping history.

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<sup>11</sup> Peter Skafish: “Introduction” in Eduardo Viveiros de Castro: *Cannibal Metaphysics* (Minneapolis: Univocal, 2014), p. 22

<sup>12</sup> Peter Gow: Op.cit., p. 19



## Chapter 1

### **Rites of Passage**

#### *Non-Arrival Story*

My due date was Wednesday January 8, 2014, but once that day had passed nothing had happened. In their time, both my sister and my mother had had uncomplicated 8-hour deliveries seven to fourteen days prior to their due dates, so I had expected the same would be the case for me and already felt overdue when reaching my due date. I had had the bloody show a few days earlier and also the symptomatic diarrhoea that often suggests that labour is nearing. This had made me feel hopeful, but then nothing further happened, and as January 8 came and went, I became increasingly impatient. I tried to calm myself down and repeat what I had been taught during the different antenatal classes I had attended during my pregnancy: that the child will come when it is ready—that one is more likely to get a difficult labour if attempting to speed up the process. But I was on the verge of explosion. With my 162 centimetres, I was nearly as wide as I am tall, and the child was pressing against my ribcage making it difficult to breathe and relax. While everyone would promote forward-bending resting positions as ideal to ensure the optimal positioning of the child's head in the pelvis prior to labour, towards the end of my pregnancy I would always prefer flexing backwards in an attempt to ease the increasingly painful pressure on my lower ribs.

Thursday January 9 also came and went without any sign of labour, but then in the middle of the night between Thursday and Friday January 10, contractions suddenly kicked in. I tried to rest but was too agitated and excited that I had finally gone into labour, and in addition the pains themselves made it difficult to relax. I did not wake up my partner. Instead, I opened the contraction timer app on my mobile phone to check the intervals between contractions, but they were too irregular to identify a general pattern, and as morning broke, they started to fade.

Friday January 10 passed with scattered contractions—at times they were relatively frequent with seven-ten minutes' intervals but would then give way to longer stretches of time with very few or no contractions at all. As the evening approached the process seemed to have halted altogether, and I felt like a caged animal, since we had already spent many days at home in the expectation that labour was imminent. My partner then suggested that we went out for a while and proposed we go to a restaurant around the corner.

It was a blunt but welcome proposition; if I was not supposed to be giving birth anyway, I thought, I might as well participate in the everyday world. I do not remember a lot from the restaurant other than the waitress welcoming us with the question whether we would like to start with a drink? They had a large selection of delicate fruit juices, she explained. To this I replied that I would rather have a glass of red wine, which she served without commenting on the potential controversiality of a pregnant woman drinking alcohol. The wine did me good, but I could not eat a lot, and soon contractions were back at full force, and I had to ask my partner to take me home. I was wearing high heels as a kind of scorn against the labour that did not seem to want me—now it scorned me right back by prompting me to traverse the 800 metres from Kødbyens Fiskebar to our home in heels and with contractions. Luckily a taxi passed our way, and upon arriving at our building my partner lifted and supported my weighty corpus up the stairs to our fifth-floor apartment as best he could, all the while I tried to handle the contractions. At this point my heels were dangling from my hand.

Another night of frequent but irregular contractions followed. My partner fell asleep, but for the second night in a row I was unable to find rest due to the sharp and recurring pains. In the early morning contractions yet again retreated. We decided to call the hospital to get a midwife's assessment of my situation. Immediately they seemed friendly but for some reason also felt called to specify that labour could not be perceived as immanent based on what we described, so there was no need for us to show up. This comment hurt me, as this was not our impression either—but we were puzzled at the course and longevity of my latent phase, as well as its start-stop-pattern, and I was beginning to feel exhausted from the irregular contractions and the mounting lack of sleep. In response to this, they invited us to come to get an assessment of the progress of my labour, which had at that point been building up for approximately 30 hours. The midwife who welcomed us and did the exploration seemed surprised, but also pleased to inform us that I had already dilated one full centimetre out of ten, and that the cervix had been completely eliminated—then it had not merely been Braxton Hicks-contractions, she said. Again, this felt misplaced and slightly hurtful, as if she was admitting that up until then she had perceived me as squeamish. I had had several Braxton Hicks-contractions for the last segment of pregnancy, and they had been nothing like the contractions that had besieged me during the past days and nights, which were on a completely different spectrum. But it was clear that I did not hold the power of definition in this regard. I could do nothing but be thankful that at least I had passed the test at this level, and so

brushed her remark aside and accepted her offer to perform a membrane stripping to attempt pushing my labour beyond the latent phase.<sup>13</sup>

While we had taken a taxi to the hospital, we decided to take the bus back, since my contractions had slowed down significantly, and it felt like little was happening. At this point, 'labour' seemed like an inappropriate label to assign the trajectory I was on, and I felt conceited and embarrassed. Trying to imagine what giving birth would be like before going into labour, I had expected a sweeping, forcefully mounting condition that through pain and affect would catapult me beyond my usual perception of myself and take me to my child. Instead, I felt trapped in a game of hide and seek, where labour—Labour—would only concede to work its forces on me when I gave up on it—at night after days of waiting, body and mind attempting to relax—then it would show. But if I called it out and tried to face it, then it would retreat and sound its mockery through the midwife's mouth: "No, no, this isn't established labour," she would inform me. As if I did not know.

I did not want to go back to the frustrating claustrophobia of our 65 sqm-apartment. It felt like the least probable place for Labour to seek me out, so instead we stayed on the bus until reaching the Thorvaldsen Museum, where a critically acclaimed black-and-white drawing exhibition was on. We had not yet seen the exhibition and had thought we would miss it. But in the light of our unexpected new circumstances, we decided to go. Yet the stretch across the square from the bus stop to the museum entrance was tricky, and I had to stop several times to wait for a contraction to pass. Upon entering, I greeted the ticket vendor whom I knew peripherally, but then had to move out of sight to the side of her booth to allow for yet another contraction to roll over me. The drawings were fine, I could not care less, and found myself zoning more and more in on the contractions that kept seeking me out at an increasing pace, but I did not dare to acknowledge their presence out of fear that if I did so, they would abandon me yet again. So, I controlled my breathing when contractions came, slowed down, but to avoid attracting attention I did not cry out or make a fuss. I am unsure whether my partner was really aware of what was going on then and there. I tried to reply calmly to his comments about the beautiful artworks—possibly an owl or a cat in one, and a rendition of classic architecture? Were there Goya-drawings? Dismembered bodies? *Disasters of War*? I tried to pay attention, not so much of consideration for my partner as for Labour;

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<sup>13</sup> Membrane stripping is a manoeuvre where the midwife or obstetrician sweeps their gloved finger between the thin membranes of the amniotic sac in the uterus. This helps separate the sac and is thought to help induce labour.

I had sought her out, and there she was. Now it was a question of behaving accordingly. For sure, I was in no position to pose as her victim; that would have been insulting, when she was there at my wish, my invitation and initiative. Still, I was truly at her mercy. By my accepting the membrane stripping, our contract and power relation had distorted beyond my imagination. It was me, not her, who had brought her upon me, and somehow that changed everything.

We left the museum around noon and were looking for a place to eat lunch; it was hard for me to focus, but I was still afraid of losing Labour if we went back home. To me, our apartment had become the very epitome of a birth not happening, so we went to a Moroccan café where we ordered samosas and mint tea, but I could not sit still. The contractions were grilling me, and I had to move to cope. I was rocking back and forth in the soft armchair, and after a little while my partner took out his mobile phone to time the contractions. We sat around with our untouched lunch plates and tried to assess what was going on, and after a few rounds of irregular but insistent contractions, we arrived at a median interval of five-six minutes, and as I was becoming increasingly restless, and people around us had started noticing that something was up, we left the café to go back home. Again, we opted for the bus despite my mounting contractions. Like the peace and calm of our apartment, taxis also suddenly seemed to me hubristic: That it would be an insult towards Labour for me to engage in such indolence. But I was unable to sit still on the bus and my heavy breathing attracted knowing gazes from older women and other parents.

Back home it seemed that Labour was there to stay. We continued to time my contractions, and while they had dropped slightly on the bus and when climbing the stairs, they picked up again when we settled back in the apartment. My memory of this Saturday is hazy; there were many and strong contractions, but they continued to be wildly irregular. We watched a movie to waste time—Fellini's *La Dolce Vita*, which lasts three hours—during what felt like a backwards race against time: The goal was specifically not to hurry, but to show extreme patience. At the same time, the process kept intensifying, and when evening came my partner started worrying that I would suddenly be giving birth at home. I was not really worried about this, since the contractions were still irregular—some were only half a minute apart, others up to seven minutes, and while the median was close to four minutes, I knew from my antenatal classes that labour could not be imminent with such irregularity. But in order to be able to cope with the pain, I needed his support and strength, and since his conviction was starting to fade, I agreed to go back to the hospital in the vain hope that our long day of labour-

work might have brought me beyond the magical four-centimetres-threshold that would grant us access to stay in the hospital.

Labour had first descended on me Thursday night, January 9; now it was Saturday evening, January 11. The taxi driver was sympathetic and talked about his own wife's labour while I was breathing my way through several contractions on our way to Hvidovre Hospital. When we arrived, I collapsed on the floor and had to stay on all fours until a contraction had passed. From there, we took the elevator to the yellow centre 3 and passed through what seemed like an eternity of a hallway towards the reception for labouring women at the end. On the way through the hallway, I had to go down on all fours more than once while managing the contractions, and likewise upon arriving at the reception desk: Seeing the contraction besieging me, a midwife immediately took my hands and helped me breathe through it. For the first time during the past two days, I felt safe, held and supported, and I was thankful and proud by her comments that I was handling the contractions well; that my breathing techniques were good. I started thinking that now the waiting part—Labour's game of hide and seek—would be over. That I could transition into the giving-in and going-with I had expected labour to be. But upon exploration, Labour mocked me once again: I was still just one centimetre dilated despite the 40 hours that had passed since the first contractions had started two days earlier and in spite of the overwhelming intensity of the contractions that had been rapidly mounting since the membrane stripping that morning. The midwife gave me a half lenient, half condescending look and then inculcated that I go back home and not return until it really hurt. She would give me a 'cocktail,' she said: a mix of mild painkillers, sleeping pills and muscle relaxants. I was humiliated and defenceless—it really did hurt, but there was no way I could prove my pain to her. She had cast me as weak, and it was beyond my powers to challenge her conviction. My pains were lonely now that they had been reproached, yet they kept seeking me out, mercilessly and angrily, as if I were to blame for her lack of recognition, and I was silently crying when we drove home in the taxi. I remember the pain of the cobblestones that cover the streets in our borough; how they made the taxi shake, and how that felt like daggers stabbing the front of my pelvis, which in turn felt like red-hot burning metal. The pain was nauseating, and the cocktail did not work; again my partner slept, again I was incapable of finding rest, and the minutes and hours of that pitch-black January night passed with my restless and muted suffering, until at 4 AM I woke up my partner and asked him to take me back to the hospital for what would be the third and final time.

The hospital was quiet, the light dim, and the midwife differently mild than the others we had encountered. She had an air of tenderness around her and did not hold it against me that despite another night of contractions, I had not dilated any further. After 48 hours of irregular contractions, I was still in what would be objectively described as the early latent phase. One centimetre dilated, there were another three to go before I would be in what they call 'established labour,' yet I was already completely exhausted. She recognised this and also seemed to silently express an acknowledgement that things were not quite right—that it was unusual for the latent phase to last this long. So, she invited us to stay; not in a real bedroom, but in a sort of storage they had repurposed for liminal cases such as mine: Not in labour, not without. Betwixt and between. I was still haunted by Labour's sad and moaning contractions, but the midwife warded them off with a shot of morphine and the suggestion that we attempt an induction in the morning. I conceded, even if I did not understand the need to induce a labour that was already happening. The problem was its pace, not its factuality, but I was too tired to launch this discussion and succumbed to the morphine, which responded by wrapping me in a dark velvet cover and calmly rocking me out of pain's reach, away from inability and defeat. "Do not worry," it comforted me, "everything is alright." From a distance, I heard the sounds of labouring women arriving at the reception desk. Their rising and fading screams like routine calls of night trains passing each other in the dark. In motion, on track. From my velvety opiate hammock, I heard them calling as they passed on to labour chambers somewhere beyond the threshold I was lingering on. My partner sleeping by my side. My distorted senses dull but alert. Night's train passing to give way to Day's vessel. January 12 dawning. Tut-tut.

When we had been admitted to the hospital in the early hours of the morning, the midwife on night shift had instructed us to let them know once I had awoken; they would not wake me up. There were no windows in the room we had slept in, and it was around 10 or 11 AM when we turned ourselves in to the morning staff. The midwives were friendly and complaisant; I remember a number of them circling around my bed and talking softly to me about allowing labour to happen, inviting her in. I so wanted to accommodate to their vision of my process, so when they heard that I had had a missed abortion a few years earlier, they thought the initial stage of my labour had been troublesome because I had somehow been fighting it as a traumatic response to my past experience. I felt this was not true, but I was losing grip of my own narrative and was eager to remain within the fold of the labouring—even if this meant bending my view of reality to fit theirs and proceed with a labour induction, as they were now

suggesting. With the bright morning light, Labour's ghost had faded into the shadows, and in the place of her moody games my midwives would produce her effects with whatever tools were at their disposal: Interventions, mechanics, drugs, suggestion, force, acupuncture, coercion. It was on.

Maria was the name of the midwife who broke my water a little before noon. I liked her a lot and was sad to learn that she would be off at 12 and not be 'my' midwife. The warm water washed out between my thighs and onto the floor, and it kept seeping, while we were waiting for contractions to kick back in. They were relatively quick to do so, and finally my bed, my partner and I were transported beyond the gates of the reception area, through a number of doors, which led to the mythic labour ward. Here, my partner ensured that we were installed in a labour room with a tub, because prior to labour I had imagined that I would want to give birth in water. This turned out not to be an immediate option, however, since our son had defecated in the amniotic fluids, which were in turn greenish; an indication that the child is stressed. They therefore had to monitor his heartrate with a sensor fastened to my stomach with a water-intolerant belt. As a result—and after struggling to take a laxative myself despite mounting and very direct contractions—I was connected to the apparatus from a lateral position lying on the bed. The midwives also wanted to hook me up to a Syntocinon-drop<sup>14</sup> to produce 'better contractions.' I did not understand what they meant by this, as the contractions I was already having seemed very strong, painful and frequent to me, and again it felt hurtful that what my body was capable of producing was somehow insufficient or wrong in their eyes. My partner and I managed to ward off the s-drop for the time being, and the midwife suggested acupuncture instead. She was younger and seemed somehow reserved; upon exploring me she informed us that it would still be a while before the child could be born because his head had not yet flexed. His position was 'asynclitic' and 'deflexed,' meaning that he kept his head askew while gazing straight forward instead of downwards, which is a prerequisite to be able to enter the 12-centimetres-wide birth canal—when asynclitic and deflexed, the head measures 13,5 centimetres. The midwife was pregnant herself and this meant that she was unable to perform the rebozo-treatment that my antenatal teacher had otherwise told us could be effective against foetal malpresentations. I was frustrated about this but accepted her suggestion that she could ask a colleague to do it later—for now acupuncture would suffice, she said.

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<sup>14</sup> Abbreviated 's-drop'

In an attempt to try to bond with her between contractions, and bridge the air of reservation between us, I asked about her pregnancy: Was this her first? “No,” she replied, and continued: “My first labour was like yours; my child’s head was also deflexed.” I wanted to know whether this had changed during labour—if she had managed to give birth in the end? She had not, she answered, “which is why it is all the more important to me to do everything in my power to make you labour naturally.” I did not know what to think about that; I am not a midwife, and vaginal birth was not my top priority. If I were to present my ambitions for labour, it would be something vaguely formulated as being brave, but still making it out alright—if that would require a caesarean, fine by me. But after she had presented her stance, I did not feel very comfortable sharing mine.

Oh. Those hours on my side in the hospital bed. Acupuncture needles in my hands and the belt around my waist faithfully tracking my son’s heartrate. Stabbing contractions along the front of my pelvis, and my attempt to suppress my moans, since “it will still be a while, before he is born—the head remains to flex.” I zone in on my breathing, only this. A warm pillow to ease the pain in my pelvis, my partner’s hand as he secures it in place. Then only pain and patience, those troubled two, riding my breath to the end of the world on the exhale, and back again on the inhale. As my antenatal teacher had instructed us, I tried to envision how each contraction would bring me one step closer to my child and to redemption; how every contraction was not a stab. Hours passed. They changed the mat under me. The fluids were still green, but the heartrate okay. Yet they needed closer monitoring, so they entered the birth canal with a pointed cable, which they attached to the child’s head to be able to trace the oxygenation of his blood. The sensation of him moving within by way of the rotating cable in my vagina. Communicating vessels, plugged-in, zoning-out. Are the exchanges in my favour? I am not sure. Around 6 PM the midwife performs another exploration. It has been five or six hours of strong and regular contractions, since Maria broke my waters, and I think we all—my partner, the midwife, and myself—imagine that the spell is broken and that I will have dilated further. I am imagining six to seven centimetres—not fully dilated, but on my way... Such humiliation and heartache, when the exploration shows that I am only two to three centimetres dilated. That the head is still deflexed. That I have been struggling and giving in for hours in vain. Now they change their tone of voice and inculcate brusquely in me that acupuncture is not enough. We need to change the course of action to produce ‘better contractions.’ I still do not understand what they mean by this; my contractions are full-on, bringing me to the verge of explosion



when they descend on me every two to three minutes. I am so tired, half-naked, on my back. But I still manage to mobilise the power to ask whether it might be enough? I am 62 hours into my presumed labour, maybe it is time to call it off and realise that I was incapable of giving birth? Maybe it would be better to opt for a caesarean instead? The midwife looms over me. Her hair in a perfect ponytail. She has not been smiling a lot at all, but now she seems offended: “You can ask for a caesarean if you like, but that means that I will have to call a doctor to whom you will have to defend your claim.” To my mind’s eye, she seems two metres tall—my imagined doctor at least five. I dare not meet him. When she can see me bending to her pressure, she adds that she agrees that I should have a caesarean if I have not yet given birth at midnight, which is when her shift ends. I accept this deal.

Their change of action implies s-drop and epidural. I am terrified of both. Of tetanic contractions, month-long postpartum headaches, paralysis. Their actions are truly against me, but they do not have the patience to support me in my dance with moody Labour, and they are the only support I have aside from my partner who is as terrified as me. But I have never been as scared as I was when being administered the epidural. The trick, they told me, is to sense how the needle moves through the spinal tissue until it reaches a point called ‘loss of resistance.’ That is when the anaesthesiologist knows they have reached the epidural space. They need not bother, I think; my resistance was lost long ago. But when my stupid midwife is going to fix the s-drop, she is unable to hit a vein and pierces my hand again and again and again. Then she tries another vein, and then another. Eventually she gives up and goes out to ask a colleague to help her, and returns flanked by the very same midwife who 23 hours earlier had told me to come back when it really hurt. I do not know what she is thinking, as she continues my midwife’s desperate perforation of the skin on both my hands and wrists to find a vein to plug into. But I know what I am thinking: Fuck you, bitch. Something like that. In the end, she finds a vein in my wrist and leaves the room. I hate her and the person she has made of me.

It is difficult to describe the coming hours in words. I feel I was not there, even if the epidural did offer much-needed relief and I found myself suddenly capable of conversing the substitute midwife, while mine was out on a break. During those hours they moved us from the tub-chamber—another couple was needing it, and I would not be detached from the tubes and vessels going in and out of me. The epidural in my spine. The s-drop on my wrist. The oxygenation cable from my vagina. The sensor-belt around my waist. The acupuncture needles they had removed though. They turned the s-drop to the max, but my son’s heartrate was

affected—or was it the oxygenation of his blood? I do not remember, but at any rate they had to turn it down again because something was wrong. The amniotic fluids that kept seeping continued to be of a greenish hue. The child was stressed, but his heartrate generally steady. At some point they gave me another shot of anaesthetics in the epidural. And at 10 PM the leading midwife was called to my room, because a new exploration had shown that nothing further had happened. Despite all our combined efforts—their action plan, the violations of my bodily integrity that I was allowing them, 66 hours of trying to give birth—I was still only two to three centimetres dilated and not yet in ‘established labour,’ whatever that meant. I did not really care, or, I was devastated, or I had given up on Labour long ago and was only waiting for the clock to arrive at midnight when according to our deal I would get a caesarean. But the midwives cared a lot, and all of a sudden, I found myself repositioned into elbow-knee position, the leading midwife comforting me that “they had already had two girls like me today, but after they had been placed in that position, they had been able to deliver.” I did not want to deliver; I just wanted peace and relief. I started feeling the contractions again, but they were warded off with yet another dose of anaesthetics in the epidural. Turned upside-down with my face towards the pillow, the hospital staff no longer had to confront my gaze, but were free to focus on the bio-mechanic riddle I posed. I felt like a cow. I felt very sorry for that cow.

I was hoping the position would not have the effect that the midwife had promised. I did not want to give birth vaginally. I was so incredibly tired; all I wanted was for something or someone to relieve me from the situation as painlessly as possible. At that point, this entity was conceptualised in my mind as a caesarean, which was shining its bright light towards me from the morning day. The slow progression of time towards midnight. Every second a heartbeat, a blink, an uneasy sigh. So much body, flowing in and out of me, then a minute had passed. And so forth.

Half an hour before her shift was over, at 11.30 PM on January 12, my midwife approached the headrest of my bed where I was still lying facing the pillow. She told me that she thought it wisest for the new midwife to be doing the midnight exploration instead of her, and to decide the onwards course of action. I did not realise that this meant calling off our deal, so just responded “okay” or “whatever” to her cowardly proposition.

Finally, midnight hour came. I had arrived. Now it would stop. The contractions were back at full force, and I had already received the maximum dose of anaesthetics one can get during labour. But I did not care; soon it would be over anyway. Still on elbows and knees, I

was sure that I had not dilated to the full ten centimetres during the past two hours; birth did not feel imminent, and I was happy it did not. I was so incredibly tired, but also relieved that I was still far from giving birth. It was an objective fact. And the deal was that if I had not given birth by midnight, I would be administered a caesarean. The new midwife arrived; she seemed fresh and energetic when she approached me to perform the exploration as I was lying there on my elbows and knees.

The child's head was still deflexed, but no longer askew; also her fingers—were they slimmer, more generous in their assessment?—estimated that I was now around five centimetres dilated. Whatever, I thought, it is still far from the full ten necessary to deliver. She went out; we waited. I stared at my pillow while breathing into the oxygen mask they had given me some time before; my son was now under pressure and needed extra oxygen. But his heartrate was fine. Then the midwife and the leading midwife returned and told me that we would continue; they had spoken to the doctors whose estimate was that as long as labour was progressing we would keep going. On the basis of my dilation from three to five centimetres, they evaluated that the elbow-knee position had worked. They would make another assessment an hour later, they said. This is when my heart broke. I had invested all my powers in reaching midnight; succumbed to their will, assisted them in their vision however divergent from the signs and signals of my body; allowed them unhindered access to my most private parts—my vagina, sure, but more importantly my passion and dedication. My love.

I do not know how to properly describe the suspension that followed; how the room came apart and how I started to detach from myself. How I collapsed and took off the oxygen mask. Lay down on my side. Closed my eyes. How they propped me back up and placed the mask over my mouth. How I lay down again. How they forced me back up.

I hurled into the vertigo of my soul's waters, not in panic but in bliss. Such comfort in lying down. Such wonder to know that we would be mother and son in eternity—not in the petty flesh of pain of which the last days had been a tour de force. There was no suffering, my son and me forever in an orange plasmatic light that absorbed us; integrated us into all of its being. Immensely vast we were. All is beauty, all is love, all is one. We are One. Magnificent. Then they propped me back up. The oxygen tasted bad. I was angry at them for disturbing my orange free fall. They had nothing to do where I was going—they had brought me there, but now we were leaving them to continue the journey on our own. Glorious. Only love. Those stupid people! Why do they keep propping me back up, when I want to be lying down? There is no way

I could do as they want; if it had taken six hours for me to dilate from two to five centimetres, then a simple calculation had me far into the morning day before I would have dilated to ten. And then a pressing phase? I was 68 hours into labour; I knew with my whole being, that that was not going to happen. My labour was the end of me, and I chose to opt for a peaceful ending, lying down. These are difficult words to write; not so much because of their emotional charge and the retrospective guilt my then-budding death wish makes me feel towards my child, but because dying is a very different register than written language.

But. The horror when they returned to the labour chamber at 1 AM. Another exploration. Cold hands within, assessing me. They were my torturers; this was their game. Then they went out, but quickly came back with the message that it was off; nothing further had happened, only the cervix had thickened, and a lump was forming on the top of my son's head from its persistent pressuring against my pelvis. I had been really scared of the leading midwife, but now she took my hand and told me I had fought well. Such relief there would have been in her recognition. But it was too late. I was already part of the orange One—how could I split back into human form? The s-drop was removed, but not the cannula. The epidural, the belt and the vaginal cable also remained in place, but they unplugged the anaesthetic drop and gave me a shot of muscle relaxant to stop the contractions. Now it was only a question of waiting for an operation room to become available. I still had to remain on my elbows and knees and to keep the oxygen mask in place, because now my son was reacting to the longevity of the process, but I was so tired. I had to stay on elbows and knees for him to make it, but I wanted to lie down, and now the midwife let me—she was looking at the screen, I closed my eyes. A little later she propped me back up and gave me the mask to breathe into again; I think my partner was instructed in helping me keep it in place. They had told me it would be a while before the caesarean could be administered, since there were many women, whose conditions were worse than mine, who needed it more. But all of a sudden it was my turn, and I later realised that the midwife had possibly helped me by allowing me to lie down. That we had produced the critical figures to my son's heartrate and oxygenation levels to cut the line. They dressed me in compression stockings, my partner in a green suit. And there we went, down the hallway. Now? It is now. I am not dying; I am going to be a mother. I did not want to be a mother. I wanted to beam into the orange One, but it was gone. As we went down the ward, before my mind's eye I saw doors opening to all the labour rooms we passed on our way, and out came each and every one of the 11 midwives who had been complicit in making me what I

had become: Furious. I was right. All the time I had been right, but none of them had cared to listen. Instead, they had projected their superciliousness onto me; their condescending pity. I raised my arms and flipped them off; slowly from one side to the other as we passed down the ward. Fuck you all. In a low pitch: Fuck you! Bass: Fuck YOU! An alien scream across all registers: Fuck YOUOUOUOU!!!! If Death comes to you, Death comes to you. It does not matter whether she hides behind stainless steel-décor and electric tentacles, the appropriately leaned interfaces of the Danish welfare state, or the cold starvation of our past-times' heathlands. If Death comes to you, she comes to you. To me she came in Labour-guise, no less terrifying. Behind our procession, she walked us to the operation room. She loomed over me, as they disinfected my stomach. They asked where the cannula was, and what on earth had happened to my hands? I outed the midwife straight-away: "It was Rose who did it" and presented my wrist. Dying is like allowing yourself to fall. How do you stop falling?

Alert and defenceless, I saw the operation lamp turn into an octopus turn into a spaceship (annoyingly) turning into an art object—the most beautiful I ever saw—with its many attentive eyes all fixed on me. My arms were fixated with straps to the stretcher; my legs were immobilised by a new wave of anaesthetic shot into my spine. Knowing they would cut me open; the panic of that knowledge. The total syncing of my being into a compressed moment in time—all my memories, aspirations, breaths, sensations, thoughts. A body of complete simultaneity; a body with neither past nor future and with an indiscriminate distribution of functions throughout. All limbs thinking, pulsating, screaming, climaxing, all at once.

At 2.14 AM on January 13, 2014, they delivered my child and then delivered me to the recovery unit. 70 hours had passed since the first contractions. He was freed, I kept falling. Not into warm seas of orange pulsations now, but into the lonesome obscurity of launching my child into the world motherless; of being incapable of changing my fall's direction. Dark waves kept rolling over me, and my liquefied body rolled with them—becoming mermaid, some fraction of me thought, not in water, but of water; soon I would be gone. My potassium levels were critically low, my temperature and CRP's skyrocketing. I was administered potassium pills, intravenous antibiotics and an injection to "stop the spasms within 15 minutes." The spasms did not stop but kept rolling over me like breakers on the shore. They gave me another shot, and then another. Then something in me tensed up and shot from my torso but was held back by a constriction around my neck and waist. It relaxed for a moment and then resumed its efforts. My vision was suspended.

This is when I lost consciousness.

“What would have happened if I had not gotten the caesarean then?” I asked.

“Then you would have died,” he said. I do not remember who he was.

*How we die is how we live*<sup>15</sup>

In Denmark, an average of 58,000 children are born every year,<sup>16</sup> while the maternal mortality rate constituted a mere seven per 100,000 live births in the period 2002-2017 with a 8.8-peak in 2014,<sup>17</sup> amounting to a little less than four birth- and pregnancy-related maternal deaths per year.<sup>18</sup> In comparison, more than 1,000 women per 100,000 live births die every year in the world's least-developed countries,<sup>19</sup> and ten per 100,000 across Europe.<sup>20</sup> However you regard it, contemporary Denmark is among the safest locations in the world and in history to give birth.

While the introduction of labour hygiene by law in 1945,<sup>21</sup> and the commercialisation of antibiotics in the same period, led to a steep decrease in maternal mortality in Denmark—particularly in the case of caesarean sections that have been performed on living mothers in Denmark since 1813<sup>22</sup> with an initial maternal mortality rate of 75-100 percent<sup>23</sup>—labour complications persist as long as pregnancy and birth is the matter of living women's contingent bodies. And while many of these complications would likely have killed or severely impaired our foremothers, modern medicine now ensures that Danish women return from the death horizon to bear some kind of witness to the trajectories and states of being that continue to claim the lives of hundreds of thousands of women around the world every year.<sup>24</sup>

Compared to other developed countries in- and outside of Europe, Denmark has a relatively low frequency of caesarean sections despite an increasing tendency since 1997,

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<sup>15</sup> Oreet Ashery: *How We Die Is How We Live Only More So* (Milan: Mousse Publishing, 2019)

<sup>16</sup> Katrine Sidenius and Wie: "fødsel (samfundsmedicinske aspekter)" on *lex.dk*, Den Store Danske, June 19, 2015, [https://denstoredanske.lex.dk/fødsel\\_\(samfundsmedicinske\\_aspekter\)](https://denstoredanske.lex.dk/fødsel_(samfundsmedicinske_aspekter)) (accessed December 3, 2022)

<sup>17</sup> "Antallet af kvinder, der er døde af svangerskabs- og fødselskomplikationer" on *Danmarks Statistik*, July 14, 2022, <https://www.dst.dk/da/Statistik/Sdg/03-sundhed-og-trivsel/delmaal-01/indikator-1> (accessed October 12, 2021)

<sup>18</sup> Birgit Bødker, Lone Hvidman, Tom Weber, Margrethe Møller, Betina Ristorp Andersen, Hanne Brix Westergaard, Susanne Rosthøj and Jette Led Sørensen: "Reduction in maternal mortality in Denmark over three decades" in *Danish Medical Journal*, 68, 9 (2021), p. 1

<sup>19</sup> Danish United Nations Association: "Svangerskabsrelateret dødelighed" (<https://www.globalis.dk/Statistik/moedredoedelighed--last> accessed October 13, 2021)

<sup>20</sup> Birgit Bødker, Lone Hvidman, Tom Weber, Margrethe Møller, Betina Ristorp Andersen, Hanne Brix Westergaard, Susanne Rosthøj and Jette Led Sørensen: Op.cit.

<sup>21</sup> Sine Lehn-Christiansen: "Livets begyndelses politik" in *Tidsskrift for Professionsstudier*, 14, 27 (2018) (Aarhus: VIA University College, 2018), p. 60

<sup>22</sup> Lone Hvidman: "Fødsel ved kejsersnit—en epidemi?" in *Tidsskrift for Forskning i Sygdom og Samfund*, 8 (2008) (Aarhus: Aarhus University, 2008), p. 105

<sup>23</sup> "Before the late 1800s, cesarean sections were death rituals, not lifesaving procedures. If a doctor suggested a cesarean, you knew you were on the way to the morgue (...) Try picturing a C-section of the Middle Ages: Women were wide awake, tethered to the table and cut without anesthesia. Sometimes they were not sewn back together because doctors thought an open wound fastened healing." See: Randi Hutter Epstein: *Get Me Out: A History of Childbirth from the Garden of Eden to the Sperm Bank* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2011), p. 157

<sup>24</sup> Birgit Bødker, Lone Hvidman, Tom Weber, Margrethe Møller, Betina Ristorp Andersen, Hanne Brix Westergaard, Susanne Rosthøj and Jette Led Sørensen: Op.cit.

when only 13 % of all pregnancies were terminated with a caesarean. In 2017, this number had risen to 20,2%,<sup>25</sup> but new statistics indicate that it is yet again on the decrease<sup>26</sup> due to the targeted effort of midwives and doctors to minimise the number of caesareans performed at the mother's wish without a medical indication. WHO recommends a caesarean frequency of 15% of live births in any given country,<sup>27</sup> which according to Danish statistics approximately equals the number of emergency caesareans that are performed on women in labour to ward off threatening conditions,<sup>28</sup> as well as planned caesareans with a medical indication.

The low Danish frequency of caesarean sections, and the insistence of both midwives and doctors to promote vaginal labour instead of caesarean sections, has been attributed to a number of factors, among them the early organisation and professionalisation in the field of midwifery in Denmark, as well as the underlying organisational structure of the Danish welfare system: Midwifery was first formalised with the so-called 'church oath' in 1685,<sup>29</sup> which has enabled Danish midwives to secure their relative autonomy and dominance within the field of obstetrics against the increasing influence of doctors through the ages. On the other hand, the generally non-commercial nature of the Danish welfare system ensures that the relation between patient and hospital staff is not immediately one of direct transaction where midwives, nurses, and doctors are coerced by their superiors to promote particularly pricy birthing methods to increase the hospital's earnings or save time.

Importantly, that does not mean that economy is not part of the Danish birthing equation, however. On the contrary, Danish hospitals are public and state-funded institutions that have been operating under a strict New Public Management scheme since the 1990s.<sup>30</sup> As such, they are obliged to continuously streamline their operations, which until 2018 meant a yearly spending cut of 1,5 to two percent.<sup>31</sup> Additionally, even if private hospitals do exist in Denmark, all vital examinations and surgeries take place under state jurisdiction and responsibility—and while it is possible to give birth at home or in a private clinic, the birthing

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<sup>25</sup> Mette Juhl and Eva Rydahl: Figure 2.3.7 "Kejsersnit, før og under fødslen" in *Fødselsstatistik MIPAC 2020 Fødsler i Danmark 1997-2017* (Copenhagen: Danish University Colleges, 2020), p. 26

<sup>26</sup> Charlotte Brix Andersson and Christina Flems: *Årsrapport 2018. 1. september 2017 - 31. august 2018* (Aarhus: Dansk Kvalitetsdatabase for Fødsler, 2019), p. 4

<sup>27</sup> Lone Hvidman: Op.cit., p. 112

<sup>28</sup> Charlotte Brix Andersson and Christina Flems, Op.cit., p. 51

<sup>29</sup> Helen Cliff: "En Jordemoders forretning" i *Beskrivelse af Jordemoderområdet 1-2* (København: Den Alm. Danske Jordemoderforening, 1997), p. 64

<sup>30</sup> Andreas Rudkjøbing: "De to procents tyranni" in *Ugeskrift for Læger* 24 (2016), <https://ugeskriftet.dk/nyhed/de-procents-tyranni> (accessed October 14, 2021)

<sup>31</sup> Michael Bech: "De 2 procent er væk – men hvad nu?" on Dansk Sygeplejeråd, October 6, 2017, <https://dsr.dk/politik-og-nyheder/nyhed/de-2-procent-er-vaek-men-hvad-nu> (accessed December 3, 2022)



woman has to be transferred to a public hospital in case of any complications. This also means that it is not possible to buy a caesarean section from a private provider in Denmark.

Thus, while many hospitals in countries such as the United States or Brazil are ultimately private businesses and thus potentially prone to promoting unnecessary interventions to increase earnings or save time, Danish public hospitals may approach this weighing of costs and benefits differently: According to the Danish Health Data Authorities, in 2020 the cheapest birthing method in a Danish setting was planned caesarean at DKK 22,721, followed by spontaneous labour at DKK 29,445, and induced labour at DKK 32,910 (all figures relating to first-time births).<sup>32</sup> While this could be seen as an incentive to increase the use of surgical birthing methods to reduce public expenditure, the shared belief of Danish midwives and doctors in the superior physiological and psychological benefits of spontaneous vaginal labour continues to dominate the field—a belief they hold the power to enforce on the birthing woman, who is not authorised to request a caesarean without a doctor’s approval. And once vaginal labour is established, interventions such as epidural,<sup>33</sup> cup,<sup>34</sup> or emergency caesarean,<sup>35</sup> pose a significant additional cost, which means that midwives and doctors may be reluctant to intervene until it is absolutely necessary. This also means that the women who deliver—and the children that are born—by emergency caesarean in Denmark are likely to have been under substantial physical strain, or in direct danger of acquiring mental or physical disability—or die—had the staff not intervened.

When looking at the specific cases of foetal malpresentation and cephalopelvic disproportion, which were the complications that obstructed my own labour, the main symptom is time and a lack of progress. Without intervention, these conditions would never result in the child being born. Instead, the contractions would fade, and the child would either die from lack of oxygen, or the uterus might burst, discharging the foetus and placenta into the abdominal cavity—a condition that untreated would lead to the death of both mother and child.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> “Diagnosis-related Groups (DRG-takster)” on *The Danish Health Data Authorities* (Sundhedsdatastyrelsen), <https://sundhedsdatastyrelsen.dk/-/media/sds/filer/finansiering-og-afregning/takster/2020/drg-takster-2020.xlsx> (data extracted from interactive DRG, November 15, 2021)

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*: Spontaneous vaginal labour with epidural (first-time birth): DKK 32,341

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*: Spontaneous vaginal labour with instrumental delivery (first-time birth): DKK 36,359

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*: Spontaneous vaginal culminating in emergency caesarean (first-time birth): DKK 40,721

<sup>36</sup> Lone Hvidman: *Op.cit.*, p. 108

Accordingly, even if actual mortality remains marginal in contemporary Denmark, the potential of having to undergo days and nights of extended suffering, before a pathological condition of bio-mechanic disjunct is identified, persists among Danish women as does the risk of acquiring additional complications in response to protracted labour such as hypokalaemia, haemorrhages, thrombosis, sepsis, and cardiac arrest. There is thus a radical incongruence between the statistical knowledge of one's factual safety in a Danish obstetric setting, and the experience of protracted labour—of living through what would be a fatal trajectory elsewhere and in other times—to then see it suddenly abruptly before culminating in Death proper.

When time is the main symptom of a fatal complication, the postpartum riddle becomes what to do with the lived memory of a time that was spent suffering.

*Soil*  
*Earth*  
*Ground*

Literally translated, the Danish word for ‘midwife’—jordemoder—means ‘soil-, earth- or ground-mother.’

It assigns one function out of the many that were traditionally carried out by local wise women, who in addition to working as healers and greeting new souls into the world through midwifery services were also responsible for dressing dead bodies for their final journeys into death.<sup>37</sup> Accordingly, the Danish version of the common burial prayer—an appropriation of heathen burial practices into Christian ritual<sup>38</sup>—does not emphasise dust or ashes like its English counterpart, but soil: “From soil you have come; to soil you will turn; from soil you will rise again” (my translation from the Danish). With the dawn of antiseptics in the 1870s, however, midwives became banned by legal instruction from carrying out funerary services of any kind.

Yet, in its initiatory phase, from 1685 onwards, the profession was very much linked to the soil and ground by way of its active contribution to securing and maintaining the power of the crown and church over the territory—the ‘patria’<sup>39</sup>—which had recently been gathered for the first time as one legislative unity<sup>40</sup> with king Christian V’s Danske Lov (i.e. ‘Danish Law’) in 1688.<sup>41</sup>

While the larger field of reproductive health—from birth control across abortion, childbirth, and postpartum care—had traditionally been the domain and responsibility of wise women, with the Danske Lov abortion became criminalised with death penalty as were the acts of giving birth to a child unassisted by an authorised midwife, as well as killing, or abandoning,

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<sup>37</sup> Helen Cliff: Op.cit., p. 69

<sup>38</sup> Leif Kiil Sørensen: ”Af jord er du kommet ... Til jord skal du blive” in *Kristeligt Dagblad*, June 27th, 2006, <https://www.kristeligt-dagblad.dk/kirke-tro/af-jord-er-du-kommet-...-til-jord-skal-du-blive> (accessed May 24, 2022)

<sup>39</sup> Jon Faber: “Den særlige danske nationale identitet” in *Information*, March 22, 2013, <https://www.information.dk/bogforbog/2013/03/saerlige-danske-nationale-identitet> (accessed May 24, 2022)

<sup>40</sup> Danske Lov replaced the medieval legislative division between the different regions of the kingdom into Jyske Lov [i.e. ‘Jutlandic Law’], Skånske Lov [i.e., ‘Scanian Law’], Sjællandske Lov [i.e. Zealandic Law’], de norske landskabslove [i.e., the Norwegian landscape Laws], the Sachsenspiegel [i.e., the ‘Saxon Mirror Law’] and romerretten [i.e., ‘Jus Romanum’ or ‘Roman Law’]. See: Birgit Løgstrup: “Konglomeratstaten” on *danmarkshistorien.dk*, Aarhus Universitet, July 6, 2012,

<https://danmarkshistorien.dk/vis/materiale/konglomeratstaten> (accessed November 7, 2022)

<sup>41</sup> Christina Lysbjerg Mogensen: “Danske Lov 1688” on *danmarkshistorien.dk*, Aarhus Universitet, March 10, 2021 <https://danmarkshistorien.dk/vis/materiale/danske-lov-1688> (accessed November 7, 2022)

a new-born infant.<sup>42</sup> Child-abandonment had been a common commons-based practice of family planning in pre-Christian Denmark<sup>43</sup> and thus an obvious target for Reformist Christian authorities to attack and stigmatise in order to inculcate in their subjects the doctrines of the Ten Commandments,<sup>44</sup> upon which the new Danske Lov was firmly based.<sup>45</sup> Thus, if an abandoned child was found within her district, the local midwife—often accompanied by so-called ‘Dannekoner’<sup>46</sup> (literally ‘Danish wives’)—was required to inspect the breasts of all unmarried women for milk in order to identify the mother and turn her in to the authorities for her death sentence<sup>47</sup> through decapitation and the mounting of her head on a pole.<sup>48</sup>

While officially securing midwives their formal authority and autonomy, the 1685-church oath also functioned as a targeted controlling measure by the state—the crown and church—imposing upon aspiring midwives a set of strict criteria that were incompatible with many of the practices and world views of the region’s traditional healers. These were in turn increasingly stigmatised and condemned as witches for sharing and using their knowledge.<sup>49</sup>

The church oath placed high emphasis on the midwife’s Christian beliefs, and required that she was both married and had given birth herself.<sup>50</sup> Further, it required her to pledge to informing the authorities should she gain knowledge of dissident practices within her field or district; of any “un-Christian, illegal, yes, heathen and devilish remedies, in which case you should not merely refrain from these yourself, but also, if you get the suspicion that these are in use among others, notify the Authorities and the Church at once, so that the so-inclined may be punished”<sup>51</sup> (my translation from the Danish).

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<sup>42</sup> Beth Grothe Nielsen: *Letfærdige Qvindfolk* (Stenløse: Forlaget Delta, 1982), p. 33-34

<sup>43</sup> Juha Pentikäinen: “Child Abandonment as an Indicator of Christianization” in *Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis* (Åbo: Donner Institute, 1990), p. 75 and Hanne Sigismund Nielsen, Anne Løkke and Cecilia Milwertz: “børneudsættelser” on *lex.dk*, Den Store Danske, January 29, 2009, <https://denstoredanske.lex.dk/børneudsættelser> (accessed November 14, 2022)

<sup>44</sup> Brian Duignan: “Ten Commandments” on *Britannica* <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Ten-Commandments> (accessed November 7, 2022)

<sup>45</sup> Birgitte Possing: “Med hovedet på en stige 1683-1866” in *Mod Sædvane* (København: Strandberg Publishing, 2022), p. 134

<sup>46</sup> ‘Danish wives’ were legally married and so-called ‘honourable’ women cf. ”Danne-Kone” or ”Danne-Kvinde” on *Moths Ordbog / Det Danske Sprog- og Litteraturselskab*, <https://mothsordbog.dk/ordbog?query=dannekone> (accessed November 7, 2022) and Beth Grothe Nielsen “Debat: »Letfærdige Qvindfolk«” in *Fortid og Nutid*, 1., 1982, p. 110

<sup>47</sup> Beth Grothe Nielsen: *Ibid.*, and Helen Cliff: *Op.cit.*, p. 65

<sup>48</sup> Birgitte Possing: *Op.cit.*, p. 138

<sup>49</sup> Helen Cliff: *Op.cit.*, p. 69

<sup>50</sup> ”Danmarks og Norges Kirkeritual (Kirkeritualet) af 1685” on *Retsinformation*, <https://www.retsinformation.dk/eli/retsinfo/1685/12000> (accessed October 14, 2021)

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

In 1714, midwifery became a doctor-examined profession held to national standards and with a fixed wage.<sup>52</sup> As such, the ‘midwifery ordinance of 1714’<sup>53</sup> is believed to constitute one of the primary pillars of today’s universal Danish welfare system by requiring the midwife “to assist the poor as well as the rich / and not for petty commercial gain / without any important cause / abandon the poor / to which she has first been called”<sup>54</sup> (my translation from the Danish). Similarly, midwives were legally required to ‘patiently wait’ for a labour to unfold, and were not authorised to attempt to speed up labours.<sup>55</sup> As such, by means of their position as state-employed and -examined practitioners, and their lack of motivation to unnecessarily intervene in normally progressing births, Danish midwives have historically managed to maintain their stronghold in the obstetric field because they have been working under conditions that enabled them to keep the number of birth-related deaths to a minimum.<sup>56</sup>

Later, a shortage of doctors across the country meant an increase in the midwives’ power, both within the field of obstetrics and in related fields. As such, with the ‘midwifery regulations’ of 1810,<sup>57</sup> midwives were trusted with the task of determining whether a labour was progressing normally, and—in pathological cases—to call on the nearest doctor for medical assistance. Similarly, they became authorised to prescribe simple remedies available from the pharmacy,<sup>58</sup> and in 1829 their responsibilities grew when they became required by law to substitute the doctor if he was unavailable.

In 1843, midwives further became obliged to assist doctors during epidemic outbreaks;<sup>59</sup> a task which was however suspended upon the Danish 1870s-confirmation<sup>60</sup> of the Hungarian physician Ignaz Semmelweis 1847-discovery<sup>61</sup> of the contagious relation between the medical staff’s lack of hand wash and the prevalence of puerperal sepsis (childbed fever). In the early 1860s, it became mandatory for Danish midwives to keep a protocol of all labours, not

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<sup>52</sup> Udvalget Vedrørende Fødselshjælp: “Reglement for Gjordemodervæsenets Indretning og Bestyrelse” in *Betænkning angående Jordemodervæsenet* (Copenhagen: J. H. Schultz A/S Universitetsbogtrykkeri, 1952), p. 12

<sup>53</sup> Anne Løkke: “Fødselshjælp i 1700- og 1800-tallet” on *Danske Slægtsforskere* <https://slaegt.dk/media/aq4i4a2m/2020-fødselshjælp-danske-slægtsforskere-bjerringbro.pdf> (accessed October 14, 2021), p. 9

<sup>54</sup> Jordemoderforeningen: “Jordemoderforordningen af 1714 §8”, December 5, 2014, [https://jordemoderforeningen.dk/fileadmin/Fag\\_\\_\\_Forskning/Materialer\\_fra\\_moeder/Jubilaeumskonference\\_den\\_5\\_december\\_2014/2000/Planche\\_1\\_Forordningen\\_fuld\\_tekst\\_2000.jpg](https://jordemoderforeningen.dk/fileadmin/Fag___Forskning/Materialer_fra_moeder/Jubilaeumskonference_den_5_december_2014/2000/Planche_1_Forordningen_fuld_tekst_2000.jpg) (last accessed October 14, 2021)

<sup>55</sup> Helen Cliff: Op.cit., p. 75

<sup>56</sup> Cecilie Rønsholt: Op.cit.

<sup>57</sup> Udvalget Vedrørende Fødselshjælp: Op.cit.

<sup>58</sup> Helen Cliff: Op.cit., p. 68

<sup>59</sup> Helen Cliff: Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Dr. E. Ingerslev: *Om Dødeligheden ved Barselsfeber i Danmark og Antiseptikkens Betydning for Samme* (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzels Forlag, 1892)

<sup>61</sup> Caroline M De Costa: “‘The contagiousness of childbed fever’: a short history of puerperal sepsis and its treatment” in *Medical Journal of Australia* Vol. 177, 11 (Sydney: Australasian Medical Publishing Company, 2002), pp. 668-671

just complicated and fatal ones.<sup>62</sup> These protocols allowed statisticians to retrospectively observe the lethal effects of doctors' negligent hygiene practices, and their general 'surgical eagerness,'<sup>63</sup> both of which were particularly distinctive at the Copenhagen 'Fødselsstiftelsen'; a public birth clinic that had been established in 1750 to provide anonymous labour assistance to unmarried women, who would risk being deemed guilty of concealment of birth—and thus decapitated—if they laboured at home alone and the child died.<sup>64</sup> In the period between 1860-69, the maternal mortality rate at Fødselsstiftelsen reached an outrageous 46,42 percent, compared to 9,66 percent among midwife-assisted labours in the surrounding city,<sup>65</sup> since doctors at Fødselsstiftelsen also carried out autopsies on women who had recently died in labour, without washing hands before going on to assist the birthing women on the adjoining labour ward.

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<sup>62</sup> Helen Cliff: *Op.cit.*, p. 69

<sup>63</sup> Dr. E. Ingerslev: *Op.cit.*, p. 10

<sup>64</sup> Concealment of birth remained death penalty until the replacement of Danske Lov with Straffeloven (i.e. the 'Danish Criminal Code') in 1866. See: Birgitte Possing: *Op.cit.*

<sup>65</sup> Dr. E. Ingerslev: *Op.cit.*, p. 51

## *Birth Nation*

Since the introduction of the church oath for midwives in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Danish authorities had been increasingly committed to securing public health through standardised health care that would secure the population's abundance as well as their loyalty towards the crown and state. The period that saw the introduction of the antiseptic regime coincided with the emergence of the science of genetic refinement, eugenics, which was formulated in 1865 by Sir Francis Galton<sup>66</sup> in response to his half-cousin Charles Darwin's theories of evolution and natural selection.

With democratic movements on the rise across Europe after the French Revolution in 1789—emboldening bourgeois liberalist movements to challenge their crowns and nobilities—the 1800s saw a shift in orientation from patriotism towards democratic nationalism.<sup>67</sup> From this followed an increasing focus on ethnically refining and culturally homogenizing the different European nations, i.e. peoples ('natio' being the Latin word for 'people'), and Denmark was no exception from this trend.

"In the 1700s, you were the King's subject regardless of whether you spoke Norwegian, Danish or German," historian Uffe Østergaard<sup>68</sup> explains of the Danish conglomerate state, uniting Norway, Denmark, Iceland, Greenland, the Faroe Isles, and the principalities of Schleswig, Holstein, and Lauenburg, under the Danish crown.<sup>69</sup> But this began to change after the loss of Norway in 1814, and with the rise and strengthening of the national democratic movement in the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, leading to a targeted effort of the state to craft its nation by homogenizing and stereotyping Danishness,<sup>70</sup> involving the wilful attempt to annihilate aberrant genetic, cultural, moral, and social, traits in the population.

Denmark formally obtained democratic rule in 1849<sup>71</sup> in response to the First Schleswig War fought against the rebelling principalities of Schleswig, Holstein, and

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<sup>66</sup> Francis Galton: "Hereditary Talent and Character" in *Macmillan's Magazine* 12, Vol. 68 (London: Macmillan Publishers, 1865), pp. 157-166

<sup>67</sup> Jon Faber: Op.cit.

<sup>68</sup> Jon Faber: Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> "The term conglomerate state denotes a state, which consists of different countries or provinces with different state bodies, and perhaps also different languages and religions, but which, despite these differences, is held together by a single ruler. As such, it is the opposite of a unitary state." (my translation from the Danish) See: Birgit Løgstrup: Op.cit.

<sup>70</sup> Richard Jenkins: "'Where the crows turn': Darkest Jutland—Denmark's Enlightenment" in *Being Danish—Paradoxes of Identity in Everyday Life* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2016), pp. 56-61

<sup>71</sup> Peter Bejder and Benjamin Kristensen: "Det danske demokrati, efter 1849" on *danmarkshistorien.dk*, Aarhus Universitet, September 14, 2014, <https://danmarkshistorien.dk/leksikon-og-kilder/vis/materiale/det-danske-demokrati-fra-1849-og-frem/> (last accessed October 15, 2021)

Lauenburg. While the Danish King Frederik the 7th had peacefully accepted the transition from absolute to constitutional monarchy, these South-Danish principalities were strongly opposed to the idea of a democratically ruled 'Denmark for the Danish people' that would shift the power of governance from their duke, the King of Denmark, towards a wider segment of the population.<sup>72</sup> The three principalities together accounted for a third of Denmark's population and half of its economy. But since the new Danish nation state would be exclusively open to those who spoke and felt 'Danish,' the German-speaking populations—including nobilities—of Holstein and Lauenburg<sup>73</sup> would be effectively ruled out. Schleswig, however, was initially included into the Danish nation state after 1849, because Danish nationalists held that contrary to Holstein and Lauenburg, it contained a large number of ethnic Danes. German nationalists, on the other hand, believed that Schleswig and Holstein should not be separated, which led to the two duchies being subsequently referred to as 'Schleswig-Holstein.'<sup>74</sup>

In addition to being a conflict of budding nations, the First Schleswig War was also a war between classes. The ranks of the principalities' cavalry were filled with the gentry and nobility, whose view of the conflict was "that of strict legitimacy," to use the words of historian Jan Schlürmann: "[T]he Danish King was not their enemy—he stayed the 'unfree' sovereign of the duchies—the enemy was the liberal and national Danish 'revolutionary' party which threatened the traditional social order of the common monarchy of Danish and German speaking subjects."<sup>75</sup>

The Danish victory against the rebelling principalities in the Battle of Fredericia in 1849, and the formal introduction of democracy with the Danish Constitutional Act that same year, did not secure a lasting peace, however. Instead, it prepared the ground for the Second Schleswig War fought between Denmark and Austro-Prussia in 1864; a war deeply rooted in questions and ambiguities of Danish and German national identity. For example, the Brothers Grimm, who were central to the standardisation of the German language with their *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, argued that the entire peninsula of Jutland should belong to Germany,<sup>76</sup> since the

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<sup>72</sup> Jan Schlürmann: "The Schleswig-Holstein Rebellion" on *Danish Military History*, [https://web.archive.org/web/20120320024806/http://www.milhist.dk/trearskrigen/outbreak/outbreak\\_uk.htm](https://web.archive.org/web/20120320024806/http://www.milhist.dk/trearskrigen/outbreak/outbreak_uk.htm) (accessed Nov. 1, 2022)

<sup>73</sup> Nationalmuseet: "Første Slesvigske Krig 1848 – 50" on *natmus.dk*, Nationalmuseet, <https://natmus.dk/historisk-viden/temaer/militaerhistorie/danmarks-krige/foerste-slesvigske-krig/> (last accessed October 15, 2021)

<sup>74</sup> Jan Schlürmann: Op.cit.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Bue Rübner Hansen: "Den Sorte Jyde" on *Friktion*, March 21, 2017, <https://friktionmagasin.dk/den-sorte-jyde-125e41c66e40> (accessed Oct. 27, 2022)



various Jutlandic dialects were grammatically closer to German than to Danish by e.g. placing the article in pre- rather than post-position.<sup>77</sup>

This argument should be seen in addition to the fact that it was not until the end of the Napoleonic Wars, and the consequential loss of Norway to Sweden in 1814,<sup>78</sup> that the Danish state had (re-)discovered Jutland<sup>79</sup> and initiated what would grow to become a targeted and all-encompassing programme to ‘Danify’ the peninsula and its inhabitants. A feat that came to include the rapid enclosures and agricultural development of the heath commons to re-model the Jutlandic landscape and its peoples after an East-Danish example.<sup>80</sup>

Before then, Jutland had been under the formal rule of the Danish crown, but with no internal or external expectation that its peoples should be culturally aligned with Denmark’s royal and noble representatives<sup>81</sup> (who were cosmopolitical rather than Danish in their orientation, speaking German and French at court). In fact, power had traditionally prevailed through asserting and demonstrating its difference and distance from the subjects of its dominance,<sup>82</sup> but the 1800s saw—not just a shift in power from the One to the Many—but also a shift in attitude to overcome rather than assert cultural differences to unify the nation.

As mentioned, this shift was anchored in bourgeois national liberalist ideology. This was in turn heavily informed by an idealisation of the peasants as the true Danes, inextricably tied to the ground, the soil, and the landscape, as they were:<sup>83</sup> A connection that was sought explicated and brought to the peasants’ own conscience through Højskolebevægelsen (‘the folk high school movement’), 1844-onwards, teaching to the rural youth “the history of the homeland, and the significance of the collective, (...) what it means to Danish and human in Denmark”<sup>84</sup> (my translation from the Danish).

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<sup>77</sup> Annette Lassen: “Müller’s Method” in Gylfi Gunnlaugsson and Clarence E. Glad (eds.) *Old Norse-Icelandic Philology and National Identity in the Long Nineteenth Century, National Cultivation of Culture*, Vol. 28 (Leiden: Brill, 2022), p. 91

<sup>78</sup> “Treaty of Kiel: Denmark-Sweden [1814]” on *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Treaty-of-Kiel> (accessed Oct. 27, 2022)

<sup>79</sup> “It has, in fact, been argued that it was not until the shocking loss of Norway in 1814 that the Danish state ‘discovered’ Jutland at all.” See: Richard Jenkins: Op.cit., p. 54 and p. 320 (note 4): “‘Rediscovered’ may be a better expression, since it was the centralizing ambitions of seventeenth-century absolutism that rendered Jutland increasingly peripheral.”

<sup>80</sup> Peter Henningsen: “Det mørke Jylland: Et dansk landskab i en brydningstid” in *Bol og By: Landbohistorisk Tidsskrift*, 12, 1 (Copenhagen: Landbohistorisk Selskab, 1996), p. 59

<sup>81</sup> Tine Damsholt: “En national turist i det patriotiske landskab” in *Fortid og Nutid* (Vejle: Dansk Historisk Fællesråd, 1999), pp. 3-4

<sup>82</sup> Bue Rübner Hansen: Op.cit.

<sup>83</sup> “Dengang vi var bønder: Hedeboender” on *dr.dk*, Danmarks Radio, 2018, [https://www.dr.dk/drtv/episode/dengang-vi-var-boender\\_254013](https://www.dr.dk/drtv/episode/dengang-vi-var-boender_254013) (accessed May 24, 2022), 00:15:08

<sup>84</sup> Nationalmuseet: “Højskolebevægelsen” on *natmus.dk*; Nationalmuseet, <https://natmus.dk/historisk-viden/danmark/nationalstaten-1849-1915/faedreland-og-folkelig-hoejskolebevaegelsen/> (accessed November 4, 2022)

## *Self and Other*

With the Danish 1864-defeat in the Second Schleswig War at the Battle of Dybbøl, Denmark lost all three of its German-speaking principalities to the budding German national project—a circumstance that greatly came to inform the country's new and lasting self-understanding as a small state threatened by a mighty neighbour. Similarly, the significant territorial loss fanned the wish to establish distinctly demarcated borders between the national self and its other, physically as well as sentimentally:<sup>85</sup> To produce homogeneity within, and otherness without, by stereotyping both.

While to the patriot, the notion of 'homeland' assigns one's current country or state—the place where one holds rights and duties, but not necessarily the country of one's of birth—the nationalist understands the term differently. To the nationalist, the homeland is the country where one is born, linking it intrinsically to questions of heritage, culture, and language. As such, the national conception of homeland—which emerged during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and became foundational to the European democratic movements—was, according to ethnologist Tine Damsholt, anchored in a “concrete nature, based on the idea of the world's nature as divided into national landscapes with each their own particular characteristics (...) understanding language, history, landscape, and culture as part of one organic unity. A unity that was tied together by, and an expression of, a 'popular spirit' which was believed to be shared within the nation, and which likewise served to demarcate it from other nations.”<sup>86</sup> Other nations such as, in Denmark's case, Germany.

In Denmark, the transition from patriotism to nationalism coincided with, informed, and was informed by, the 19<sup>th</sup> century so-called Danish Golden Age; an exceptional outburst of creativity across arts and sciences with a firm national anchoring. Through the productions of writers, philosophers, painters, and poets,<sup>87</sup> the Golden Age contributed to conceptualising the national Danish landscape by evoking and romanticising the dominant and desired traits of its nature following an East-Danish ideal: “The image of bright beech forests reflecting themselves in the blue sea is recognisable across the national hymns of the era,”

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<sup>85</sup> Nationalmuseet: “Anden Slesvigske Krig - 1864” on *natmus.dk*, Nationalmuseet, <https://natmus.dk/historisk-viden/temaer/militaerhistorie/danmarks-krige/anden-slesvigske-krig/> (accessed October 15, 2021)

<sup>86</sup> Tine Damsholt: *Op.cit.*, pp. 3-4 (my translation from the Danish)

<sup>87</sup> E.g., Hans Christian Andersen, Søren Kierkegaard, N. F. S. Grundtvig, Bertel Thorvaldsen, C. W. Eckersberg, Adam Oehlenschläger, B. S. Ingemann, and J. L. Lund

writes Damsholt, who, drawing on Michel Foucault's understanding of discourse,<sup>88</sup> sees this as an "expression of a 'national gaze' that construes the national landscape by investigating and describing which types of nature that live up to this designation"<sup>89</sup> (my translation from the Danish).

If the Golden Age-rendition of an ideal Danish nature contributed to crafting a new unified national self-understanding in response to the lost pluralism of the conglomerate state, not only did it do so by homogenising the image of Danish nature from an East Danish ideal (beech, sea, corn fields). It simultaneously worked to suppress the imagery of Danish landscapes that diverged from this stereotyped rendition—to 'other' and exoticize them as foreign elements that should be expelled, suppressed, or eliminated to satisfy the ambition of producing the country, its landscapes, biotopes, and peoples as truly 'Danish.'

This, in turn, contributed to legitimising real-political and agricultural programmes to standardise and transform diverging landscapes. For example, landscapes such as the heath- and boglands covering 90 percent of Midwestern Jutland,<sup>90</sup> which had historically provided for a very different life and culture than the East Danish isles. Yet these were excluded from informing the incipient Danish national gaze and would—conversely—come to deliver 'within' Denmark, "what had been lost without"<sup>91</sup> with the territorial losses of 1814 (Norway) and 1864 (Schleswig-Holstein).

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<sup>88</sup> "Foucault adopted the term 'discourse' to denote a historically contingent social system that produces knowledge and meaning. He notes that discourse is distinctly material in effect, producing what he calls 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak'." See: Rachel Adams: "Michel Foucault: Discourse" on *Critical Legal Thinking*, November 17, 2017, <https://criticallegalthinking.com/2017/11/17/michel-foucault-discourse/> (accessed: Nov. 1, 2022)

<sup>89</sup> Tine Damsholt: Op.cit., p. 15 (my translation from the Danish)

<sup>90</sup> Hugo Matthiessen: Op.cit., p. 14

<sup>91</sup> The saying, "what is lost without, must be won within," has been attributed to the poet H. P. Holst, and even if it initially expressed with a view to the industrial development of the country in general, it soon became inextricably linked to the agricultural development of the Jutlandic heathlands (1866-onwards) on the initiative of Enrico Dalgas and his Heath Society that used the saying as their motto. See: Jan Baltzersen: "National genrejsning efter nederlaget i 1864" on *ddb.byhistorie.dk*, Dansk Center for Byhistorie, 2005, [http://ddb.byhistorie.dk/monumenter/artikel.aspx?xid=danmarks\\_nationale\\_genrejsning](http://ddb.byhistorie.dk/monumenter/artikel.aspx?xid=danmarks_nationale_genrejsning) (accessed October 15, 2021).

## Homogenisation

Proponents and opposers of the national liberal cause were not distributed according to a clear-cut East-West geographical divide, however. Rather, the Danish nation state project was in many ways a class-issue emanating from the bourgeoisie and its representatives—public officials, priests, merchants, doctors<sup>92</sup>—who were increasingly taking office throughout the country in response to the 1814-loss of Norway and as part of the Danish state’s efforts to culturally unify its remaining territories.<sup>93</sup>

While for centuries, East Denmark—the isles of Funen and Zealand, and the Eastern parts of Jutland—had been organised according to the feudal structure, deep-time geological factors had historically accounted for a radically different lifestyle west of the Jutlandic ridge.<sup>94</sup> Since West Jutland was not covered by ice during Weichsel, the last ice age, its soils had not been renewed or enriched by glacial minerals like the other parts of Denmark, and was thus unfit for conventional intensive agriculture of the East-Danish variant. According to archaeologist Mette Løvschal, the West Jutlandic sandy acidic soils instead provided for extensive pastoralist farming and sheep-herding:

As the heather spread (...) pastoralists developed new ways to manage and optimise it – further fostering its expansion. Each spring, they began to set heathlands ablaze, which helped the heather’s seeds germinate and encouraged new sprouts to spring from the stem. Fire gave [ling heather] an advantage against competing species that couldn’t survive the burn. And fire allowed pastoralists to keep the shrub, which is most nutritious in its first five years, perpetually young. The desire to burn more, and more frequently (...) created a very particular ecology of life forms, producing different rhythms and opportunities for many species. With each season of burning, heather expanded. As its spread accelerated, it became an increasingly valuable resource, inviting new management techniques and new uses. Over time, heather and heather turfs (the soil layer among its roots) were used for thatch on houses, fuel, “bedding” in livestock stalls, building materials, fertiliser and tool-making. The spread of heathlands also allowed pastoralists to expand their livestock and produce more wool, milk and meat.<sup>95</sup>

In his 1939-publication, *Den Sorte Jyde* (‘The Black Jute’), historian Hugo Mathiessen explains that “[t]o the Farmer inside Jutland (...) the Heath Sheep played the same role as the Reindeer

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<sup>92</sup> Bue Rübner Hansen: Op.cit.

<sup>93</sup> Claus Møller Jørgensen: “Skole og undervisning efter 1814: Almueskolen efter 1814” on *danmarkshistorien.dk*, Aarhus Universitet, February 3, 2017, <https://danmarkshistorien.dk/vis/materiale/skole-og-undervisning-1814-2014> (accessed November 2, 2022)

<sup>94</sup> Mette Løvschal: “Mutual Entrapment” on *aeon*, October 11, 2022, <https://aeon.co/essays/how-one-modest-shrub-entrapped-humans-in-its-service> (accessed November 3, 2022)

<sup>95</sup> Mette Løvschal: Ibid.

to the Lapps [sic.]<sup>96</sup>. It provided him with Food in the form of Meat and Milk (...) through its Wool with Clothes for the Body and Thread for the eager Knitting, and the Hide could be used in many Ways<sup>97</sup> (my translation from the Danish).

Such extensive pastoralist farming however required large areas of land per farm resulting in low population density.<sup>98</sup> This meant that, in addition to sustaining themselves from a radically different kind of farming than their East-Danish peers, West Jutlandic heath farmers were also wealthier and more autonomous,<sup>99</sup> being under no or little control from the authorities since tax collection and law enforcement was difficult to carry out in these thinly-populated, and often also adversarial,<sup>100</sup> regions. A fact, which the national authorities were increasingly determined to change after 1814, to secure future taxpayers and soldiers to boost its army.<sup>101</sup>

In Midwestern Jutland, the national liberalist movement found one of its most ardent proponents in the priest and poet Steen Steensen Blicher (1782-1848), whose literary work has grown synonymous with the heathlands: Its landscapes, peoples, customs, dialects.<sup>102</sup> Blicher dedicated much of his prose to the particularities of the heathlands and -dwellers, and on occasion also wrote in dialect<sup>103</sup> to mediate and document the different Jutlandic tongues to his pan-Danish readership.

Yet, his political writings focus rather on ways to supersede such disparities than maintaining them to facilitate the country's unifying homogenisation. In his view, Danish homogenisation required: 1) The marginalisation of foreigners, such as—according to Blicher—Jewish people, by excluding them from political affairs and matters of the state;<sup>104</sup> 2) establishing disciplining Magdalene asylums, following the English example, to 'save' fallen

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<sup>96</sup> I.e., the Northern European Sámi

<sup>97</sup> Hugo Mathiessen: "Brug og misbrug af heden" in Op.cit., p. 67

<sup>98</sup> Peter Henningsen: Op.cit., p. 50

<sup>99</sup> "Dengang vi var bønder: Hede-bønder," Op.cit., 00:08:17

<sup>100</sup> Easily outnumbering the authorities' representatives, the latter would often simply be beat up if they crossed the heath farmers. See: "Dengang vi var bønder: Hede-bønder," Op.cit., 00:09:00

<sup>101</sup> Peter Henningsen: Op.cit., p. 48

<sup>102</sup> Throughout the Jutlandic heath regions, places and buildings are named after Steen Steensen Blicher. For example, as a Tjørring/Herning-child in the 1980s, I attended a kindergarten called Steen Blicher's Børnehavn.

<sup>103</sup> Steen Steensen Blicher: *E Bindstouv* (Roskilde: Blicher-Selskabet, 2012) (1842)

<sup>104</sup> "I know of no Country where They have enjoyed more Privileges than in Denmark (...) After having achieved such high degrees of Freedom, which neither they nor their Ancestors have known, (...) they become immediately desperate, because they are not allowed to become Deputies of the Estates, (...) because they cannot participate in the control of a foreign state! I say foreign (...)" (my translation from the Danish). See: Steen Steensen Blicher: "Bør Jøderne taaes i staten?," "Mosaiterne som Stænder-Deputerede" and "Ikke saa meget til B.R. og Syskind som om dem til Publikum" in *Bør Jøderne taaes i staten?—og andre avisartikler* (Esbjerg: Rosendahls Forlag, 1984), p. 67

women and assert bourgeois Christian family values in society;<sup>105</sup> and 3) annihilating aberrant cultural and linguistic traits within the Danish nation, such as those embodied and expressed by the West Jutlandic nomadic 'Kjeltrings,'<sup>106</sup> who are largely unknown today, but were a very concrete worry among policy makers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>107</sup> because of their dissident culture and their unwillingness to assimilate with the Christian lifestyle prescribed by the nation state.

That the Kjeltrings have gone into oblivion, while Blicher has entered canonized literary history, shows how the writing of history is far from neutral, but actively produces white spots in the landscape, which in turn lock in wordless inutterability that which majoritarian culture cannot or does not want to contain, such as its own negation or proof of its artificiality. Certainly, the concealed fact of the Kjeltring's recent existence attests to the constructedness and novel character of the homogenized Danish nation. As Hans Hauge has remarked: "Nations are young, but would rather be old,"<sup>108</sup> and as the young Danish nation state sought to naturalize its homogeneity and coherence through mytho-historico narratives linking the royal house and the national flag with ancient roots,<sup>109</sup> it did so on the backs of the Kjeltrings, of women, and of anyone not fitting into or aligned with the national liberals' narrow vision of Danishness.

Remembering the Kjeltrings today, then, means challenging such narrow and exclusionary renditions of belonging in a place. It means acknowledging that things do not have to be the way they are, and that just as we have changed from pasts to presents, we will change in unknown ways into our futures.

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<sup>105</sup> Steen Steensen Blicher: "Forslag til Redningshuse for faldne Piger?," "Endnu en Mindelse om Redningsanstalter for faldne Piger" and "Engang Endnu" in *ibid.*, pp. 91-100, 103-109, and 111-112

<sup>106</sup> "These were from old Age a deeply despised and debased Class of Humans. Of their Origins nothing is certain. I consider it most likely that they derive from our Heathen Ancestors' Slaves"; "With which Eyes will they consider themselves? How may he find that self-esteem, which is a Source of Virtue as well as its Defence? Slave conditions – Slave mind!" "Subdued neither by Force, Work, or Worries of Sustenance, this Race is now breeding immensely; since these people obey solely the Command of Nature," and "I see no more Efficient Means (...) than the complete Elimination of the Estate and its Name (...) and complete absorption into the other Civil Classes. See: Steen Steensen Blicher: "Om Natmændsfolkene" in *ibid.*, pp. 115, 116, 117, 122

<sup>107</sup> H. P. Hansen: "Ældre opfattelse af natmændsfolket og dets afstamning" in *Natmændsfolk og kjeltringer* (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde og Bagger, 1959), p. 10

<sup>108</sup> Hans Hauge: "Nationalstaten" in *Danmark, Tænkepauser 8* (Århus: Aarhus Universitetsforlag, 2013), p. 19

<sup>109</sup> "the long royal genealogy that is traced with pride, even if indirectly, between Margrethe II and Gorm the Old (...) offers a plausible narrative, and, despite the usual multi-national European royal family tree, allows the family to claim timeless and authentic Danishness" and p. 131: The Danish flag "has its own mythology, which Danes still recount: it is, apparently, the oldest national flag in the world, falling from the heaven in June 1219 during the battle of Lyndanisse[.]" See: Richard Jenkins: "'Just how it is': The Sacred and the Profane" in *op.cit.*, pp. 127

## *Crooked Life*

While much of Blicher's prose and poetry concerning Jutland appears an homage to the peninsula and its inhabitants, his political writings cast the former in a different and less empathic light: For example, his romanticising and exoticizing portrayal of the Kjeltring couple Linka Smælem and Peiter Beenløs<sup>110</sup> in the 1829-short story "Kjeltringliv"<sup>111</sup> (i.e., 'Kjeltring Life,' or, derogatively: 'Crooked Life'/'Life as a Crook') did not keep him from formulating a detailed programme for the Kjeltrings' annihilation in a newspaper article published in 1820.<sup>112</sup> Interestingly, the article preceded the short story by nine years, suggesting that Blicher's romanticising view on the Kjeltrings was simultaneously a 'deadening gaze' akin to that of the hunter, who may revel in the physiognomic and behavioural particularities of his game, while plotting to kill it.

"Kjeltringliv" supposedly draws on Blicher's own experiences from 1817, when during a thunderstorm he became the accidental witness to a Kjeltring ball in Axelhus—a small house erected on Ørre Heath in 1816 by the Poor Law Authorities to contain the infamous Kjeltring Johannes Axelsen and his family. Even if it was later revealed as pure fiction, the story—in all its exoticizing spectacularity—became instrumental to forming the national Danish conception of this "state within the state,"<sup>113</sup> designated as 'Kjeltrings,' 'natmænd,' 'skøjere,' 'rakkere,' 'tater,'<sup>114</sup> etc., grouping these presumably distinct but in many ways also over-lapping groups into one less-than-human savage entity for the Danish authorities to antagonize and confront.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the science of eugenics had not yet been disqualified by the nationalisms arising throughout Europe and culminating in the fascisms and genocides of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and so Blicher was not the only intellectual of a national liberalist bent who was fantasizing about ways to refine and eventually assimilate what was considered a lower-

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<sup>110</sup> Steen Steensen Blicher: "Kjeltringliv" in op.cit., pp. 129-152

<sup>111</sup> "Blicher's 'Linka Smælem' only carries the exotic traits, which the writer's vigorous fantasy (...) has attributed to her. That the name is an invention of Blicher is indisputable. Linka's name was Birgitte, and Peiter was called Mikkel." And "[D]espite his lively interest and fair knowledge of these nature peoples, [Blicher...] is blind to the fact that these are – ethnographically regarded – good Danes [sic.]" (my translations from the Danish). See: H. P. Hansen: "Afstamning – typer – personnavne" in op.cit. (1959), pp. 80 and 89

<sup>112</sup> Steen Steensen Blicher: "Om Natmændsfolkene" in op.cit., pp. 115-126

<sup>113</sup> "The real Kjeltrings—not those crooks you find distributed across the other ranks and classes—form an isolated unity, a state within the state; which is why a transiting French was more right than he would ever know when observing that 'en Dannemarc il y a une nation qui s'appelle Kjeltrings, elle n'est pas si bien cultivée comme les autres danois.'—This nation calls itself travelers." (my translation from the Danish). See: Steen Steensen Blicher: "Kjeltringliv" in op.cit., p. 131

<sup>114</sup> I.e., 'Kjeltrings,' 'nightmen,' 'travelers,' 'knackers,' 'Tatars,' etc. See: H. P. Hansen: "Ældre opfattelse af natmandsfolket og dets afstamning" in op.cit. (1959), p. 9

standing human race: “To take the Children from their Parents is in Fact an Act of Kindness,” he writes of the Kjeltrings: “[P]articularly with regards to the Former; as this may know very little of this crude and for almost all tender Feelings deprived Human Race, and would not know: That the most one might in General expect is only an instinctual Care from the Mother towards her child, as long as she is suckling the infant by her breast. (...) For the Unborn, a Door would be opened to a comprehensive refinement, by the eradication of the Past’s imprinted stigma”<sup>115</sup> (my translation from the Danish).

Using the word ‘natmand’ (i.e., ‘nightman’) interchangeably with ‘Kjeltring’,<sup>116</sup> and thereby adding to their rendition as lowlives, in his 1820-article “Of the Nightmen People” Blicher expands his view on how to discipline the Kjeltring nation, emphasizing that what is required is nothing short of the “Complete Elimination of the Estate and the Name”:<sup>117</sup>

1. On a secret date, known only to the district and the city bailiffs, all nightmen—sedentary as well as nomadic—are arrested and taken to the nearest market town, where food and shelter has secretly been prepared for them beforehand.<sup>118</sup>
2. Here the arrested mass is examined: Escaped prisoners are handed over to their assigned places; foreign vagabonds are escorted out of the country; all domestic beggars and vagrants that are not of the nightmen nation are handed over to the Poor Law Authorities for further treatment.<sup>119</sup>
3. From the remaining pool of nightmen proper, the old, disabled and sickly are sorted out and handed over to hospitals and poorhouses for their lifetime maintenance.<sup>120</sup>
4. Further, all children aged 7 to 15 will be brought to orphanages, or in another way sought raised and trained by the government in the skills of either carpentry, handicrafts, or maybe—for the boys concerned—military service.

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<sup>115</sup> Steen Steensen Blicher: “Om Natmændsfolkene” in op.cit., pp. 125-126

<sup>116</sup> In this text, Blicher primarily uses the word ‘nightman’ (natmand), but the words ‘rakker’ and ‘kjæltring’ (both p. 122) also find their way into the text, indicating to me that he takes aim at the same heterogenous group of people as in the short story “Kjeltringliv.” The Kjeltrings’ exonyms count ‘Kjeltring,’ ‘natmand’ (i.e., ‘nightman’), ‘skøjer,’ ‘rakker’ (i.e., ‘knacker,’ ‘tater,’ ‘rejsende’ (i.e., ‘travellers), among others. See: Ibid., pp. 115-126 (my translations and summary from the Danish).

<sup>117</sup> Curiously, as mentioned, they went by several names, which Blicher himself also uses. Ibid. p. 122

<sup>118</sup> Ibid. p. 123

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.



The utmost efforts must be made that their origins are forgotten, and therefore they should eventually be placed where this may indeed happen, such as Copenhagen or the Danish colonies abroad.<sup>121</sup>

5. For the remaining nightmen, two colonies are built on two uninhabited islands—e.g. Hesselø and Hjelm—one for able-bodied legally married couples as well as illegally married couples with children below the age of 7. The other island is for able-bodied unmarried couples, and illegally married couples who do not have children below the age of 7.<sup>122</sup>
  - A) In the first colony for families and/or married couples, each family is assigned a plot of land to which they may tend when not working in the factory, which is to be set up on the island. The factory is overseen by a factory manager and the whole island by an inspector. No school is needed on the island, since the children who are born will be brought—between the age of 6 or 7—to the above-mentioned orphanages. Neighbouring priests will take turns conducting service on the island, and a military unit will be deployed to secure order and prevent the colonists from deserting.
  - B) The second colony is very much like the first one, only here men and women are kept apart in different buildings. Marriages are allowed, but in that case the couple will be relocated to the former island. Within 40 to 50 years, all colonists will likely be dead and the intention with the operation thus met<sup>123</sup> (my translations and summation from the Danish).

Blicher issued his proposal in 1820. 15 years later, on February 11, 1835, the Ringkjøbing, Viborg, Aalborg, and Randers counties launched a large-scale hunt for Kjeltrings within the territories of their jurisdiction.<sup>124</sup> Although none from Kjeltring strongholds such as Dejbjerg or Rind were caught, Jutlandic historian H. P. Hansen still considers the outcome impressive, not least taking into consideration the vastness of the terrain and the limited number and mobility of the hunters.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid., pp. 123-124

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., p. 124

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> H. P. Hansen: "Kjæltringejagten i jyske amter" in *Kjæltringejagten—og andre beretninger fra Det gamle Jylland* (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde og Bagger, 1966), p. 57

<sup>125</sup> Ibid. (1966)

- 64 were caught in Ringkjøbing county
- 45 in Viborg county
- 33 in Aalborg county

Amounting to a total of 142 people, of whom 24 were below the age of 15.<sup>126</sup> These were arrested and convicted of vagrancy. Regardless of their age, those who had not previously been so, were forcibly baptized and/or confirmed. Illegally cohabitant couples were married, able-bodied men and women were distributed among the peasants as labour force, and children assigned mandatory schooling.<sup>127</sup> Many children were likely also removed from their parents to be ‘out-sourced’ (literally: ‘udliciteret’) to live with and work for the peasants, which was common practice with regards to Kjeltring children.<sup>128</sup> Those without permanent residence were however not allotted to colonies, as Blicher had proposed, but to poorhouse facilities such as Axelhus—the one that had been erected for Johannes Axelsen and described by Blicher in “Kjeltringliv.”

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid. (1966)

<sup>127</sup> Ibid. (1966), pp. 57-58

<sup>128</sup> The Poor Law Authorities outsourced the daughters of Johannes Axelsen, of whom the youngest was 9 years old at the time. The children were banned from thenceforth seeing their mother. “Yet the mother kept visiting the girls, and the girls kept running home to their mother, which meant the Poor Law Authorities had to remove them time and again.” Helenes Hus, Museum of Cultural History, Herning Municipality, on-site information poster (last visited March 2022)

*Lost Without*  
*Lost Within*

That same house, Axelhus, was home to my great-great-great-great-grandmother Johanne Thygesdatter, when she was approached by the Danish folklore collector Evald Tang Kristensen 38 years later, in 1873. The house still stands today and is known as ‘Kjeltringehuset’ (‘the Kjeltring house’), Rakkerhuset (‘the knacker’s house’), or, more neutrally—after its last inhabitant—‘Helenes Hus’ (‘Helene’s House’). It functions as a < 30 square metres-mini museum under Herning Municipality to shed light on the history of the Kjeltrings and the authorities’ harsh disciplining measures against them. I do not know whether Johanne was Kjeltring. But the more I read on the matter, the more it appears to me that—despite Blicher’s racializing and racist claims to the contrary— ‘Kjeltring’ is rather something one does, than something one is. Further, importantly, the word ‘Kjeltring’ is an exonym used to assign a heterogenous group of people, some—but not all—of whom called themselves ‘rejsende’<sup>129</sup> (i.e. ‘travellers’) or ‘skøjere’.<sup>130</sup> And some—but not all—of whom worked as nightmen or knackers.<sup>131</sup>

In his book *Natmandsfolk og kjæltringer*, H. P. Hansen attempts to shed light on the Kjeltrings, who—in addition to being largely nomadic—were known to speak their own language, ‘Prævelikvant’;<sup>132</sup> a creolisation of Jutlandic intermixed with words of their own and words deriving from other travelling peoples.<sup>133</sup> The name of the language translates into something like ‘the beautiful language,’—‘præwweler’<sup>134</sup> meaning ‘to talk,’ and ‘kwandt’ meaning ‘good’ or ‘beautiful.’<sup>135</sup> Speaking Prævelikvant—speaking beautifully and well—enabled Kjeltrings to have a conversation in public without being understood. Myth has it that Kjeltrings were not allowed to reveal their language to outsiders, and that the consequence of doing so was severe retaliation, possibly even death;<sup>136</sup> a circumstance Hansen has however neither been able to confirm nor deny.

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<sup>129</sup> Steen Steensen Blicher: “Kjeltringliv” in *Op.cit.*, p. 131

<sup>130</sup> H. P. Hansen: “»Kjeltringer« som fællesbetegnelse til tiggere af natmandstypen” in *op.cit.*, (1959), p. 57

<sup>131</sup> The Kjeltrings were far from a unified class, Tang Kristensen writes: “Once, a Kjeltring Woman came to Niels Halds’ Farm in Breum to beg, while the others were waiting outside. His Wife had gone to Church, and he did not know what to give her, or how to get rid of her. Then he got the idea that he may be able to get rid of them by asking if they could skin a male Dog for him. ‘No, No,’ they respond, ‘we may be Kjeltrings, but we are still not Knackers.’ Much lies in this answer.” (my translation from the Danish). See: Evald Tang Kristensen: “Småtræk af Kjeltringernes Liv” (1888) on *Heimskringla*, [https://heimskringla.no/wiki/Småtræk\\_af\\_Kjeltringernes\\_Liv](https://heimskringla.no/wiki/Småtræk_af_Kjeltringernes_Liv) (accessed November 7, 2022).

<sup>132</sup> H. P. Hansen: “Kjeltringsproget” and “Skøjersproget” in *op.cit.* (1959), pp. 89-100 and 100-113

<sup>133</sup> E.g., the German Rotwelsch and Norwegian Fant languages. See: H. P. Hansen: “Skøjersproget” in *op.cit.*, (1959), p. 90

<sup>134</sup> H. P. Hansen: “Skøjersproget” in *op.cit.* (1959), p. 108

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.* (1959), p. 106

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.* (1959), pp. 98-100

Attempting to trace the diffuse aetiology of the Kjeltrings, Hansen writes that they were first described as a unified class in 1699 by Otto Sperlingius.<sup>137</sup> He believed them to be the descendants of “the country’s first indigenous population, the Celts; a conception shared by E. Pontoppidan in his ‘Danske Atlas’ until 1763, when the author, after having mentioned the immigration of the *Æsir*, writes: ‘Those who (...) did not want to appropriate the new oriental Life Style, but maintained the old Dress and simple Customs, either had to escape to deserted Places, or be treated with extreme Disdain by the proud *Æsir*, who marginalised them by the name of *Keltringer*, which is still used today to designate the most debased and horny of Peoples”<sup>138</sup> (my translation from the Danish; italicisation Hansen’s). Hansen’s coupling of Sperlingius’ and Pontoppidan’s writings concerning the Kjeltrings encapsulates the breadth and confusions of their changing conceptions: Indigenous nomads, lowlife crooks, nightmen, beggars, knackers...

Hansen, however, regards the group’s ethnic cohesion, and their alienation from the surrounding society, as a figment of their different beholders’ lively imagination. As such, he refutes the assumptions of Blicher and the likes that the Kjeltrings should be an isolated race, since Hansen’s own experience from growing up on the heathlands, as well as his later ethnographic and ehtnological work, shows that “these people, ethnographically regarded, were no different from the rest of the population.”<sup>139</sup> However, this does not change the fact that, just as the heath farmers’ lifestyle diverged substantially from their East Danish peers, the lifestyle of the nomadic Kjeltrings diverged substantially from the sedentary heath farmers’ in spite of their intertwining ancestries and shared dependence on the heath commons.

According to Evald Tang Kristensen, “the Life of the Kjeltrings was so intricately tied to the Life of the lower Peasantry that the Former only with the Latter might serve to complete the Picture of the ‘the poor Peasant’s’ Life at the Time”<sup>140</sup> (my translation from the Danish). Since, as previously described, the heathlands’ sandy soils provided only for very few farm units, the surplus population had to support themselves otherwise. Many emigrated,<sup>141</sup> but quite a few also took up life as wandering service providers,<sup>142</sup> and became enrolled in, or

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<sup>137</sup> H. P. Hansen: “Ældre opfattelse af natmændsfolket og dets afstamning” in op.cit. (1959), p. 9

<sup>138</sup> Erik Pontoppidan: *Danske Atlas*, p. 31, quoted in H. P. Hansen: Ibid. (1959), pp. 9-10

<sup>139</sup> H. P. Hansen: “Afstamning – typer – personnavne” in ibid. (1959), p. 79

<sup>140</sup> Evald Tang Kristensen: Op.cit.

<sup>141</sup> Peter Henningsen: Op.cit., p. 50

<sup>142</sup> Mylius Erichsen: *Den jydsk Hede* (Copenhagen: Gyldendalske Boghandels Forlag, 1903), p. 435-516, quoted in: H. P. Hansen: “Ældre opfattelse af natmændsfolket og dets afstamning” in op.cit. (1959), p. 17

associated with, the 'Kjeltring estate,' sustaining themselves as glaziers,<sup>143</sup> messengers,<sup>144</sup> chimney sweepers,<sup>145</sup> fabricating tinware and soldering,<sup>146</sup> knitting and spinning,<sup>147</sup> skinning dead animals,<sup>148</sup> and as wise men and women, i.e., healers,<sup>149</sup> among other things. The Kjeltrings were also known to be skilled fishermen and hunters, working with pre-modern devices across the commons, selling the part of the catch they did not need to sustain themselves.<sup>150</sup>

This however changed at the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries with the previously described homogenisation and Danification efforts after 1814,<sup>151</sup> resulting in a targeted programme to discipline the Kjeltrings by hunting them down, and clamping down hard on their vagabonding, to force their assimilation into the general peasantry.<sup>152</sup> Seeing their legal sources of income dwindle as a result of these efforts,<sup>153</sup> many Kjeltrings increasingly turned to begging and stealing for their survival,<sup>154</sup> which further informed their stigmatisation and persistent reputation as crooks and lowlives. To challenge the way they have thus entered posterity, however, I would like to offer two anecdotes that in my view attest to the Kjeltrings' life and estate as something more and other than 'merely' poor and crooked.

The first anecdote is drawn from Hansen's major work, *Natmændsfolk og Kjeltringer* (i.e., 'Nightmen People and Kjeltrings'). It concerns a Kjeltring wedding to which the seamstress Jette Skak was invited in 1874 as the only outsider, having sown the black damask gown for the bride Kjeltring Katrin. The wedding was held in a small sod-thatched house on Skærlund heath. Pots and pans had been borrowed in Skærlund, and the guests each contributed to the feast by bringing food, forks, knives, and spoons. "The bride was beautiful," Skak tells Hansen:

[S]he was wearing a long pale-red bridal veil instead of the short white ones that were used at the time. And in her myrtle crown, seven white fabric flowers were placed. When people had finished eating, the tables were moved aside, and Jette thought they were going to dance. But instead, the father took hold of the bride's left hand and stepped into

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<sup>143</sup> H. P. Hansen: "Ærlig – uærlig: Glarmesterfolk" in *ibid.* (1959), pp. 56-57

<sup>144</sup> H. P. Hansen: "'Kjeltringer' som fællesbetegnelse for tiggere af natmandstypen" in *ibid.* (1959), p. 62

<sup>145</sup> H. P. Hansen: "Ældre opfattelse af natmændsfolket og dets afstamning" in *ibid.* (1959), p. 16

<sup>146</sup> H. P. Hansen: *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11

<sup>147</sup> H. P. Hansen: "'Kjeltringer' som fællesbetegnelse for tiggere af natmandstypen" in *ibid.*, (1959) pp. 63-64

<sup>148</sup> H. P. Hansen: "Ærlig – uærlig: Glarmesterfolk" in *ibid.* (1959), pp. 56-57

<sup>149</sup> H. P. Hansen: "Laust Glavind: Glavind Familieforhold" in *Kloge Folk: Folkemedicin og Overtro i Vestjylland, i.* (Copenhagen: Ejner Munksgaard, 1942), p. 65

<sup>150</sup> H. P. Hansen: "'Kjeltringer' som fællesbetegnelse for tiggere af natmandstypen" in *op.cit.* (1959), pp. 57-58

<sup>151</sup> 1814 marks Denmark's loss of Norway to Sweden as part of the Treaty of Kiel following the Napoleonic Wars.

<sup>152</sup> H. P. Hansen: "Ældre opfattelse af natmændsfolket og dets afstamning" in *op.cit.* (1959), p. 10

<sup>153</sup> Evald Tang Kristensen: *Op.cit.*

<sup>154</sup> H. P. Hansen: "'Kjeltringer' som fællesbetegnelse for tiggere af natmandstypen" in *op.cit.* (1959), p. 57

the middle of the floor, while the two mothers moved aside. Immediately all the others, with the exception of the groom, circled tightly around father and daughter. And now the groom had to struggle in order to break the circle and get through to his wife. He took off his coat and toiled greatly, and finally he succeeded in picking out a small girl, making his way into the circle, and securing his bride in his arms. The father let go of her, and immediately the groom's father stepped forth, shook the young couples' hands and wished them happiness and blessings, upon which everyone fell on their knees, covered their faces in their hands, and mumbled some kind of prayer. (...) During the ceremony in the living room, many were crying<sup>155</sup> (my translation from the Danish).

After the ceremony in the house, the couple and the two fathers went to church to receive the priest's blessing, while the guests prepared the house for the night's dinner and subsequent party. The intricacy of the ceremony and the solemnity, which with it was carried out, stands in marked opposition to the general preconceptions of the Kjeltrings' intimate life, holding that "[t]heir Indecency surpass all Description. (...) For Education in Christianity, Confirmation, and Communion, they care not the slightest. (...) Polygamy, Incest, Adultery, Drunkenness, Theft, Robbery, are all common iniquities of theirs. Their Wedding Ceremonies are short; if they meet somewhere, they throw their Staffs against each other (...), that is, they swap Beggar Staffs, and now the Union lasts until one of them finds a better Match"<sup>156</sup> (my translation from the Danish).

That the Kjeltrings' marital and sexual norms differed from those of the Christian population seems indisputable, however, with representatives of both sexes holding relative freedom to be with, or change, partners as they liked.<sup>157</sup> Indisputably, too, is it that the conception of the Kjeltrings' life as one of iniquity, indignity, indecency, and hardship, is likely a product of the authorities' disciplining efforts to stigmatise dissident cultures and render wandering people eligible for support only within the parish of their birth.<sup>158</sup> This meant that pregnant Kjeltring women were forced to move on, even as labour was nearing, or in course, because local authorities did not want to become responsible for the women's offspring. They were therefore often forced to give birth in "the open, snow-covered field,"<sup>159</sup> or by the "dike around a field,"<sup>160</sup> if they did not have a sod house dug 120 centimetres into the ground like that of Jens Chr. Gartner, where the midwife had to pass through a hole that had been made in the

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<sup>155</sup> H. P. Hansen: "Ægteskab – moral – religion" in op.cit. (1959), pp. 68-69

<sup>156</sup> *Fyens Stifts Adresse Avis*, no. 100 (1815), quoted in: H. P. Hansen: "Ægteskab – moral – religion" in op.cit. (1959), pp. 68-69

<sup>157</sup> H. P. Hansen: *Ibid.* (1959), p. 67

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.* (1959), p. 69

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.* (1959), p. 70

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.* (1959)

roof by removing parts of the ling heather thatch, because she was too voluminous to pass through the narrow doorway.<sup>161</sup>

However, as the first anecdote showed, that they were poor in material terms, did not mean they were uncultured.

The second anecdote, which I believe poses a counter image to the prejudicial stereotyping of the Kjeltrings as lowlife crooks, is recounted by folklore collector Evald Tang Kristensen in his *Småtræk af Kjeltringernes Liv*<sup>162</sup> (i.e., ‘Small Features of the Kjeltrings’ Lives’). Tang Kristensen writes that according to his older informants, the Kjeltrings used to be rather wealthy. For example, the Kjeltring Per Lind’s children were known to be more than properly dressed. Once, when he and his family stopped over at a farm, the farmer’s children persuaded Lind’s children to show them their clothes and attires, among which were a handful of “incredibly pretty dresses, sown in [Kjeltring] style<sup>163</sup> with Adornments and red Ribbons and in the same Fashion as the other Childrens’, namely with short Sleeves. One of the Farmer’s Daughters tried on one of these Dresses and liked it so much that she later asked her mother to give her a Dress like Per Lind’s Daughters’. But she was scolded instead[,]”<sup>164</sup> writes Tang Kristensen (my translation from the Danish).

The girl is scolded for her wish to look like the Kjeltring girl, even if the latter’s dress is described as both beautiful, fashionable, and well-made. The same mix of exoticizing reverence and disdain towards the Kjeltrings is reflected in the accounts of the fiddler Pe’ Spælmand—Peder Jensen (1898-1986)—who in his early years received training from the old fiddler Kræn Lillevrå, or Christen Jensen,<sup>165</sup> of whom it was said that “he had practically been raised among the Kjeltrings on the heath. (...) Among other things, it was said of [the Kjeltrings] that they were highly skilled musicians. When they threw balls in their small houses, they could

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<sup>161</sup> H. P. Hansen: “Boliger – opløsning” in *ibid.* (1959), p. 82

<sup>162</sup> Evald Tang Kristensen: *Op.cit.*

<sup>163</sup> Tang Kristensen here writes ‘rakker’, i.e., ‘knacker,’ but I translate it to the word ‘Kjeltring,’ since unlike ‘knacker’ it is not affiliated with the profession of skinning self-dead animals, which is not what is at stake here.

<sup>164</sup> Evald Tang Kristensen: *Ibid.*

<sup>165</sup> Kræn Lillevrå, who is referred to in the book, is likely my great-great-grandfather Christen Jensen (1848-1925). The authors write that the old fiddler was named Lillevrå after the name of his smallholding, Lille Vrå, but they seem to have confused him with another Christen Jensen (1834-1917), who was born in Over/Øvre Vrå, but also lived and died in the Parish of Vrå like my great-great-grandfather. On the basis of parish records, the authors attempt to provide the age and date of death of Pe’ Spælmand’s mentor, Kræn Lillevrå, but those stated are of the other Christen, even if it was my great-great-grandfather who was born, lived in—and was named after—the Lille Vrå smallholding. My great-great-grandfather Christen Jensen was working and teaching as a fiddler for his entire life and was raised on the heath. I therefore consider it likely that the authors have simply singled out the wrong Christen Jensen, when flipping through the Vrå parish records. See: Torben Hviid, Ole Jensen, Martin Jensen, Anders Christensen, Thomas Bojesen, Better Berents (eds.): “Peder Spillemand, Pe’ Spælmand” in *Hjejelens Toner. Peder Spillemand. En vestjysk spillemand. Menneske, musik og miljø* (Albertslund: Folkemusikhusets Forlag, 1991), p. 38

make new melodies offhand, which would be named after an incident related to the ball"<sup>166</sup> (my translation from the Danish).

Kræn Lillevrå taught Pe' Spælmand many of the Kjeltrings' scores, which differed from the mainstream fiddle music of the time by their staccato style. The old fiddler often also played at the Kjeltrings' balls in Sammelsted By on Ørre heath,<sup>167</sup> but when Pe' Spælmand was on one occasion invited to come along, he declined: "A tø't det war under mi værdihed"—"I thought it was beneath my dignity"—he explained.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid., p. 37

<sup>167</sup> According to Pe' Spælmand, Sammelsted By was also called 'Lille Kjøbenhavn,' i.e., 'Little Copenhagen.' My great-great-great-great-grandmother Johanne Thygesdatter's house—'Axelhus'—was located in Sammelsted By. See: Ibid., p. 131

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., p. 37



## The Transformation

Evald Tang Kristensen's fieldwork was initially sparked by the national romantic desire to record Denmark's ancestral mythic heritage where it was thought to still be preserved, namely among the rural populations in Midwestern Jutland.<sup>169</sup> He imagined himself on a race against time to save the country's folklore before it was lost, once and for all, to forces of industrialization and modernization, which by the 1860s had made their entrance on the heathlands too.<sup>170</sup>

In 1866, partly in response to the 1864-loss of Schleswig-Holstein, Enrico Dalgas and the Danish Heath Society launched their sweeping agricultural development project to—once and for all—cultivate the heath. This effort became inextricably linked with the poet H. P. Holst's saying that "what is lost without, must be won within,"<sup>171</sup> and was presented to the local inhabitants as a 'help to self-help'—scheme, akin to present-day development aid to so-called 'underdeveloped' countries.<sup>172</sup> Despite the optimism and good intentions underlying these cultivation efforts, however, the process ended up further marginalising and impoverishing many local inhabitants, who lost access to the pastoral commons they had relied on for their living, and were equally incapable of sustaining themselves from the small plot of sandy land they had been assigned through the land reforms.

Consequently, many fell under the Poor Law Authorities and were relegated to poorhouse facilities such as Axelhus, which Tang Kristensen visited in 1873 by following "that same desolate stretch where Steen Steensen Blicher had set the scene for his short story 'Kjeltringliv.'" <sup>173</sup> Tang Kristensen writes: "I was walking as if blindfolded, knew neither road nor path and couldn't see neither anyway."<sup>174</sup> Eventually, however, he managed to arrive at the house. There he encountered my great-great-great-great-grandmother, Johanne Thygesdatter, from whom he recorded 13 songs—one of which had never been taken down in writing anywhere before.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> Evald Tang Kristensen: "Efterskrift" in *Gamle Jyske Folkeviser, samlede af Folkemunde, især i Hammerum Herred* (Copenhagen: 1876), pp. 317-319

<sup>170</sup> "Dengang vi var bønder: Hede bønder," op.cit., 00:17:33

<sup>171</sup> Jan Baltzersen: Op.cit.

<sup>172</sup> "Dengang vi var bønder: Hede bønder," op.cit.

<sup>173</sup> Evald Tang Kristensen: Op.cit. (1876), p. 338

<sup>174</sup> Ibid. (1876)

<sup>175</sup> In *De Forsvundne*, folklorist Palle Ove Christiansen writes that Evald Tang Kristensen later, in 1874, recorded the song from yet another informant, Jens Talund, and that the latter added two more verses to the song. See: Palle Ove Christiansen: "Insidder Johanne Thygesdatter. Sammelsted fattigkoloni" in *De Forsvundne* (Copenhagen: Gads Forlag, 2011), pp. 134 and 136. Consulting Evald Tang Kristensen's

Tang Kristensen titled the song *Forvandlingen*, i.e., 'The Transformation,' and it tells of an enchanted landscape with burial mounds shrouded in drifting dew and falling frost, where 'elver-dwarfs' (i.e., 'little people') are dancing. Here, Daughter Donnimaar is dancing with the lovely Knight of the Rose Garden, whom she suggests transforming into, first, a pair of shoes for her to wear on her little feet; then a pair of gloves for her to wear on her slender hands; and, ultimately, a golden flax thread. The knight politely rejects her two first proposals saying: "I do want to carry your gifts, but I don't want to be a pair of shoes," or: "I don't want to be a pair of gloves." But when she suggests turning him into the golden flax thread and braid him into her hair by her rosy cheek, he accepts, and together they venture off to her father's farm.

The father greets them by the gate, saying: "Welcome, Daughter Donnimaar, and the oh, so lovely, Knight of the Rose Garden!" The father has, in other words, seen through the deceit and their attempt to hide the knight by braiding him into her hair. Daughter Donnimaar then opens her blue cape and says: "Yes, dear father, that's what you're looking at!" But the father is not fooled and rightly states that the knight is not under her cape but is braided into her hair—and not by her scarlet cheek, but by her rosy cheek. Then, he brings forth a sharp knife to cut her hair into seven pieces. He cuts her hair into nine pieces, but the Knight of the Rose Garden escapes. The song then ends: "There is no Maid in this Land / who may keep her Husband like she can. // There is no Man on this Island / who has such a cunning Spouse" (my translation from the Danish).

In the printed version of Evald Tang Kristensen's song collection, published in 1876, three years after Tang Kristensen's encounter with Johanne, he introduces the song accordingly: "This highly strange old Magic Song has so far only been found in the Memory of one single old Woman in Sammelsted By, Ørre Parish. No other old or new Recording of it is known, neither from Denmark nor other Countries"<sup>176</sup> (my translation from the Danish).

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handwritten notes and letters in the Danish Folklore Collection at the Royal Danish Library in Copenhagen, Tang Kristensen attributes the verses to Johanne. He writes: "Later she remembered these two end verses // 19. There is no Maiden on this Land / which may keep her Husband like she can // 20. There is no Man on this Island / who has such a cunning Spouse" (my translation from the Danish). See: Evald Tang Kristensen: "Johanne Thygesdatter i Sammelsted-By, Ørre" in *Visemanuskript II (Folkeviser optegnede i Jylland)*, DFS 1929/024, p. 535). In the printed version of his song collection, published in 1876, Tang Kristensen attributes the song in its entirety including the two end verses to Johanne Thygesdatter. See: Evald Tang Kristensen: "Forvandlingen" in *Gamle Jyske Folkeviser, samlede af Folkemunde, især i Hammerum Herred* (Copenhagen: 1876), p. 1

<sup>176</sup> Evald Tang Kristensen: Op.cit. (1876). Tang Kristensen seems to write against his own better knowledge, however, since he recorded the song from yet another singer, Jens Talund, in 1874. See: Evald Tang Kristensen: "Der gaar Dands ved Bjærgen" in *Visemanuskript DFS 1929/024*, bind III, p. 684

This assessment is backed by Svend Grundtvig,<sup>177</sup> the Copenhagen-based literary historian and ethnographer whom Tang Kristensen was working for. In a personal letter, Grundtvig congratulates Tang Kristensen with this “first-class find,” adding that the song is “truly strange” and encouraging him to “squeeze as much as possible out of this Johanne”<sup>178</sup> (my translation from the Danish). Grundtvig compares the song’s many transformations to those of another song,<sup>179</sup> where a maiden is transformed into a line of different lifeless things. But the strange culmination of *Forvandlingen*, with the father cutting off Daughter Donnimaar’s enchanted hair, passes unmentioned by both Grundtvig and Tang Kristensen.

Possibly neither had read the German Brothers Grimm’s collected tales or did not—for national or political reasons—want to emphasize the resemblance of this latter motif of little people and enchanted hair being cut off, to recurring motifs across German folktales such as *Rapunzel*,<sup>180</sup> *Rumpelstiltskin*,<sup>181</sup> and, in particular, *The Gifts of the Little People*.<sup>182</sup> In *The Gifts of the Little People* two wanderers, a tailor and a goldsmith, are lured into a circle of little people dancing and singing by a mound. In the middle of the circle an older and slightly larger man is standing, and he motions both to step forward. The circle closes around them, and the little people are singing and dancing wildly forth. But then, suddenly, the old man takes a knife hanging from his belt, sharpens it, and grabs hold of the goldsmith. With great speed he smoothly shaves off his beard and the hair from his head. Then, the same thing happens to the tailor. Their fear disappears when the old man pats them friendly on their shoulders as if wanting to say that they had done well by letting it all happen without resisting. And as a reward for their docility, he urges them both to fill their pockets with coal lying in a stack. After a good night’s sleep at a nearby tavern, the coal is transformed into gold.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Svend Grundtvig was the son of Nikolai Frederik Severin Grundtvig, founder of the Højskolebevægelse, and had inherited his father’s keen interest for folklore.

<sup>178</sup> Svend Grundtvig to Evald Tang Kristensen: 1929 / 144 II. [correspondance], Dansk Folkemindesamling 1873.12.29; 1874.12.18

<sup>179</sup> Svend Grundtvig: “Jomfruen i Ulveham,” (DgF 55), “Jomfruen i Fugleham,” (DgF 56), “Nattergalen,” (DgF 57), and “Jomfruen i Hindeham,” (DgF 58) in *Danmarks Gamle Folkeviser* (DgF), 12 volumes (Copenhagen: Samfundet til den danske literaturs fremme, 1824-1883)

<sup>180</sup> Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm: “Rapunzel” in *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, vol. 1 (1812), <https://sites.pitt.edu/~dash/grimm012a.html> (accessed November 4, 2022)

<sup>181</sup> Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm: “Rumpelstiltskin” in *ibid*, <https://sites.pitt.edu/~dash/grimm055.html> (accessed November 4, 2022)

<sup>182</sup> Brødrene Grimm: “De Små Folks Gaver” in *Samlede Eventyr* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 2006), pp. 471-472, and Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm: “The Gifts of the Little People” (“Die Geschenke des kleinen Volkes”) in *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, vol. 6 (1850), <https://sites.pitt.edu/~dash/grimm182.html> (accessed November 4, 2022)

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid*.

Transformations agreeably abound. But if we diverge from Grundtvig's course, and—instead of his focusing on transformations into<sup>184</sup> or between<sup>185</sup> lifeless things—we follow the motif of little people dancing on mounds and their older male representative, or father, cutting off the protagonists' hair to the surprising benefit of the latter, we may be afforded a peak into the historical circumstances at the time of the song's collection: If it is indeed the same mythic entity—the same 'mytheme'<sup>186</sup>—we find recurring in Johanne's song from the West Jutlandic heathlands and in *The Gifts of the Little People*, it may suggest a larger degree of cultural and mythic continuity between West Jutland and what would grow to become Germany, than what suited the Danish national liberalists' narrative of a unified and homogenous Danish nation (and which Grundtvig and Tang Kristensen were both working to substantiate with their collections).

Nothing is certain, however, when it comes to mythic narratives and their entanglements with history, and we can only speculate as for the reason why—despite its 'first-class-character'—*Forvandlingen* did not make the cut into the popular selections of old Danish ballads,<sup>187</sup> which became one of the most important and influential outcomes of Golden Age folklore collection providing the basis for mandatory teaching on folksongs and ballads in Danish schools up until today.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> E.g., the knight's transformation into shoes, gloves, thread.

<sup>185</sup> E.g., coal to gold.

<sup>186</sup> "In structuralist anthropology and literary criticism, [the mytheme is] each of a set of fundamental generic units of narrative structure (typically involving a relationship between a character, an event, and a theme) from which myths are thought to be constructed." See: "Mytheme" on *Oxford Dictionaries – English*,

<https://web.archive.org/web/20170425031310/https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/mytheme> (accessed October 24, 2022)

<sup>187</sup> Such as, e.g., Ernst Frandsen (ed.): *Danske Folkeviser, Bind I og II* (Copenhagen: Thaning & Appels Forlag, 1966-71). As it says on the back of the cover: *Danske Folkeviser* [i.e., Danish Folksongs] "offers a beautiful, precise, and justified selection of what could rightly be called the breeding ground for Danish poetry." (My translation from Danish)

<sup>188</sup> "Bekendtgørelse om formål, kompetencemål, færdigheds- og vidensområder og opmærksomhedspunkter for folkeskolens fag og emner (Fælles Mål): Dansk litteraturs kanon: Bilag 1A" on *Retsinformation*, <https://www.retsinformation.dk/eli/lt/2020/1217> (last accessed November 7, 2022)

## *Reproduction*

Just like the patriotic project underlying the conglomerate state (1534 -1864) had enlisted midwives to contribute to securing the dominance of the Danish crown and state over the culturally pluralistic subjects within their territories of jurisdiction, the crafting of the democratic Danish nation state was hinged on the continued control and streamlining of women's reproductive capacities. Symbolically, and factually. This meant linking antiseptic hygienic practices with theories of racial hygiene through the budding science of eugenics.

In the beginning, the Danish eugenic debate was largely dominated by doctors and scientists, who were concerned that genetically and morally 'defective' groups would influence negatively on the quality of the people and inflict large maintenance costs upon the state and its taxpayers.<sup>189</sup>

Institutional eugenic practice in Denmark was championed by Johan Keller, a priest and teacher of deaf and mentally disabled children, who in 1865 founded De Kellerske Anstalter<sup>190</sup>—the largest institution for mentally and intellectually disabled people in Scandinavia, which under the direction of his son, Christian Keller—and with the political backing of social democratic politician Karl Kristian Steincke—grew to become a beacon of the eugenic cause in Europe. As if echoing Blicher's call for Magdalene Asylums and Kjeltring colonies a century earlier, in 1911 and 1923 the Livø and Sprogø branches of De Kellerske Anstalter were established in order to contain 'anti-social' men and women—men in the former, women in the latter—in order to cure them for their 'moral imbecility'; a treatment which after the introduction of the Sterilisation and Castration Laws of 1929 and 1935, included forced sterilisation and castration.<sup>191</sup>

For a woman, any previous sexual experience (even rape or sexual abuse) was seen as indication that she would be sexually active after being released from the Sprogø Institution,<sup>192</sup> whereby she was in high risk of becoming pregnant and thus passing on her morally degenerated genetic material. Sterilisation was thus an unavoidable premise for

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<sup>189</sup> Klaus Petersen, Mette Seidelin, Sarah Smed, Poul Duedahl, and Annemarie Borregaard: "Kapitel 5: Rids over særforborgens udvikling 1933-1980: Særforborgeren før 1933" in *Historisk udredning vedrørende børn, unge og voksne anbragt i særforborgens institutioner 1933-1980* (Svendborg: Danmarks Forsorgsmuseum (by the commission of the Danish Ministry of Social Affairs and Senior Citizens, 2022), pp. 43-44

<sup>190</sup> Ibid. p. 44

<sup>191</sup> Birgit Kirkeback: "Sprogø og Livø - danske øanstalter for uønskede: Progressionstanke og politisk eftertanke i Danmark" in *ibid.*, p. 382

<sup>192</sup> Klaus Petersen, Mette Seidelin, Sarah Smed, Poul Duedahl, and Annemarie Borregaard: "Kort sammenfatning af undersøgelsens resultater: Kapitel 14 Sterilisation, kastration og abort" in *ibid.*, p. 22

release after serving a minimum of eight years of indeterminate institutionalisation. In fact, many inmates, men and women, were diagnosed as moral rather than intellectual imbeciles, and for women this was almost always rooted in matters related to sexuality. In a recent report commissioned by the Danish Ministry of Social Affairs and Senior Citizens, historian Birgit Kirkebæk describes the eugenic bent and gender bias underlying the diagnostic framework of the Sprogø Institution accordingly:

Diagnostic keywords in relation to women were frivolity, promiscuity and hypersexuality, but also vagabonding, theft and the inability to work could be included as diagnostic benchmarks. If a woman showed a behaviour, which in part or total included any of these descriptions, one could be almost certain that she was one of them: The morally imbecile, whose disability was of a moral rather than an intellectual character. It was the combination of presumed hereditary defects, deviant behaviour and problems at work, which led women to be admitted to Sprogø. One of the most important arguments for admission were of an economic nature however: A woman had given birth to one or more children, which were now under the care of the Poor Law Authorities, or the woman was so loose that a pregnancy could be expected. Such a woman's children were expected to be even more "inferior" than herself, at the same time as it was expected that she would produce offspring in abundant quantity. The stories of the medical journals focus more on such expectations and on the pre-determined diagnostic picture of the specific diagnosis than on the individual woman herself<sup>193</sup> (my translation from the Danish).

Even if the Kjeltrings are not mentioned by name, their sexually liberal, vagabonding ghosts linger in the descriptions of the types of 'imbecility' that required quashing for the state to craft its nation of loyal, servile, and faithful subjects.

For 20<sup>th</sup> century Danish women to maintain the privilege and capacity of reproduction, they had to bend to the stringent behavioural norms of the national collective. If a woman had once stepped or fallen outside the lines, been labelled 'defect,' and admitted to any of the disciplining institutions, it was too late.

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<sup>193</sup> Birgit Kirkebæk: "Sprogø og Livø - danske øanstalter for uønskede: Tidsbestemt anbringelse" in *ibid.*, p. 390

*The Many Names of her Dispossession, or:  
“A woman in the doorway of a house  
A river in the city of her birth”<sup>194</sup>*

In her essay *She Has Many Names*, visual artist Dora Garcia draws on figures from different cultural realms and lets them inform and talk through each other to trace a pan-cultural outline of “feminine figures that were at one or other moment in history labelled as *defectors* from the community”<sup>195</sup> for asserting a differently configured view on femininity and reproduction (italicisation Garcia’s).

Weaving the trajectories of such diverging fictional, religious, and historical, figures as Alexandra Kollontai,<sup>196</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa,<sup>197</sup> La Malinche,<sup>198</sup> Coatlicue,<sup>199</sup> Anna Livia Plurabelle,<sup>200</sup> and Kristine Ærillæ Laitimor,<sup>201</sup> among others, Garcia assembles their radically different but mutually illuminating narratives into a single transformation group<sup>202</sup> to shed light on the ominous thread that binds them together and casts them as defectors for their dissidence: Globalised European patriarchal society, which ritualizes itself, is enacted, and re-enacted, across our pasts and presents through normative marriage and the “compulsive isolated family idea.”<sup>203</sup> Tying the plights and insights of these individual characters into a multi-faced, and multifaceted, repetitive narrative of female oppression and dispossession,

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<sup>194</sup> Eavan Boland: “Anna Liffey” in *In a Time of Violence* (New York: Norton, 1994), pp. 41–46

<sup>195</sup> Dora Garcia: “She Has Many Names” in *If I could wish for Something: A Book of Visual and Text Essays* (Oslo: Fotogalleriet, and Aalst: Network Aalst, 2021), p. 32

<sup>196</sup> Alexandra Kollontai was a Russian Communist revolutionary, who in 1919 became the first female minister in the world. In 1926–27, she served as Soviet Ambassador to Mexico, where she expressed apprehension of the Indigenous cause and criticised the stigmatization of the original Indigenous beliefs. See: *Ibid.*, p. 27

<sup>197</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa was a Chicana feminist and scholar (1942–2004) and the author of *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987) in which she “underlines the transitional, mutable character of Mestiza feminism, transfeminism, lesbofeminism—and its dispossession,” according to Garcia. See: *Ibid.*, pp. 32 and 36

<sup>198</sup> La Malinche was the “translator, negotiator, and lover of Hernán Cortés, mother of the first Mestizo, Don Martín,” and long-lastingly shamed as ‘traitor’ to her people for enabling the Spanish conquest of the Aztec empire. See: *Ibid.*, p. 32

<sup>199</sup> Coatlicue was the Mother Goddess of the Aztec pantheon whose ‘monstrous’ femininity, through its association with snakes, was conceived as a threat to European preconceptions of femininity and therefore had to be suppressed. See: *Ibid.*, p. 34

<sup>200</sup> Anna Livia Plurabelle is “Everywoman, Everygoddess, Everyriver (...) especially Dublin’s little, winding, brown-red, polluted river, Anna Liffey” from James Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake*, first published in 1939. See: *Ibid.*, p. 27

<sup>201</sup> In September 1898, Ellisif Wessel photographed the 96-year-old Kristine Ærillæ, Laitimor, sitting in a doorway to her house by Vaggatem in Sør-Varanger. “Laitimor stands for ‘mother of people,’ as she was believed to be the direct ancestor of most people in the area.” See: *Ibid.*, p. 47

<sup>202</sup> According to Lévi-Strauss, myths are organized in what he calls ‘transformation groups,’ each consisting of a set of isomorphic variations of the same myth of which none can be said to be more true or archaic than others. Claude Lévi-Strauss: “Magic and Religion” in *Structural Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1963) (1958), pp. 216–218

<sup>203</sup> Dora Garcia: *Op.cit.*, p. 48

Garcia activates myth's capacity to oscillate between historical and a- (or extra-) historical modes of narration; between the continuous and the particular.<sup>204</sup>

Probing the nature of mythic thinking, Garcia engages with Anna Livia Plurabella from James Joyce's novel *Finnegans Wake*—or “ALP”; “Approach to lead our passage;” “alpha-pi-lambda”; “Alma Luvia Pollabella”<sup>205</sup> (or any of the other forty-some names assigned to her throughout the novel)—who is both a fictional character and a fluid mythological principle, or ‘mytheme’:<sup>206</sup> “The mother, ALP or Anna Livia Plurabelle, is all mothers, the mother of everyone, the stem mother, and a river, the river Liffey,”<sup>207</sup> writes Garcia. Originally called “Ruir Tech,” the river acquired the name of ‘Liffey’ from the place it was running through, namely Magh Liffé, or the ‘plain of life,’ thus impregnating the character of Anna Livia with the swiftly running, ever-changing, eternal flow of water in the Liffey-stream through the associations invoked by the mutual resemblances of “Liffey-Leafy, alive, live, life.”<sup>208</sup> Or, in the words of poet Eavan Boland, from her poem *Anna Liffey*:<sup>209</sup>

*Life, the story goes / Was the daughter of Canaan, / And came to the plain of Kildare. / She loved the flat-lands and the ditches / And the unreachable horizon. / She asked that it be named for her. / The river took its name from the land. / The land took its name from a woman. (...)*

Boland is however critical of James Joyce's simultaneous appropriation and screening-out of historical and literary female voices,<sup>210</sup> and therefore refuses to let the woman of her poem—a poet named Anna Liffey—dissolve into the river Liffey and the Irish “national tradition of exclusion”<sup>211</sup> of women. Conversely, according to Melissa Dinsman, Boland insists “that there exists a difference between suggesting similarities between woman and river and equating the two, as Joyce does with ALP,”<sup>212</sup> and she reminds us that “[a] river is not a woman (...) [a]ny more than [a] woman is a river.”<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> Or ‘intermittent’ in Lévi-Strauss’ terminology. See: Claude Lévi-Strauss: “Ouverture” in op.cit. (1964), p. 28

<sup>205</sup> Dora Garcia: Op.cit., p. 30-31

<sup>206</sup> “Mytheme” on *Oxford Dictionaries*. Op.cit.

<sup>207</sup> Dora Garcia: Op.cit., p. 38

<sup>208</sup> Dora Garcia: Ibid., p. 27

<sup>209</sup> Eavan Boland: Op.cit., pp. 41–46

<sup>210</sup> Melissa Dinsman: “‘A river is not a woman’: Re-visioning *Finnegans Wake* in Eavan Boland’s ‘Anna Liffey’” in *Contemporary Women’s Writing* 7, 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 174

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., p. 185

<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

<sup>213</sup> Eavan Boland: Op.cit., pp. 41–46



Anna Liffey, / Spirit of water, / Spirit of place, / How is it on this / Rainy Autumn night / As the Irish sea takes / The names you made, the names / You bestowed, and gives you back / Only wordlessness? (...) // The body is a source. Nothing more. / There is a time for it. There is a certainty / About the way it seeks its own dissolution. / Consider rivers. / They are always en route to / Their own nothingness. (...) <sup>214</sup>

Despite their diverging, if not opposing, positions on the narrative relations between the female voice, the land, the water, and the nation—embodied by ALP’s fluid multiplicities<sup>215</sup>—Joyce and Boland share an engagement with mythic thinking as an active practice, rather than a passive heritage. A timely stance, if we agree with Garcia that mythic structures form the very basis of the human as an “infrastructure that goes beyond the biological but also determines it,”<sup>216</sup> through its dreaming, its stories, and songs: “[T]he eternal death and resurrection of Anna Livia (the river into the sea and then back to the young cloud and the spring and the tiny stream...), is a dream time, a mythic time, a cyclic time, an eonic time, the breakdown of linear time, the time of ‘Yes’<sup>217</sup>—noting, as Garcia does (with Freud), that the unconscious knows neither negation nor time.”<sup>218</sup>

Returning these latter insights to the modern myths of the nuclear family, marriage, and the nation state, Garcia links mythic thinking to the realms of biopolitics<sup>219</sup> and shows how our continual (and consensual?) succumbing to their forces is an effect of deep patriarchal mythic structures that groom our subconscious and carry the dispossession of femininity at its core:

We all know that (...) violence against women originates in archaic patriarchal structures, often assimilated to the very idea of the state, giving unsettling connotations to the chants heard in the Mexican feminist demonstrations: “No, no, no, no es un caso aislado, los feminicidios son crímenes de estado” (No, no, no, they are not isolated cases, femicide are

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<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

<sup>215</sup> “Joyce implodes the archetypal Gea Tellus and Mother Ireland by filling ALP with multiple representations of woman, including goddess, whore, wife, mother, and daughter. Joyce, then, challenges any universal and totalizing reading of woman. Yet, in this plurality it appears that Joyce may have removed all meanings of historical women from ALP, thereby enabling her to ‘mean whatever “we” want [her] to mean’ (Smyth 10). Moreover, the connection between woman and water is troublesome when female fluidity is taken to such an extreme that the female figure is no longer able to carry any meaning. (...) Thus, in ‘Anna Liffey,’ Boland re-imagines ALP as a historical woman and female poet in order to shatter the idealized image of woman as fluid and inarticulate.” See: Melissa Dinsman: Op.cit., p. 178

<sup>216</sup> Dora Garcia: Op.cit., p. 43

<sup>217</sup> “Yes” is the final word in James Joyce’s novel *Ulysses* (1922)

<sup>218</sup> Dora Garcia: Op.cit., p. 40

<sup>219</sup> “Biopolitics” is a term that refers to the intersection and mutual incorporation of life and politics. (...) For Foucault, life cannot be understood in terms of biological forces or determinants that exist outside of political processes. Instead, life must be understood as both an object and effect of political strategies and technologies.” See: Michael Laurence: *Biopolitics* on Oxford Bibliographies, April 28, 2018, <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199756223/obo-9780199756223-0170.xml> (accessed October 24, 2022)

state crimes). The state—as superstructure mirroring the patriarchal family—kills women.<sup>220</sup>

If the modern myths of the family, marriage, and the nation, as Garcia suggests, equals the projection and exertion of state-sanctioned patriarchal violence that ultimately kills women—symbolically or physically (in the streets, the homes, the labour rooms, and on the levels of authoritative knowledge production and dissemination)—I consider the transformative time- and history-defiant character of active mythic thinking to be a source with which to engage in order to undo or transform such oppressive mythic structures. Turning the page from 628 to 3 in *Finnegans Wake*, with Garcia, resurrecting our heroine anew,<sup>221</sup> altering her trajectory—and, derailing it.

Doing this, however, requires a closer look at the transformative operations underlying mythic thinking, I will argue.

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<sup>220</sup> Dora Garcia: Op.cit., p. 48

<sup>221</sup> Ibid., p. 40

## Multi-Dimensional Body

Working his way “outward from the centre”<sup>222</sup> of one Bororo-myth—the one he calls the  $M_1$  (key myth). *Bororo: o xibae e iari. (The macaws and their nest)*<sup>223</sup>—across his four-volume oeuvre *Mythologiques*, structuralist anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss unfolds the nature of mythological thought by tracing its inherent isomorphism<sup>224</sup> between what he understands as two sets of oppositions: Between nature and culture, and between the continuous and the particular (the latter also called ‘discrete’ or ‘intermittent’<sup>225</sup> by Lévi-Strauss).

In his opening remarks, Lévi-Strauss writes: “[T]he Bororo myth, which I shall refer to from now on as the key myth, is (...) simply a transformation, to a greater or a lesser extent, of other myths originating either in the same society or in neighbouring or remote societies. I could, therefore, have legitimately taken as my starting point any one representative myth of the group.”<sup>226</sup> This sentence anticipates what has grown to become a key notion of his mythologies, namely ‘transformation group’ or ‘permutation group,’ (Lévi-Strauss uses these two notions interchangeably), which is a concept that Lévi-Strauss has coined to conceive of the structural dynamics underlying mythic thinking, persistently defying territorial limits and any one system of classification: “However it is approached,” he writes, mythic thinking “spreads out as a nebula, without ever bringing together in any lasting or systematic way the sum total of the elements from which it blindly derives its substance[.]”<sup>227</sup>

In this way, certain meanings of a myth, writes cultural anthropologist Peter Skafish in the introduction to anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro’s *Cannibal Metaphysics*, can only be exposed—and the logical relations they rearrange, reconstituted—when relinked to its transformation group: “Mythemes thus have a relational, extrachronological character much like that ascribed by Deleuze to concepts, and the affinity between them is only heightened when the mytheme’s transphenomenality—the fact that they are irreducible to the individual myths constituting them—is emphasized.”<sup>228</sup> This leads Skafish

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<sup>222</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss: “Ouverture” in *The Raw and the Cooked* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990) (1964), p. 4

<sup>223</sup> Ibid. (1964), pp. 35-37

<sup>224</sup> “Definition of *isomorphism*: 1. the quality or state of being isomorphic.” See: “isomorphism” on *Merriam-Webster*, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/isomorphism> (accessed October 25, 2022) and “Definition of *isomorphic*: 1. a. being of identical or similar form, shape, or structure.” See: “isomorphic” on Ibid., <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/isomorphism> (last accessed October 25, 2022)

<sup>225</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss: “Ouverture” in op.cit. (1964), p. 28

<sup>226</sup> Ibid. (1964), p. 2

<sup>227</sup> Ibid. (1964)

<sup>228</sup> Peter Skafish: “Introduction” in Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, op.cit., p. 21

to conclude that with regards to its formal properties, myth is so speculative and theoretical an operation as to not only have parity with, but be superior to the concept, since “no ‘mythologist’ could have ever formalized myth by making one myth explain or regulate the others.”<sup>229</sup>

Lévi-Strauss establishes the transformation group of each mythic sequence either within the myth itself, or by elucidation of the ‘isomorphic links’ between sequences derived from different myths originating in the same community. Thereby he is capable of identifying certain ‘guiding patterns’ along a single axis, which in turn open up towards vertical lines representing other axes that are established by the same operation as the first, but carried out by analogous myths deriving from neighbouring communities: “As a result, the guiding patterns are simplified, made more complex, or transformed”<sup>230</sup> ad infinitum, since every new axis opens up to other axes and lines of association, and so forth.

Thereby, according to Lévi-Strauss, something resembling an order emerges from the supposed chaos, when “[s]equences arranged in transformation groups, as if around a germinal molecule, join up with the initial group and reproduce its structure and determinative tendencies. Thus is brought into being a multi-dimensional body, whose central parts disclose a structure, while uncertainty and confusion continue to prevail along its periphery.”<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

<sup>230</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss: “Ouverture” in op.cit. (1964), p. 2

<sup>231</sup> Ibid. (1964), p. 3

### *The Bird-Nester*

The M<sub>1</sub> Bororo-key myth, *o xibae e iari*. (*The macaws and their nest*),<sup>232</sup> begins as the village women take to the forest to gather palms used to make penis sheaths for the male adolescent youths for their initiation ceremony. One of these youths, however, secretly follows his mother into the woods and rapes her.

Upon the mother's return to the village, her husband—the young man's father— notices feathers in her belt similar to those worn by their son. Having ascertained himself that those feathers have not been worn by any of the village's other young men, the father sets out to punish his son. First, he sends him off to the dangerous aquatic 'nest of the souls' to obtain the great dance rattle, aware of the fact that he will likely be killed by the souls. Next, to obtain the smaller rattle, again from the souls. And lastly, a pair of jingling anklets. With the help of his grandmother, as well as a hummingbird, the 'jurití' dove, and a grasshopper, the youth however succeeds in bringing back all three items unharmed.

Infuriated that none of his plans had worked, the father invites his son to join him in the hunt for macaws, nesting on the steep side of a cliff. The grandmother is incapable of warding off this danger but gives her grandchild a magic wand, which he can cling to if falling. Arriving at the cliff, the father erects a long pole and orders his son to climb it, but once the youth is at the height of the macaws' nest, the father knocks over the pole, and the son thrusts the wand into a crevice to save his life. The father then takes off and leaves the youth crying for help.

Eventually, the youth manages to climb to the top of the cliff with the help of a creeper. After a rest, a lizard hunt, and an encounter with a group of vultures, he returns to the foot of the mountain, and is soon reunited with his grandmother and younger brother. At the night of their reunion, however, a thunderstorm breaks loose, putting out all the village's fires except the grandmother's. When the father's second wife comes to the grandmother's house to ask for embers to rekindle their fire, she recognizes the young man and runs off to warn her husband, the young man's father, who pretends nothing is wrong and welcomes his son with songs of greetings for returned travellers.

But the young man is full of revenge and one day he and his brother lure their father into the woods. The young man then dons a pair of false antlers and gallops towards

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<sup>232</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss: "Bororo Song: a. The Bird-Nester's Aria" in *ibid.* (1964), pp. 35-37

their father, impaling him with the horns. Continuing straight to a lake, he drops the dead body into the water, where it is instantaneously devoured by carnivorous fish incarnating the so-called 'Buiogoe' spirits. All that remains, apart from the bare bones lying at the bottom of the lake, are the father's lungs floating on the surface in the form of aquatic plants.

Returning to the village, the young man goes on to kill the father's wives—one of whom is his own mother.

## *Objectified Thought*

According to Lévi-Strauss, myths operate outside of time, and outside of finitude.<sup>233</sup> As such, any one myth within his studied transformation group could justifiably have served as the starting point for his analysis, since “[m]yths, like rites, are ‘in-terminable.’”<sup>234</sup> “We define the myth as consisting of all of its versions,” writes Lévi-Strauss, and therefore “structural analysis should take all of them into account.”<sup>235</sup> The key myth,  $M_1$ , is thus no more archaic, complete, or simple than the other myths,<sup>236</sup> which makes multiplicity an essential feature of myth, and the means by which myth is capable of moving between the continuous and the particular (or discrete/intermittent).<sup>237</sup>

The layered structure of myth (...) allows us to look upon myth as a matrix of meanings which are arranged in lines or columns, but in which each level always refers to some other level, whichever way the myth is read. Similarly, each matrix of meanings refers to another matrix, each myth to other myths. And if it is now asked to what final meaning these mutually significative meanings are referring (...) the only reply to emerge from this study is that myths signify the mind that evolves them by making use of the world of which it is itself part. Thus there is [a] simultaneous production of myths themselves, by the mind that generates them and, by the myths, of an image of the world which is already inherent in the structure of the mind.<sup>238</sup>

As such, myths are phenomena of the imagination that according to Lévi-Strauss result from the attempt at interpretation, and whose function and purpose it is to “prevent its disintegration into a confusion of opposites,”<sup>239</sup> understanding “difference as disequilibrium and dissymmetry, but not opposition,”<sup>240</sup> as Skafish emphasises.

In other words, according to Lévi-Strauss, it is possible to contain the transformation of the narrative trajectory from the key myth,  $M_1$ , to its first variation, within the same narrative structure, because myths—contrary to history—defy time and finitude: A hero may be killed in one version of a myth, to find himself revived and prevail in the next variant. Or the nest of souls may take the form of an underwater world in the first myth,  $M_1$ , only to be

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<sup>233</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss: *Op.cit.* (1958), p. 209

<sup>234</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss: “Overture” in *op.cit.* (1964), p. 6

<sup>235</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss: “Magic and Religion” in *op.cit.* (1958), p. 217

<sup>236</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss: “Overture” in *op.cit.* (1964), p. 2

<sup>237</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss: “Magic and Religion” in *op.cit.* (1958), p. 229

<sup>238</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss: “The Wedding” in *op.cit.* (1964), pp. 340-341

<sup>239</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss: “Overture” in *ibid.* (1964), p. 5

<sup>240</sup> Peter Skafish: “Introduction” in Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *op.cit.*, p. 22

transformed to the house of the jaguars in another.<sup>241</sup> It is this openness of mythic thinking—its willingness to hold numerous, and seemingly contradictory, trajectories within its structure at the same time, rather than deeming one true and others false, one original and the others derivative—that generates the possibility of an un-invested point of reflection from which to “discover the conditions in which systems of truths become mutually convertible and therefore simultaneously acceptable to different subjects, where the pattern of those conditions takes on the character of an autonomous object, independent of any subject.”<sup>242</sup> Contemplating the world, as it were, from the position of both none and all, mythic thinking thus reveals the contemplating mind “to be of a nature of a thing among things,”<sup>243</sup> the individual destiny of which is no more or less important than that of any other thing.

In this way, myth makes shareable experiential phenomena across diverging axes of association and affiliation, and—breaking down linear time (to deliver us to Joyce and Garcia’s cyclic, eonic time of “Yes”)—it reflects the multiplistic fact of the wild contingency of being beyond the finitudes of particular embodied historical presents.

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<sup>241</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss: “Divertissement on a Folk Theme” in op.cit. (1964), p. 285

<sup>242</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss: “Ouverture” in ibid. (1964), p. 11

<sup>243</sup> Ibid. (1964), p. 10



## Mythstory

According to Lévi-Strauss, mythic thinking has been conceived with the sole purpose of coming to terms with history by systemically re-establishing “a state of equilibrium that may act as a shock absorber for the disturbances caused by real-life events.”<sup>244</sup>

This makes mythic thinking—or maybe rather Lévi-Strauss himself?—somewhat of a paradox, since it (he?) is radically open towards transformation on the level of myth’s narrative structure (transforming water spirits to jaguars,<sup>245</sup> and, later in the *Mythologiques*, a star to a woman and then a man,<sup>246</sup> both living and dead) but simultaneously insists that the purpose of myth is to counteract transformation on cultural or historical levels. In the concluding chapter of the fourth and final volume of his mythologies, *The Naked Man*, Lévi-Strauss reconciles this paradox of ‘un-transformative’ transformations:

[E]ach American community had its own independent and extremely complicated history, whose dramatic events it constantly tried to neutralize by reshaping the myths, in so far as this was compatible with the traditional moulds into which they always had to fit. A story already altered by such internal developments reacts externally on similar productions; adjustments are made or fresh oppositions come into being, transposing the constant pattern of similarities and contrasts on to different levels. During intertribal encounters, such as marriages, commercial transactions, or the taking of prisoners, all these rectifications are sparked off in sequence, and spread in a counter direction much more rapidly than those major occurrences which seal the destiny of peoples. The system has only to be disturbed at one particular point for it to immediately seek to re-establish its equilibrium by reacting in its totality, and it does so by means of a mythology which may be causally linked to history in each of its parts, but which, taken in its entirety, resists the course of history and constantly readjusts its own mythological grid so that this grid offers the least resistance to the flow of events[.]<sup>247</sup>

Across his *Mythologiques*, Lévi-Strauss references, time and again, the deep history of human settlement in the Americas by successive waves of immigrations from Asia<sup>248</sup> as the historical source to which he believes the Amerindian mythic foundation of his study to bear testimony.<sup>249</sup> He therefore decries the more recent history of the colonisation of North and South America by white Europeans settlers; not immediately for the fact of its scale, cruelty, or systematised

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<sup>244</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss: “One Myth Only” in op.cit. (1971), p. 607

<sup>245</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss: “Divertissement on a Folk Theme” in op.cit. (1964), p. 285

<sup>246</sup> Ibid. (1964), p. 289

<sup>247</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss: “One Myth Only” in op.cit. (1971), p. 610

<sup>248</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss: “Overture” in op.cit (1964), pp. 8-9, and Claude Lévi-Strauss: “Prologue” and “One Myth Only” in op.cit. (1971), pp. 15-22

<sup>249</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss: “One Myth Only” in op.cit. (1971), p. 607

violence, but because it brought the American continent's "independent historical development"<sup>250</sup>—and, with it, the imagined sealed-off character of its cultures and peoples—to an abrupt halt.

This stance may also explain why Lévi-Strauss appears open and accepting towards such wild mythic transformations within older sources as mentioned above (water spirit → jaguar, and, later on, star → woman → man), but dedicates three full pages<sup>251</sup> to obsess about the "regrettable liberties"<sup>252</sup> a Native scribe has apparently taken, when transcribing myths in a way that would make them "correspond to customs [the scribe] himself had observed or which had been described to him...[i.e.] what he considered to be the ethnographic reality."<sup>253</sup>

What the scribe changed—or transformed—in the version of the myth that he submitted to the Catholic Salesian Fathers, Antonio Colbacchini and César Albisetti, who went on to publish it in 1942,<sup>254</sup> is the object to be made from the materials gathered by the women in the very beginning of the M<sub>1</sub> key myth, *The macaws and their nest*. Instead of penis sheaths made from palms, it is now rush mats made from straw.<sup>255</sup> According to Lévi-Strauss the rest of the myth appears unchanged in its entirety.

It is hard to understand why—for an anthropologist who has made it his stated mission to research the relations between myth and history—the Native scribe's engagement with the mythic narrative poses a problem: Using Lévi-Strauss very own conceptualisations, such an engagement could in fact be seen as an 'in vivo' example of the transformative operations of active mythic thinking to function as a shock absorber against the pressure from historical developments.<sup>256</sup>

In his ethnographic account of the Yine/Piro people residing in the Peruvian Amazon, *An Amazonian Myth and its History*,<sup>257</sup> anthropologist Peter Gow draws heavily on Lévi-Strauss' mythologies to account for the Yine's capacities of historical memory preservation through mythic narrative, which he also takes to include shifts and transformations that have occurred since the time of contact and exchanges with whites.

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<sup>250</sup> Ibid. (1971), p. 608

<sup>251</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss: "Bororo Song" in op.cit. (1964), pp. 44-47

<sup>252</sup> Ibid. (1964)

<sup>253</sup> Ibid. (1964), p. 45

<sup>254</sup> Ibid. (1964), p. 44

<sup>255</sup> Ibid. (1964), p. 45

<sup>256</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss: "One Myth Only" in op.cit. (1971), p. 19

<sup>257</sup> Peter Gow: Op.cit.

“If we accept that myths are operating to obliterate time,” Gow writes (and we may add: To ensure the cultural continuity of a tribe or people), “we can look to the very myths themselves to tell us what historical events and processes they might be seeking to obliterate.”<sup>258</sup>

Considering that the ‘independent historical development’<sup>259</sup> of the American continent was radically challenged but did not end with the advent of European colonisation, instead of decrying the ‘liberties’ a Native scribe has ‘regrettably’ taken with a myth, Lévi-Strauss could instead have asked what interest this scribe might have had in changing the object from penis sheath to rush mat, when transcribing the myth for the Salesian Fathers?

He could have asked: In what way might this subtle change have functioned as ‘shock absorber’ for the disturbances caused by such very real real-life events as the European colonisation and subsequent missionizing activity in the Amazon from the 15<sup>th</sup> century onwards? What does it suggest of the potency and resilience of mythic thinking when conceived as an active practice of real living people instead of the mytho-archaeological remains of an irretrievable past; the fantasy of an origin?

To begin to answer these questions seems (to me) to require substantial transformation beyond the level of the mytheme. It requires shifting mythic thinking into active mode. Beyond Lévi-Strauss, and out of the archive.<sup>260</sup>

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<sup>258</sup> Peter Gow: “Introduction” in *ibid.*, p. 19

<sup>259</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss: “One Myth Only” in *op.cit.* (1971), p. 608

<sup>260</sup> Curiously, while decrying the alteration of the myth made by the Salesian Fathers’ Native scribe as ‘regrettable’ in *The Raw and the Cooked* (1964), he does not problematize Sigmund Freud’s active engagement with the Oedipus-myth. Conversely, in *Structural Anthropology*, published six years earlier, in 1958, he welcomes Freud’s active contribution to the Oedipus transformation group, which makes me wonder how Lévi-Strauss structures his hierarchy between different ‘mythographers’ and contributors. In *Structural Anthropology* he writes: “Our method thus eliminates (...) the quest for the *true* version, or the *earlier* one. On the contrary, we define the myth as consisting of all of its versions (...) A striking example is offered by the fact that our interpretation may take into account the Freudian use of the Oedipus myth and is certainly applicable to it. (...) Therefore, not only Sophocles, but Freud himself, should be included among the recorded versions of the Oedipus myth on par with earlier or seemingly more ‘authentic’ versions. (...) If Freudian comments on the Oedipus complex are a part of the Oedipus myth (...) [t]here is no single ‘true’ version of which all the others are but copies or distortions. Every version belongs to the myth.” (Italicisation his) See: Claude Lévi-Strauss: *Op.cit.* (1958), pp. 216-218

## Active Mythic Thinking

In the introduction to *Classical Myth and Psychoanalysis*, classicists Vanda Zajko and Ellen O’Gorman discuss the use and status of myths between active and passive modes: “The myth-teller,” they write, “self-consciously grapples with the limits of an individual story, drawn from a vast network of interconnected myth, and chooses which elements to highlight or exclude.”<sup>261</sup> Quoting fellow classicist Mary Beard, they regard such mythography as an instance of ‘active mythic thinking,’<sup>262</sup> even as it draws on existing materials and mythemes rather than inventing its own.<sup>263</sup>

According to Beard, Zajko and O’Gorman, many modern mythographers have regarded Roman mythology as ‘borrowed’ or ‘secondary’—that is, passive—in relation to Greek cultural forms and religious iconography. But this view misses the point, Zajko/O’Gorman write:

Roman literature responds to Greek literature and culture in a way that is both imitative and creative. Some texts fill in the gaps in existing stories, as when Ovid in the *Heroides* has mythical heroines give their version of events. Other texts expand a shorter episode into an extended narrative: Vergil’s *Aeneid* [...] combines historical and symbolic associations [of the Goddess Juno] which enable Romans to confront and come to terms with moments in their imperialist past.<sup>264</sup>

This latter point returns us to Peter Gow’s statement that “we can look to the very myths themselves to tell us what historical events and processes they might be seeking to obliterate.”<sup>265</sup> If, for example, we take the case of Lévi-Strauss’ Native scribe, who subtly changed an object in a myth, from penis sheath to rush mat, we understand that he probably did so in order to keep the myth—and thus his culture—alive in spite of the condescending view on Native ritual practices and myths involving genitalia most likely held by the Catholic

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<sup>261</sup> Vanda Zajko and Ellen O’Gorman: “Introduction: Myths and their Receptions: Narrative, Antiquity, and the Unconscious,” in Vanda Zajko, and Ellen O’Gorman (eds.): *Classical Myth and Psychoanalysis: Ancient and Modern Stories of the Self; Classical Presences*, Oxford Academic online edition, May 23, 2013, <https://doi-org.ez.statsbiblioteket.dk/12048/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199656677.003.0001> (accessed November 10, 2022), p. 3

<sup>262</sup> “Roman authors, we acknowledge, may *use* the repertoire of Graeco-Roman mythology; Roman political propagandists may *draw* on that inheritance for their own ends; sophisticated Roman intellectuals may *speculate* about the nature of mythical stories. But the domain of active mythic thinking at Rome, and of the creation and re-creation of myth as strictly defined, is not reckoned to be part of the world of Ovid, Augustus or Cicero.” (italicisation Beard’s, emphasis mine) See: Mary Beard: “Looking (harder) for Roman myth: Dumézil, declamation and the problems of definition” in Fritz Graf (ed.) *Mythos in mythenloser Gesellschaft: Das Paradigma Roms* (Berlin, Boston: B. G. Teubner, 2015), p. 45

<sup>263</sup> Vanda Zajko and Ellen O’Gorman: Op.cit., p. 5

<sup>264</sup> Vanda Zajko and Ellen O’Gorman: Ibid. p. 6

<sup>265</sup> Peter Gow: “Introduction” in op.cit., p. 19

Salesian Fathers to whom he submitted the myth.<sup>266</sup> The shift that sees the mention of penises being erased from the myth thus provides a clue to the historical developments in the Amazon at the time of its telling, namely the increasing influence of and pressure from Christian moral values on Native Amazonian cultures as a result of European colonisation and missionizing activity.

However, by the myth's sheer insistence to be told—or the teller's insistence to tell it (even if in a slightly altered form, and even on invitation)—we also see something else: We see the wish arising from within the myth—of the vast network of 'contemplating minds'<sup>267</sup> that conceived it—to obliterate the pressuring forces that inspired its alteration. This follows from Lévi-Strauss' understanding of myth as a "shock absorber for the disturbances caused by real-life events"<sup>268</sup>—even if he himself would not extend this capacity to count also modern influences such as Christian missionizing schemes of the 1940s.

However, let us take it even further: Let us imagine that this is how myth-telling is also a political and ethical engagement, congruent as it is, not only with historical pasts, but also historical presents and futures, linking them together. And that it provides a clue, not only to the historical developments at the time of its telling, as accounted for by Peter Gow, but also to the minds and considerations of those who told it. Suppose this is why the myths of other—or divergent—cultures are either locked in archives, in the past—penis sheaths and all—or wilfully suppressed, because mythic narrative is so tightly interwoven with the wish and will to live and persist—that is: with a will to futurity.

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<sup>266</sup> In the film *Embrace of the Serpent*, we encounter the Capuchin monks, who are running a home for orphaned boys in Colombian Amazon. The monks clamp down hard on a group of boys that had participated in the ritual preparation of a Native medicine by masturbating on a tree at the invitation of the shaman Karamakate, "the Mover of Worlds." See: Ciro Guerra (director): *Embrace of the Serpent* [Film]. (2013) Ciudad Lunar and Caracol Television, 00:56:57 - 01:02:41

<sup>267</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss: "Ouverture" in op.cit. (1964), p. 10

<sup>268</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss: "One Myth Only" in op.cit. (1971), p. 607

## *Soul Blindness*

In *How Forests Think*, anthropologist Eduardo Kohn recounts a myth told to him by Hilario, an inhabitant of the Ávila village in Ecuador's Upper Amazon. The myth tells of the *juri juri* demons, but according to Kohn, it "parallels in a curious fashion the Spanish report of the 1578 uprising (...) in which all the Spaniards were killed, save, according to this account, a young woman who was spared because one of the natives wanted to marry her."<sup>269</sup> The young man indeed married the woman, and they began raising a family. But his wife was still a demon, only disguised as a beautiful white woman. Thus, while bathing their children, the demon began secretly eating them—"sucking their brains out, *tso tso*, from the crowns of their heads"<sup>270</sup>—and one day she turned to her husband. Tormented by lice, he had asked her to pick them out of his hair, and she sat down behind him...

(...) in a position that made her now invisible to him—a position that made it impossible for him to look back—and began combing her fingers through his hair. And then the man started to feel something strange.

His neck  
became bu-rning hot

He then observed, in a matter-of-fact way, detached from any emotion:

"I'm blee-ding  
It would seem that  
I'm wou-wounded"

And then, with a flat voice, devoid of any sentiment, the man concluded:

"you're eating me"

(...)  
He was merely stating—"just like that"—the simple fact that he was being eaten alive.

And he just slept...  
She made him sleep into his death.<sup>271</sup>

Eduardo Kohn tells this story to account for the dangerous condition of 'soul blindness,' which according to his informants is the process by which we become objects to ourselves and

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<sup>269</sup> Eduardo Kohn: "Soul Blindness" in *How Forests Think* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), p. 127

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 127-128

others. It is “the vulnerable nature of an isolated self, reduced to oneself (...) cut off from others and exposed to a powerful predator.”<sup>272</sup> The latter here embodied by a demon disguised as a beautiful woman to represent the seductiveness and cannibalistic nature of Western modernity, feeding on peoples’ kindness and affective capacities while objectifying them to each other. As such, in Kohn’s interpretation, the myth provides the “dystopian glimpse of a world where agency becomes divorced from a feeling, purposeful, thinking, embodied, and localized self (...) an intimation of a world devoid of the enchantment of life, a world with no self, no souls, and no futures, just effects.”<sup>273</sup>

Frightful horizons. But maybe Kohn is getting a bit ahead of himself in his apocalypticism? Indeed, European colonialism and Western modernity are powerful seductive predatorial forces that carry unimaginable degrees of destruction in their wake. But according to writer and researcher Lou Cornum, the structured tension between utopia and dystopia—which Kohn unintentionally echoes?—is itself a Western construct: “The temporality of Indigenous existence exceeds these terms,” Cornum writes:

[T]here is no pre-apocalypse or post-apocalypse, only perpetual revelation. *Indigenous Futurism* then, is about the struggle for a different future as well as a distinctly different idea of ‘future’ – one that goes beyond the conflict between tradition and progress, and asks us to inhabit the present.<sup>274</sup> (italicisation theirs).

A present, where those who sleep awaken. The dead give way to life. The myth resumes its telling.

The page is turned.

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<sup>272</sup> Ibid., p. 128

<sup>273</sup> Ibid.

<sup>274</sup> Lou Cornum: “Who Belongs to the Land” on *Triple Canopy*, March 17, 2022, <https://www.canopycanopycanopy.com/contents/who-belongs-to-the-land> (last accessed August 7, 2022), pp. 31-32

## Shield Maiden

Like Eduardo Kohn finds the 1578-uprisings in Ávila resonating in the myth of the *juri juri* demons, I find the East-West Danish conflict (and maybe the Kjeltring hunt?) to resonate in *Skjoldmøen* (i.e., ‘the shield maiden’)—one of the 13 songs that Evald Tang Kristensen recorded during his 1873-fieldwork from my great-great-great-great-grandmother, Johanne Thygesdatter.

Below I reproduce Johanne’s version of the song in Tang Kristensen’s Standard Danish transcription (left); my English translation of Tang Kristensen’s transcript (right); and (middle) a reinterpretation by linguist Michael Ejstrup into Ørre Jutlandic, attempting to approximate how it might have been spoken or sung at the time of the song’s transcription in 1873. Ejstrup made the Jutlandic reinterpretation in 2021 on my invitation as part of my music and visual arts project *Donnimaar*, which is based on songs obtained from Johanne and her peers.

### **Skjoldmøen**<sup>275</sup> (Standard Danish, 1873)

Lidel Kirsten spuur hendes  
Moder:  
—Herre Falken tog—  
“Havde jeg ingen Broder?”<sup>278</sup>  
—For de had’ hannem spændt  
udi Taarn—

“Din Broder er ikke hjemme i  
Aar,  
thi han ligger bunden udi  
Kongens Gaard.”

“Ja, havde jeg Sadel og Bidsel af  
ny,  
da skuld’ jeg hente min Broder  
fra By.”

### **Æ Skjállmø**<sup>276</sup> (Ørre Jutlandic, 2021)

Lirren Kjæsten hun spuur hinne  
Muer  
—Æ Hærre tuk æ Falk—  
“Hååj a æ’ en Bru’er?”  
—Få de håj spæ’æn ham i æ  
Tå’rn—

“Di Bruer æ æ’ hjæmm i Oo’r,  
få han lewwer bonnen i æ Kånng  
hans Goo’r.”

“Ja, hååj a Saa’rl å Bissel a nøj”,  
da skull a hin’t mi bru’er fra Bøj.”

### **The Shield Maiden**<sup>277</sup> (English, 2021-22)

Little Kirsten asked her Mother  
—*The Lord took the Falcon*—  
“Didn’t I have a Brother?”  
—*For they had chained him in  
the Tower*—

“Your Brother isn’t home this  
Year,  
because is chained in the King’s  
Castle.”

“Well, if I had a new Saddle and  
Bridle,  
I would free my Brother from the  
City.”

<sup>275</sup> Evald Tang Kristensen: “Skjoldmøen,” 31A, in *100 gamle jyske Folkeviser. Jyske Folkeminder X* (Viborg: 1889), pp. 110-112

<sup>276</sup> Reinterpretation from the Standard Danish into Ørre Jutlandic dialect by linguist Michael Ejstrup as part of Marie Kølbæk Iversen: *Donnimaar. Vredens Børn* [music album] (Copenhagen: MoBC Records, 2021)—missing verses in the Jutlandic translation above did not form part of song on the vinyl/digital record.

<sup>277</sup> English translation by Marie Kølbæk Iversen, 2021-22.

<sup>278</sup> This line is borrowed from another version. See: Evald Tang Kristensen: “Skjoldmøen,” 31F, verse 1, in op.cit. (1889), p. 119



“Vel kan du faa Sadel og Bidsel af ny, men ej kan du hente din Broder fra By.”	“Wal ka du få Saa’rl å Bissel a nøj, mæn æ’t ka du hin’t di Bru’er fra Bøj’.”	“You can have a new Saddle and Bridle, but you can’t free your Brother from the City.”
Lidel Kirsten og hun sprang til Gangere høj, saa red hun langt faster’, end Fuglen fløj.	Lirren Kjæsten å hun språng te Ganger hyw’, så ree’r hun lång faster æn te æ Fåwl dæn fløw.	Little Kirsten mounted her high Horse, then she rode way faster than the Bird flew.
Og der hun kom til Borgens Led, ud’ stod Kongens Slejfredkvind’ og hvilte sig ved.	Å dæær hun kam te æ Båår’ si le, uu stuk æ Kånnng hans Slarfrærskwin’ å hwiilt sæ ve.	And when she arrived at the Castle’s fence, the King’s Woman <sup>279</sup> was resting thereby.
“Og hører du, Kongens Slejfredkvind’! Og hvor saa ere de Fanger ind’?”	“Å hør’ør du, æ Kånnng hans Slarfrærskwin’! Å hu æ så æ Fanger in’?”	“And listen, you, the King’s Woman, Where do you keep the Prisoners?”
“For Østen i vor Borgegaard der plejer de Fanger at kruse djer Haar.”	“Få Østen i wår Båår’ si Goo’r dæær plæjer æ Fanger å kruus djær Hoo’r.”	“Towards the East in our Courtyard there, the Prisoners usually frizz their Hair.”
“For Østen i vor Stjennestoww der plejer de Fanger altid at sov’.”	“Få Østen i wår Stjænnestååw dæær plæjer æ Fanger alti å såww.”	“Towards the East in our stone hall that’s where the Prisoners usually sleep.”
Hun klapped’ på Døren alt med hendes Skind: “Stat op, min kjær Broder, du laaner mig ind!”	Hun pe’ket o æ Daar mæ hinne Skin’: “Stå åp mi kjæær Bru’er te du lå’åker mæ in’!”	She knocked on the Door with her skin: “Stand up, my dear Brother, you’ll let me in!”
“Og ikke saa kan jeg laane dig ind, for jeg ligger bunden lig’som en Fang’.”	“Å æ’ så ka æ låk dæ in’, få a lewwer bonnen lisåm en Fanng.”	“I cannot let you in, since I’m chained just like a Prisoner.”
Femten Navler og en lille Pind dem lokked’ hun fra, og saa gik hun ind.	Fæm’ten Nawler å en lel’le Pin’ dem låt hun fra å så gik hun in’.	Fifteen Nails and a small Stick she lured away and then she went in.
“Høre du, min kjær Broder! Hvad jeg siger dig: hvi lod du dig af Dannerkongen bind’?”	“Hør’ør du, mi kjæær Bru’er! Hwa a sæjer te dæ: hwoffå lo du dæ a æ Dannerkånnng binn’?”	“Listen, dear Brother, what I say to you: why did you let the Danish King tie you up?”

<sup>279</sup> “[‘Slegfred’ or ‘Slegfred-kvinde’] is a woman who lives with a man without being married to him.” “‘Slegfred’” or “‘Slegfred-kvinde’” on *Ordbog over det Danske Sprog. Historisk Ordbog 1700-1950*, <https://ordnet.dk/ods/ordbog?query=slegfred> (last accessed November 13, 2022)

<p>“Mig bandt ikke fire, mig bandt ikke fem, mig bandt vel tredive jærnklaed’ Mænd.”</p>	<p>“Mæ bon’ æ’ fiir, mæ bon’ æ’ fæm’, mæ bon’ wal trarwe jærnklaej Mæn’.”</p>	<p>“It wasn’t four or five who chained me, but thirty iron-clad Men.”</p>
<p>“Mig bandt ikke otte, mig bandt ikke ni, Mig bandt vel hundrede Riddere fri.”</p>	<p>“Mæ bon’ æ’ å’t, mæ bon’ æ’ nii’h, mæ bon’ wal hunner Riier fri’h.”</p>	<p>“It wasn’t eight or nine who chained me, but one hundred free Knights.”</p>
<p>“Her staaer jeg en Kvinde saa smal som en Lind, vel hundrede Riddere skuld’ mig ikke bind’.”</p>	<p>“Hæær stoo’r a, en Kwin’ så smal som en Linn, wal hunner Riier sku æ’t mæ binn.”</p>	<p>“Here I stand, a Woman as slim as a Linden, not a hundred Knights could put me in chains.”</p>
<p>“De skuld’ ej gange mig saa haardt imod, at de skuld’ faa Toffelen af min Fod’.”</p>	<p>[not translated]</p>	<p>“They could not charge me so hard that they could get the Slipper off my Foot.”</p>
<p>Hun løst’ hendes Broder af haardesten Baand, hun satt’ kongens Slejfredkvind’ der imod.</p>	<p>Hun løøst hinne Bru’er a hooresten Boo’n, hun så’t æ Kånnng hans Slarfrærskwin’ dæær imu’er.</p>	<p>She freed her brother from the hardest chains, and put the King’s Woman in his place.</p>
<p>“Du hilser Dannerkongen, naar han kommer hjem: her har waat en Mø, der har løst en Svend.”</p>	<p>“Hæls æ Dannerkånnng, næ han kommer hjem’: hæær har warn en Mø, dæ hå løø’s’t en Swæn’.”</p>	<p>“Extend my regards to the Danish King when he returns: a Maid has been here to free a Man.”</p>
<p>Og der hun kom ud i Rosenslund, der mødt’ hend’ Dannerkongen hans liden Smaahund.</p>	<p>Å dæær kam hun uu’ i Rosenlun’, dæær mø’t hin æ Dannerkånnng hans lelle Hun’.</p>	<p>And when she entered the Rose Grove, she encountered the Danish King’s little Dog.</p>
<p>Og der hun kom ud i grønne-en Eng, der mødt’ hende Dannerkongen og all’ hans Hovmænd.</p>	<p>Å dæær hun kan uu’ i en grønne Æn’g, dæær mø’t hin æ Dannerkånnng å all hans Håwmæn’.</p>	<p>And when she entered the green Meadow, she encountered the Danish King and all his Men.</p>
<p>“Du holder min Hest udi Tøvl’ og i Tømm’, de staaend jeg gaar hen og snakker med dem.</p>	<p>“Du håller mi Hæst i Tøwl å i Tømm, de stoo’r å a gor hæn å sna’kker mæ dæemm.”</p>	<p>“You will hold my Horse’s Reins all the while I go talk to them.”</p>
<p>“Du holder min Hest udi Bjessel og Mil’, forvar dig, du nøvner ej Navnen min.”</p>	<p>“Du håller mi hæst uu’ i Bissel å Mii’l, fåwaa’r dæ te du nøwner æ’ æ Naww’n te mæ.”</p>	<p>“You will hold my horse’s Bridle, beware not to mention my Name.”</p>
<p>Lidel Kirsten, hun hug, til hun blev træet,</p>	<p>Lirren Kjæsten hun håw te hun bløw træet,</p>	<p>Little Kirsten fought until she got tired,</p>

Hun stod vel i tredive Mænd deres ret.	hun stuk wal i trærrer Mæn' djær ræt.	then she stood in the right of thirty Men.
Lidel Kirsten, hun hug, til hun blev Mod, Hun stod vel i hundrede Ridd're deres Blod.	Lirren Kjæsten hun håw te hun bløw Mu'er, hun stuk wal i hunner Rii'er djær Bluer.	Little Kirsten fought until she became Courageous, then she stood in the Blood of one hundred Men.
Lidel Kirsten og hun drager ud hendes Sværd: "Var det ikke jer, Dannerkongen! I skuld' far' en Ufærd!"	Lirren Kjæsten å hun drawer uu' hinne Swaa'r: "War'et æ' jær, Dannerkånng, sku I faar en Ufaa'r!"	Little Kirsten draws out her Sword: "Wasn't it you, Danish King, you would be Damned!"
Lidel Kirsten og hun drager ud hendes Kniv: "Var det ikke jer, Dannerkongen! det skuld' kost jert Liv!"	Lirren Kjæsten å hun drawer uu' hinne Knyw': "War'et æ' jær, Dannerkånng, det sku kåst jer æ Lyw'!"	Little Kirsten draws out her Knife: "Wasn't it you, Danish King, it would cost you your Life!"
"Ja, havde du Byrde, og havde du Ær', Saa vel kund' du Dronning i Dannemark vær'."	"Ja, håjj du Byrd å håjj du Æær, så wal ku du Drånning i Dannemark væær."	"If you had Lineage and if you had Honour, you could very well be the Queen of Denmark."
"Ja, vel har jeg Byrde, og vel har jeg Ær', Saa vel kund' jeg Dronning i Dannemark vær'."	"Ja, wal hår a Byrd å wal hår a Æær, så wal ku a Drånning i Dannemark væær."	"Of course, I have Lineage, of course I have Honour, of course, I could be the Queen of Denmark."
Dannerkongen han tog lidel Kirsten i Favn, han gav hend' Guldkrone og Dronningens Navn.	[not translated]	The Danish King took Little Kirsten in his Embrace, he gave her a golden Crown and the Queen's name.
Nu haver lidel Kirsten forvundet hendes Nød, hun bærer hver Dag en Guldkrone saa rød.	[not translated]	Now Little Kirsten has overcome her Hardships, every Day she's wearing a golden Crown so red.
Nu haver lidel Kirsten forvundet hendes Kvid', hun sover hver Nat ved Dannerkongens hans Sid'.	[not translated]	Now Little Kirsten has overcome her Plight, every Night she's sleeping by the Danish King's Side.

The song formed part of my first album under the artist name Donnimar, *Vredens Børn*,<sup>280</sup> which I launched in 2021 on the occasion of a performance in the exhibition *Soil. Sickness. Society* at Kunsthal Rønnebæksholm. On the album, I have synthesized Johanne's version (A) with one of

<sup>280</sup> The artist/project name references Daughter Donnimaar—the main character of my great-great-great-great-grandmother's song, *Forvandlingen*—and the album takes its title from Jeppe Aakjær's novel *Vredens Børn* (i.e., 'Children of Wrath') from 1904.

the other variants recorded by Tang Kristensen (F),<sup>281</sup> and replaced the last three verses of Johanne’s version A with the two last verses from version F:

“Hold op! Lidel Kirsten! du stiller  
din Harm!  
du skal bære Guldkrone og  
Dronningens Navn.”

“Hål åp! Lirren Kjæsten, du  
steller di haarm!  
du ska bæær Gullkroon å æ  
Dronning hinne Naw’n.”

“Stop! Little Kirsten, you will  
calm your rage!  
you will wear a golden Crown  
and the Queen’s name.”

“Jeg skjøtter ej om dit Guld saa  
Rød,  
jeg agter langt mere min Broder  
hans Død.”

“A skø’ter æ’ å di Gul’ så røø’r,  
a aw’ter lånt mier mi Bruer hans  
Døø’r.”

“I don’t care for your Gold,  
however red,  
I’m much more concerned about  
my Brother’s Death.”

I replaced the verses, because I liked the F-ending better than Johanne’s, and because I felt it was more in accord with Lirren Kjæsten’s/Liden Kirsten’s/Little Kirsten’s vindictive stance throughout the rest of the song. Of course, this is not an uncontroversial thing to do, particularly not for an artistic researcher, whom you might expect would stay true to the historical sources. But I would argue that truth is not a surface structure phenomenon, and that loyalty towards historical sources might sometimes require engaging at other levels than wording precision. In fact, ever since I conceived of the *Donnimaar*-project, I knew I would want to engage with it at the ‘popular’ rather than historicizing level, echoing the Danish name for this type of songs, ‘folkesange,’ (i.e., ‘people’s,’ ‘vernacular’ or ‘popular songs’), and insist that I, too, am ‘people.’

It was a common feature of vernacular songs that—like myths—they would change with their singer and the historical context.<sup>282</sup> I thus felt I was staying ‘truer’ to the songs of my foremother by engaging with them in their transformative and historically-dependent capacity, rather than sticking to the precise wording of what—by some random historical coincidence—ended up being the last time they were recorded by an ethnographer or folklore collector. Indeed, the world has changed profoundly since the 1870s, and for the songs to have any kind of relevance as something other than mere curiosities of the archived past, I felt I had to engage with them from my historically contingent positioning too. Thereby I also meant to challenge the presumed objectivity that detaches the researcher from their material, since, in my view, such objectivity is rarely the neutral gesture it pretends to be. On the contrary, the

<sup>281</sup> Evald Tang Kristensen: “Skjoldmøen,” 31F, in op.cit. (1889), pp. 119-121

<sup>282</sup> Lene Halskov Hansen: “Ord og billeder” in *Balladesang og kædedans* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanums Forlag, 2015), pp. 108-109

ambition of the mythographer to detach themselves from the myth they are analyzing could be seen as an active contribution to the project of fixating such myths—and the cultures they seek to perpetuate—in distant pasts or different worlds.

But as I see it, one is not not mythologizing when doing so; rather one is perpetuating the counter-myth that the dissidence of these myths and cultures has already been overcome. That ‘they’ have vanished, and ‘we’ won; that ‘they’ have nothing to do with ‘us.’ But Lévi-Strauss has everything to do with the way that Native American mythologies have been locked in the past, and their tellers barred from entering modernity as equal interlocutors who hold the privilege of changing their narratives in ways that may allow them to keep being told despite shifting circumstances.<sup>283</sup> So do an art and academia that does not critically—and creatively, for that matter—engage with its own position, voice, and agency, in the entanglement.

Because suppose ‘they’ are not in the past? Suppose the heathlands’ storytellers are no more ‘vanished’—as the title of Palle Ove Christiansen’s book, *De Forsvundne*<sup>284</sup> (i.e., ‘The Vanished’) otherwise suggests—than everyone else, who have died since the 1870s? Or suppose I may at least keep their culture from vanishing entirely by actively engaging with Johanne’s songs, making them mine, now? Voicing their words in a dialect which could also have been mine, had the centralized Danish school legislation not had as its stated mission to homogenize Denmark by eliminating all dialects.<sup>285</sup> A feat which until 1967—when the schoolteachers’ right to corporeally punish students was eliminated<sup>286</sup>—was not least carried out through physical violence in our parents’ schools. Singing in dialect is intended as an invitation to remember the difference that existed—exists?—between the different Danish regions. Not to “lie the Distance between Jutland and the Isles larger than it is,” as Jeppe Aakjær put it, but neither, as he also states, to “pretend that the Fusion Politics has already succeeded in laying out a Footbridge between us and them; because Distance there is, and national Difference too”<sup>287</sup> (my translation from the Danish).

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<sup>283</sup> “I think that’s why I’m always trying to orientate any kind of background towards the future; because I feel that by focusing on the past, not only is it like that double-edged sword of having to be authentic against an irretrievable past, but the other thing, related to what you’re talking about, is that the over-identification with such pasts could in my case just lead to ‘red supremacy’ and then we haven’t gotten any further.” See: Adam Khalil and Marie Kølbæk Iversen: “A world you would want to live in?” in Marie Kølbæk Iversen og Nanna Friis (ed.): *Rovhistorier* (Copenhagen: O – Overgaden, 2022), p. 7

<sup>284</sup> Palle Ove Christiansen: Op.cit.

<sup>285</sup> Bue Rübner Hansen: Op.cit.

<sup>286</sup> Ole Varming: “Revselsesret” on *Folkeskolen*, April 24, 1997, <https://www.folkeskolen.dk/folkeskolen-nr-17-1997/revselsesret/514510> (accessed November 13, 2022)

<sup>287</sup> Jeppe Aakjær: “Fortale” in *Jydsk Stævne* (Aarhus: Det Jydske Forlag, 1902), unnumbered page

Singing in Ørre Jutlandic dialect, then, however badly pronounced, is a means of estranging myself from my homogenized Danish state. Not to claim a Jutlandic nationality instead, as Aakjær possibly would, but to experiment with singing from a position that irritates the very notion of Danishness. From a position that conceives the Dane as Other, ontologically, linguistically, and politically: Dannerkonger, Dannerkoner—Danish kings, Danish wives, Danish adversaries. Like Lirren Kjæsten/Liden Kirsten/Little Kirsten did.

But of course, it is just a tale. Johanne was right, when she put dissident Jutlandic Kjæsten/Kirsten to sleep next to the Danish king. At least from a historical point of view.





Marie Kølback Iversen: *Donnimaar. Vredens Børn*  
Soil. Sickness. Society. at Kunsthal Rønnebæksholm, 2021

## *Flag*

During my pregnancy I had attended a series of antenatal classes at the private workout facility APA to try to prepare for labour; not to master or control it, but to be informed about the unknown spaces and procedures I would be going through. Talking about the trajectory of birth, the teacher took us through its different phases, but also made sure to remind us that the pain and suffering had a clear goal, which should not be forgotten: The arrival of our children in the world. She therefore urged us to bring a bottle of champagne to the hospital, so we could make a toast with our partner and the midwife to celebrate our son's or daughter's very first birthday—something which, she told us, is even ritualised in Danish hospitals by their placing a small paper flag on the breakfast tray served immediately after birth. Disregarding the exclusionary or tribal connotations of bringing in the national flag to the vulnerable birthing space, the immediate image this tiny ritual gesture formed in my mind came with a ray of sunlight and the calm of waking to an early spring morning feeling safe, held, and secure. Without thinking further about it, I felt the potency of celebrating the child at the level of the collective it was born into by way of the flag, and I understood that the ritual would simultaneously serve to mark the end of the birthing process once and for all.



## *Liminalia*

Waking a few hours after losing conscience and realising that I had not died as I thought, I felt incredibly thirsty. From its previously suspended position, my vision had reinstalled itself in the post-partum body stripped naked from the waist down and lying on a blood-soaked mat covering the hospital bed. The spasms had stopped, but there were still tubes and cables going in and out of the lower parts of the body. My child was somewhere to my left—possibly in his father's arms, possibly in a crib. We were alone in the small space that felt dark and cave-like. A male nurse came in to check on me and change the mat. I asked whether I could have something to drink, but he said “no” and explained that drinking would only make me throw up. When I kept insisting, he finally returned with a small tray holding two plastic cups—one containing red cordial, one water—but no toast or cheese or jam. I did not care for the food but was disappointed to see there was no flag on the tray. To me this omission meant that in their view I was still suspended; that my labour had not yet ended. My fleeting vision did not dare to really settle in the body, then, but kept lingering on its surface to keep a lookout for whatever challenges might be next, intent on not failing to identify any future assailants or threats like the ones that had brought me to the nightmarish state I had awoken to.

I observed my new-born family as it was being transported from the recovery room to the postnatal ward. And I kept watch as the hospital staff tried to make my sleepy child breastfeed. How they mechanically caressed my breasts and nipples to manipulate the body to release oxytocin—the ‘love hormone’—to produce milk for my child; how they brought in a robotic pump, when my love resisted. From my lookout I saw how they grabbed hold of my hands to pierce my skin anew in order to lead new waves of liquids into the body—intravenous antibiotics this time—at fixed times during the day and night. I understood how this schedule would prompt me to remain awake at all times so they would not pin me with my guards down. I saw my child and understood how incapable I had been: How all my body had been capable of was to secure our togetherness in death. When through the caesarean the medical staff had claimed us on the side of life, they had simultaneously forced him from me and voided me in the process. What was left was a paranoid puppet they could assume to approximate my son with a motherly face.

The abyss of the endless January nights extending into the few hours of daylight of the season. The desperation every time night fell and launched yet another night of panic

and passing out substituting each other. My child. My trigger. My limitless self, at once powerless and capable of anything. No inhibitions, no attachments, no emotions but panic. The rage that wells up inside that they had not cared about what they made of me as long as they kept me alive to deliver. That ultimately, I had served only a breeding purpose to my collective, and that in my country the emotional death of a mother is an acceptable casualty as long as reproduction is ensured to keep up Denmark's fertility rates.

After four days we were released from the hospital to go home. Days turned into weeks, and weeks turned into months. To attempt constructing a stable outside to the horrific interiors I kept losing myself within, I obsessively searched the web whenever my child was sleeping. Entering words such as 'birth,' 'death,' 'horror,' 'malpresentations,' I started building a schematic vocabulary for my experience. I learned that I had been 'traumatised' through labour; that I was feeling miserable because I had passed through death without physically dying, but also that 'trauma'—PTSD—is largely a clinically incurable condition. Chess mate. I read of veteran soldiers who would relocate to the woods to cope with the emotional turmoil of their traumatic states—some alone, some with other traumatised soldiers in communitarian structures complete with on-site psychiatrists and caretakers, and I felt envious and stuck. If I were to head for the woods, I would betray my son. I did not want to leave him, but time and again found myself wishing that we could be erased from time and history. Simply vanish.

At that time in 2014, birth was only rarely linked to the condition of PTSD in Denmark, and I found myself retreating to the far corners of the internet in my quest for answers, when finally on the American site *Midwifery Today*<sup>288</sup> I stumbled upon Jennifer Jamison Griebenow's article from 2006 titled "Healing the Trauma: Entering Motherhood with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder." The article provided me with a sense of recognition and a first set of tools to try to grasp, conceptualise, and tentatively organise the rage and chaos of my emotional state in a language that had been specifically developed to address birth-related traumatisation. In the article, Griebenow quotes psychologist Lynn Madsen for writing that "one of the benefits of a diagnosis of PTSD is that it lets a woman know she is not crazy." Turned on its head, it could also be argued that the diagnosis of PTSD provides the woman with a label to her madness. Yet, at any rate the diagnosis itself does little, and even if it did indeed give me an immediate sense of relief and distance to project myself along the PTSD axis, it did not

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<sup>288</sup> Jennifer Jamison Griebenow: "Healing the Trauma: Entering Motherhood with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder" on *Midwifery Today*, 2006, <https://midwiferytoday.com/mt-articles/healing-the-trauma/> (last accessed April 15, 2021)

alleviate my suffering. Neither did it dampen the intensity of my urge to find pathways beyond my desperation: I knew I loved my child, but I could not feel it. All I felt was panic.

Searching for local resources of help or assistance targeted at people suffering from traumatisation—but not within the public context related to obstetrics or postnatal care, of which my experience had left me horrified (but which would also likely render my infliction as a case of the ‘baby blues’)—I learned that trauma associations were indeed being established, but again primarily for and by veteran soldiers. When on their websites they would list the experiences that might lead to trauma, in addition to war they would mention instances such as rape, violent robberies, and ‘trauma-like events in labour,’ which made me wonder: Is perceived death in labour less traumatic than perceived death in war? Less real? Reflecting on the apparent ‘simili’ character of my suffering, I felt called to consider whether I as a modern labourer was somehow more fragile than my foremothers, becoming ‘traumatised’ by what they had simply been forced to endure?

While there is probably some truth in this—modern civilisation largely resting upon a biopolitical contract that trades individual security and freedom from pain for loyalty towards the state,<sup>289</sup> resulting in ‘trauma’ and heartbreak when the state breaks its contractual obligations—another explanation might also be possible: That the West sees a rise in incidents of trauma simply because more people survive encountering death than before, in labour and in war. As such, the heightened levels can be seen as a direct reflection of the West’s dedication to saving (some) human lives. When I would later discuss this complex with my first anthropological supervisor Nils Bubandt in 2017, he told me—as I remember it—that in Indonesia where he works as an ethnographer, the general perception is that men die in war, women in labour, but that there is no qualitative difference rendering one mode of dying more authentic than the other. It made a stark impression on me and made me think about the unconscious preconceptions embedded in my own culture: Could it be that veteran soldiers wear the trauma label with more credibility than birthing women in a contemporary Western setting due to something as trivial as a cultural gender bias?

In no way do I intend to make light of the loss or darkness that haunt many veteran soldiers in the wake of war—I simply ask that a mother’s plight is not belittled either.

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<sup>289</sup> Michel Foucault: *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège De France, 1977-78* (Houndsmills/New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) & Hanne Thomsen and Uffe Østergaard: “Kampen om de danske sjæle gennem tiden” in *Politiiken Debat*, Politiken, Dec. 31, 2021 (Copenhagen: JP/Politikens Forlag, 2021), pp. 7-8

Thus, seeking to escape the lure of pitting these positions against each other in an impossible competition of victimhood,<sup>290</sup> I became curious to explore whether their relative insights might cross-pollinate, and if such synthetisation might help me understand what it was that had happened to me.

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<sup>290</sup> Didier Fassin and Richard Rechtman: “Conclusion: The Moral Economy of Trauma” in *The Empire of Trauma* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), p. 277

## Human Resources

I still remembered my orange free-fall and my sense of loss upon returning to life. Similarly, I remembered the constrictive feeling of the jolt in the recovery unit, but I did not know how to make sense of neither experience, and within the vocabulary of PTSD, hallucinations and out-of-body-experiences primarily figure as symptoms indicating a patient's degree of traumatisation, not as resources in their own right.<sup>291</sup>

Thus, back on the internet to continue my obsessive search, I come across a New York Times article titled "Post-Traumatic Stress' Surprisingly Positive Flip Side,"<sup>292</sup> which explores the notion of 'post-traumatic growth' coined in 1995 by the American psychologist Richard Tedeschi. The article mainly consists of a long exploration of various post-traumatic emotional responses in veteran soldiers, as well as the American Army's diverse attempts to answer to the problem of PTSD since the Vietnam War. Reading the article, its initial schematisation of the human mind and nervous system—along with the outlining of the American Army's dedicated efforts to promote positive psychology and the notion of 'post-traumatic growth' among its soldiers—did immediately amplify my scepticism towards the weaponised institutional mechanisms driving the diagnostic machinery of PTSD. However, one sequence stood out: "Tedeschi told me about one of his patients whose helicopter was shot down in Vietnam. As he fell from the sky in the midst of gunfire and explosions, a peace came over him. He saw the jungle around him, and it was beautiful. He felt connected to everyone, even enemy soldiers. Since then he has reflected on the experience, delving into philosophy and religion. He has reached out to others by volunteering his time. He has tried to remain true to that connection he felt long ago." That connection. In spite of the simple wording, which may immediately conceal the far-reaching implications of the sequence, it hit me like a blast. The article's passing mention of the soldier's all-encompassing sense of connection as he was falling from the sky was a first call for me to start reflecting on my own experience of transgressing the confines of my embodied existence when I had thought myself dying.

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<sup>291</sup> Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (US): *Trauma-Informed Care in Behavioral Health Services*. Rockville (MD): Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (Treatment Improvement Protocol (TIP) Series, No. 57.) Exhibit 1.3-4, DSM-5 Diagnostic Criteria for PTSD. (US, 2014), [https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK207191/box/part1\\_ch3.box16/](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK207191/box/part1_ch3.box16/) (accessed October 8, 2021)

<sup>292</sup> Jim Rendon: "Post-Traumatic Stress's Surprisingly Positive Flip Side" in *The New York Times*, March 22, 2012, <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/25/magazine/post-traumatic-stress-surprisingly-positive-flip-side.html> (accessed April 28, 2021)

Thus, in early 2015, precisely a year after the birth of my son, I concluded the work *Mirror Therapy* as my first artistic rendition of the experience of substantially transforming through what I had immediately experienced as utter destruction. The work comprised a large abstract installation of DIA slide apparatuses projecting light through thinly polished slices of lapis lazuli stone, as well as a looping video work available only on the internet.<sup>293</sup> Engaging with the figure of the traumatised Western soldier as my unlikely peer, the work symbolically played on the name of the occupational therapeutic practice of ‘mirror therapy’ to cross-read between two human and mineral wounded bodies inhabiting the geopolitical and art historical spectrum between Western Europe and Central Asia: A Danish veteran amputee and a slab of lapis lazuli extracted from the ground of Afghanistan, where Denmark was militarily engaged (and where the veteran lost his leg).

The ‘mirror therapy’ treatment method was developed by American neuroscientist Vilayanur S. Ramachandran in the late 1990s to ease phantom pain in amputated limbs,<sup>294</sup> and it became particularly applied in the treatment of wounded Western veterans from the 2000s wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The aim of the treatment is to alleviate phantom pain by activating the amputee’s mirror neurons to fire across disparity in the form of bodily asymmetry. Thereby, following the logics of the treatment method, *Mirror Therapy* explored ways of healing that would not be understood as nostalgic ‘restoration’ to a former pre-traumatic state, but rather as the construction of new connections through the traumatic experience itself: In the place of material unity, the installation would point to the reconfigurative potentialities nested in the virtual mirror image and in ephemeral empathy<sup>295</sup>—the latter another cognitive feature of the mirror neurons.

While crucial to any subjective and collective healing process, empathy is one of the modalities that are specifically inhibited by the neurobiological and endocrinological stress responses inherent to PTSD. *Mirror Therapy* thus aimed beyond the echo-chamber of trauma by emphasising potential capacities that—albeit weakened, or wounded—would allow for

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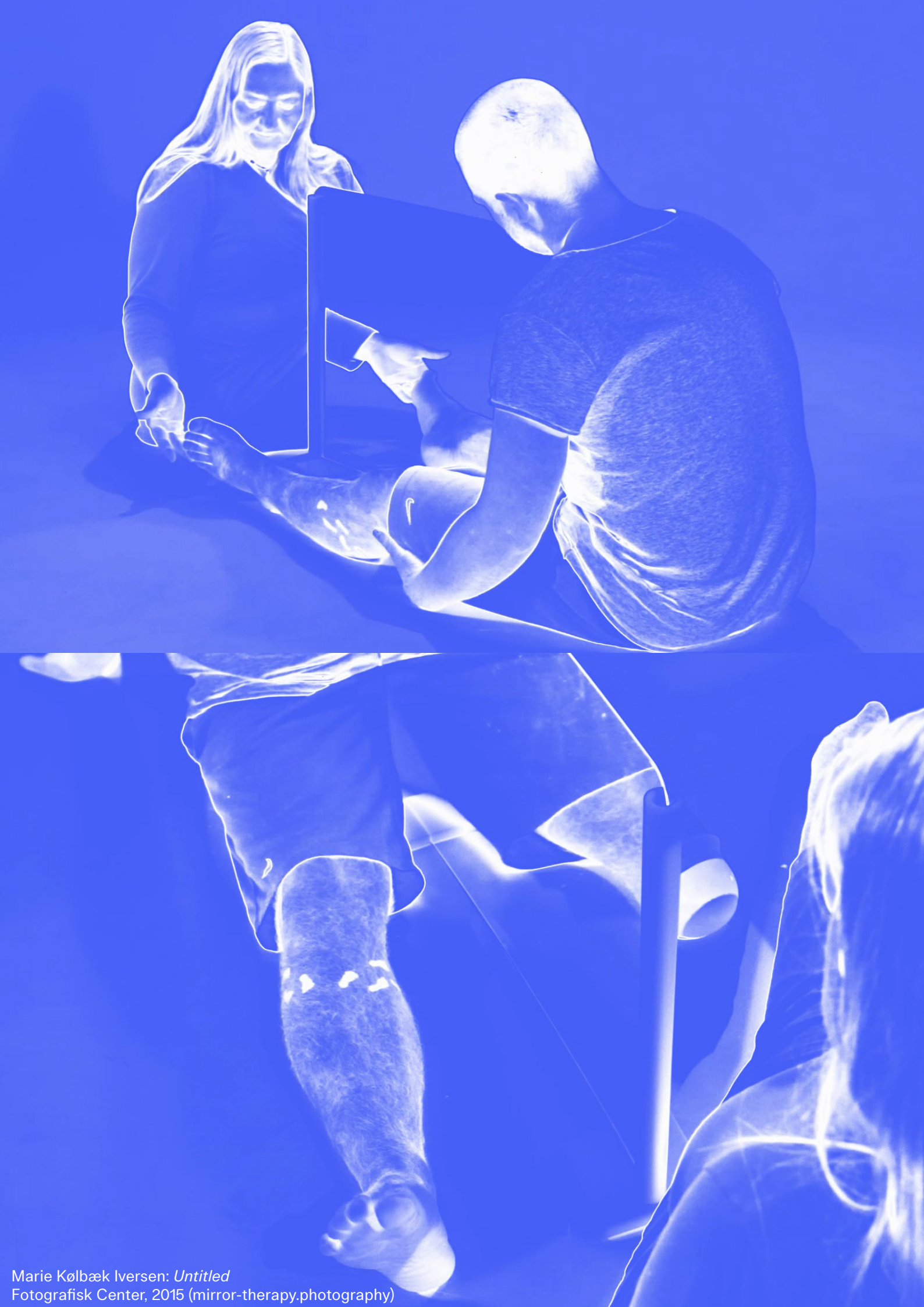
<sup>293</sup> Marie Kølback Iversen: *United* [web-video] (2015), <http://mirror-therapy.photography> (accessed November 14, 2022)

<sup>294</sup> Katja Guenther: “‘It’s All Done With Mirrors’: V.S. Ramachandran and the Material Culture of Phantom Limb Research” in *Med Hist.* Jul; 60, 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 342-358

<sup>295</sup> In 1873, German philosopher Robert Vischer introduced the word ‘empathy’ (German: ‘Einfühlung’) as a technical aesthetic term in his dissertation *On the Optical Sense of Form: A Contribution to Aesthetics*. Before being a social, psychological and neurological term, empathy was an aesthetic term describing the human ability “to ‘feel into’ works of arts and into nature...through a process of poetic identification.” See Robert Vischer: *Op.cit.*, p. 95

empathic identification across disparate locations, instantiations, and pains, within and without the confines of singular bodies, spiralling outwards.

Not as a given, but as a future-oriented goal and effort (or hope, aspiration).



Marie Kølback Iversen: *Untitled*  
Fotografisk Center, 2015 (mirror-therapy.photography)





Marie Kølbæk Iversen: *Mirror Therapy*  
The 11th Gwangju Biennial: "The Eighth Climate (What Does Art Do?)," 2016



## Flag

2021 saw the premiere of the Danish film *The Soldier*<sup>296</sup> featuring the veteran soldier Henrik, who temporarily relocated to the Peruvian Amazon after his second deployment in Afghanistan, where he was wounded after only 22 days. In the film we follow his daily life in the forest, where he lives with an unspecified group of people—some Indigenous, some of Western descent like Henrik. He lives a spartan life in nature, where he goes hunting for monkeys to sustain himself and his cohabitants. He has familiarised himself with a long line of plants and fruits growing in the forest: He knows how to get fresh drinking water, and he has learnt how to prepare and brew the psychotropic concoction ayawaska, which guides him in his healing journey to settle the score with the psychic realms of war that continue to haunt him in his dreaming and waking life. He recounts how the remote location, and the absence of external stimuli, has provided him with space to deal with his traumas: “When you do not have to deal with external stuff, you have the time and peace to treat yourself,”<sup>297</sup> he explains, while smoking a cigarette.

We follow him as he chops the caapi vine<sup>298</sup> and beats it before adding the chacruna leaves<sup>299</sup> to brew ayawaska, which he ingests after having cleansed the space with ‘palo santo,’ an aromatic type of wood used as incense. We see him throwing up, which he explains enables him to rid himself of all the bad stuff within. We follow him into the forest, all the while he lets us in on his experiences from the war, little by little, and on his life leading up to his deployments, including his younger sister’s terminal cerebral cancer. He recounts how he regrets traveling 6,000 kilometres eastwards to participate in a war, when his sister was sick and dying, but also explains how he firmly believed in the cause and really felt that he could justify it.

“I thought so, anyway,” he adds.<sup>300</sup>

Upon being wounded in an air strike,<sup>301</sup> he was taken to a field hospital where the doctor gave him a shot of ketamine to catapult him to “space land.”<sup>302</sup>

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<sup>296</sup> Nikolaj Møller (director): *The Soldier* [Film] (2021) Nordisk Film / SPRING

<sup>297</sup> Ibid.: 00:28:54-00:29:13

<sup>298</sup> Banisteriopsis caapi is a giant vine native to South. It is one half of ayawaska, a decoction with a long history of entheogenic use among Indigenous peoples of the Amazon rainforest.

<sup>299</sup> Psychotria viridis, also known as chacruna, chacrona, or chaqruy in the Quechua languages, is a perennial, shrubby flowering plant in the coffee family Rubiaceae, and the other half of the Amazonian entheogenic decoction ayawaska.

<sup>300</sup> Nikolaj Møller: Op.cit.: 00:26:00-00:26:25

<sup>301</sup> Erna Bojesen Rosenqvist: “PTSD-ramt krigsveteran rejste tre år til Amazon-junglen: ‘Det var min sidste udvej’” on *dr.dk*, Danmarks Radio, April 11, 2021, <https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/indland/ptsd-ramt-krigsveteran-rejste-tre-aar-til-amazon-junglen-det-var-min-sidste-udvej> (accessed December 4, 2022)

<sup>302</sup> Nikolaj Møller: Op.cit.: 00:29:17

In addition to focusing on the radical and monstrous wonders that ayawaska works on Henrik in his spiritual journey to process his war traumas, the film also contains dark and ghostly sequences where we see Henrik and the group cooking up ketamine and fading into its hazes. There are no immediate heroes, or a moral terrain laid out according to clearly decipherable registers; what we see is a lot of heartache, and people trying to sense and make sense in a mess of transnational relations.

In my view, the film reaches its climax when Henrik recounts how after being wounded he is sent back to Denmark, where he is waiting for his soldier buddies to return from Afghanistan so things can “go back to normal.”<sup>303</sup> When they are finally home, they are all going to go on a parade through town, and their superior asks Henrik to walk in front with the flag, which according to the superior is a great honour. The soldiers are wearing their formal uniforms and the officers carry sabres; there is a band playing, and the whole town is lined up to witness the parade, which is concluded at the sports stadium, where the soldiers’ extended families—parents, siblings, cousins, grandparents, aunts, uncles, etc.—are invited to see them get their medals. Henrik recounts how he is holding the flag in anticipation:

“Then the names are called. But my name is not called. I remember I stood there with the flag and just felt like hurling it away. I go over to greet my family. ‘Weren’t you in Afghanistan? Weren’t you injured there? Didn’t you spend a long time there?’ I did not know what to reply. Later I found out that they had this rule that you have to have been there for 30 days for it to count as a deployment. So, if you are injured before that it does not count.”

Henrik was wounded on the 22<sup>nd</sup> day of his deployment. He got to carry the flag but did not get a medal.

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<sup>303</sup> Ibid.: 00:33:53

## Flag

In *Being Danish. Paradoxes of Identity in Everyday Life*, anthropologist Richard Jenkins draws on cultural anthropologist Victor Turner and sociologist Émile Durkheim's concepts of rituality to unpack the relation between the sacred and the profane through an analysis of contemporary Danes' relation to their national flag, Dannebrog. Examining the ritual engagements with the flag across a wide range of social settings, from the formal celebration of royal visits to commercial events and children's birthday parties, he shows how Danishness is produced and reproduced through flagways that serve to ritually affirm Denmark's national mythology of homogeneity, egalitarianism, democracy, and parity of esteem.<sup>304</sup>

Dannebrog is claimed to be the oldest national flag in the world and "has its own mythology, which Danes still recount, (...) falling from Heaven in June 1219 during the battle of Lyndanisse, against the heathens of what is now Estonia, to save King Valdemar II, the Conqueror, and his knights from otherwise certain destruction."<sup>305</sup> Despite its royal initiations, it is considered as much the people's flag as the elites', according to Jenkins: "Danish common people were apparently using Dannebrog in 'unofficial' ways – to mark weddings, birthdays and solemn occasions – as long ago as the end of the eighteenth century, and these vernacular flagways increased in popularity during the decades that followed the disasters of the Napoleonic War. So much so, in fact, that in 1834 an irate King Frederik VI felt [moved to] issue an edict reserving to the state and royalty the right to fly the national flag."<sup>306</sup> This edict however proved unsuccessful, and the prohibition was lifted in 1854, which further fanned popular enthusiasm for the flag that was only strengthened with the military defeats and occupations by Prussia, Austria-Hungary, and Germany between 1848 and the end of the Second World War.<sup>307</sup> In this way the people's 1854-reclamation of the flag from the monarchy and the state grew to become a foundational aspect of the Danish national egalitarian mythology, which according to Jenkins is ritually affirmed every time the flag is flown: As such, it is a "symbol of community and fellowship, from the modest but tangible intimacy of family life to the grand historical abstraction of the nation,"<sup>308</sup> which facilitates, reiterates, and reinforces,

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<sup>304</sup> Richard Jenkins: "Just how it is": The Sacred and the Profane: Inarticulating the nation" in op.cit., p. 144

<sup>305</sup> Ibid., p. 131

<sup>306</sup> Ibid., pp. 131-132

<sup>307</sup> Ibid., p. 132

<sup>308</sup> Ibid., p. 137

the visceral connection between the state and its subjects and thus allows the nation to be reproduced and produced every day.<sup>309</sup> “Harking back to the early nineteenth-century tussle between Frederik VI and the people over the vernacular use of the flag,” Jenkins writes: “let’s not forget that the people won.”<sup>310</sup>

But which people?

In his book, Jenkins refers to the century-long historical struggle between the conservative elite and monarchy on the one hand, and what he understands to be the common people—i.e., the national liberals—on the other, as “internally non-violent.”<sup>311</sup> However, remembering the strict disciplining measures against women and Kjeltrings—and the targeted programmes to force-assimilate (if not outright eliminate) the latter during the period that saw the rise of national democracy—Jenkins’ claim appears a truth with modifications. As I have shown, there is a darker side to the democratic egalitarianism of the homogenized Danish nation state, which—not only leads to, but requires—the continual suppression of diverging cultural expressions to reaffirm its mythology of a consensually unified homogenous people.

Returning to the heathlands, where Dannerkoner, -mænd and -konger were once seen as intrusive authoritative Others rather than extensions of the local self, we reencounter Dannebrog as the driver of ritual action. However not in its capacity to ritually reaffirm an existing association with the Danish nation state, as Jenkins has accounted for.

But to initiate it.

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<sup>309</sup> Ibid., p. 150

<sup>310</sup> Ibid., p. 133

<sup>311</sup> Ibid., p. 131

## *Initiations*

In the 1700s and 1800s, dishonourable people could gain or regain their honour by having the Danish flag flown above their heads during a meticulously choreographed military ceremony that would render them equal members of Danish society.

The ceremony consisted in a line of ritual actions that would separate the initiand from the collective before reintegrating him in society in his new and elevated position. First, the flag would be collected by a captain, a first lieutenant, a second lieutenant, an ensign, four NCOs, three drum majors, three fife majors, and 50 private soldiers. These would then circle around the ensign standing in the middle with the flag, and the initiand would step forward and present his rifle while the king's resolution was read aloud. Then the initiand would undress and kneel three steps removed from the flag, upon which a major would command the ensign to swing the flag ten times above the initiand's head, touching the top of his skull at every turn. Afterwards, the initiand would be dressed in uniform and introduced into the standing ranks of private soldiers.<sup>312</sup> However, in the case the initiand was a previously deserted soldier, who had repented and been pardoned, his name had to be removed from its listing on the gallows before he could be introduced among the privates. In that case, everyone in the circle—not just the initiand himself—had to kneel during the reading of the king's resolution.<sup>313</sup>

Unlike any state legislation or clerical commandments, this ritual, according to H. P. Hansen, held the power to once and for all eradicate any trace of stigma or prejudice against a formerly dishonourable person, and integrate them fully into society.<sup>314</sup>

The 1800s saw this 'ritual of the flag' become popularised beyond the ranks and confines of the military, in a move similar to the vernacular appropriation of the flag from the state and monarchs described by Jenkins.<sup>315</sup> As such, in the 1840s the mayor of Lemvig helped his coachman of Kjeltring descent become honourable, so he could propose to the girl he had fallen in love with. The mayor did this by asking the young Kjeltring to join him to church the following Sunday, where he would walk by the mayor's left side towards their seats. Seated together for the entire duration of the service—and thus breaking the taboo that would normally segregate Kjeltrings, nightmen, and knackers, from other churchgoers by assigning them to

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<sup>312</sup> H. P. Hansen: "Ærlig - uærlig" in op.cit. (1959), p. 50

<sup>313</sup> Ibid. (1959), p. 51

<sup>314</sup> Ibid. (1959), p. 50

<sup>315</sup> Richard Jenkins: "'Just how it is': The Sacred and the Profane: Dannebrog in everyday life" in op.cit., p. 133

certain fenced-off rows<sup>316</sup>—the mayor asked the young man to walk on his right side towards the exit. Exiting the church, the flag was swung above the Kjeltring's head, after which the mayor shook his hand. Then, the two men positioned themselves on either side of the doorway and shook hands with everyone exiting the church. “[M]any cried,” H. P. Hansen writes,<sup>317</sup> and “the coachman was particularly moved.”<sup>318</sup>

Since it was not just the Kjeltrings themselves, however, but everything they had been in contact with, or touched, that was perceived as dishonourable, similar measures had to be applied if one had for example bought a horse from a Kjeltring. Immediately unfit for any farm work, a flag had to be swung above it, and a halter from a rider's horse applied, before it could be introduced among the other animals on the farm.<sup>319</sup>

While some—like Johanne—would voice their scepticism towards this assumed authority of the church and the representatives of the Danish state to enforce the upholding or overcoming of such segregation, others—like the coachman—accepted their authority to facilitate a ritual that would convey to him another sense of futurity. Either way, such rituals of inclusion and exclusion attest to the once-contingent character of Danishness and show that—like Kjeltring—to be Danish on the heath was often also something one did, rather than something one was. Something one succumbed or was subjected to, or accepted as a lesser evil.

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<sup>316</sup> Ringkjøbing-Skjern Museum: “Dejbjerg Kirke og stedets bosættelse” on *HistoriskAtlas.dk*, Nordea Fonden, [https://historiskatlas.dk/Dejbjerg\\_Kirke\\_og\\_stedets\\_bosættelse\\_\(15568\)](https://historiskatlas.dk/Dejbjerg_Kirke_og_stedets_bosættelse_(15568)) (accessed November 15, 2022)

<sup>317</sup> H. P. Hansen: “Ærlig - uærlig” in op.cit. (1959), p. 54

<sup>318</sup> The ritual resonates in the contemporary Danish state's naturalization rituals, where the handshake is still an unavoidable ritual premise if one aspires to obtain Danish citizenship. Candidates, who have successfully passed the naturalization test [indfødsretsprøve], are invited to a “constitutional ceremony” [grundlovsceremoni] at the municipality, where Dannebrog is persistently flown to mark the occasion—not over each individual's head, but from every flagpole (of which there are many). During the ceremony, the new Danish citizens take turn stepping forward to shake hands with the mayor or councillor. The handshake is an indispensable requirement to obtain Danish citizenship, and was only briefly suspended during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-2021. See: Mattias Tesfaye: “Lovforslag nr. L 56: Forslag til Lov om indfødsrets meddelelse” in *Folketingsstidende Tillæg A*, Folketinget (2021), [https://www.ft.dk/ri/pdf/samling/20211/lovforslag/156/20211\\_156\\_som\\_fremsat.pdf](https://www.ft.dk/ri/pdf/samling/20211/lovforslag/156/20211_156_som_fremsat.pdf) (accessed November 16, 2022)

<sup>319</sup> H. P. Hansen: “Ærlig - uærlig” in op.cit. (1959), p. 54

*Think (and think hard)*

In mapping the efficacy of ritual action, anthropologist Victor Turner distinguishes between 'liminal' and 'liminoid' states of being. Drawing on the seminal work of ethnographer Arnold van Gennep, *Les Rites de Passage*,<sup>320</sup> Turner demarcates van Gennep's tripartition of rites of passages and their mandatory liminality against the temporary and localised suspensions of structure in so-called 'open' modern societies (leisure, play, carnival). The latter he labels 'liminoid;' i.e., liminality-like and voluntary 'anti-structures' capable of generating and storing "a plurality of alternative models for living, from utopias to programs, which are capable of influencing the behaviour of those in mainstream social and political roles (whether authoritative or dependent, in control or rebelling against it) in the direction of radical change."<sup>321</sup>

While liminoid states, according to Turner, are thus key to inspiring profound transformation across subjective and societal levels, revolutionary even, they do not hold the power to build and sustain equally strong communities. Conversely, that is a feat that—in so-called 'closed' or tribal societies—is rooted in the unquestionable obligation towards a community, which is enacted and sealed through the liminal states of the rites of passage.<sup>322</sup> To explain what he means by 'closed' societies, Turner draws on Émile Durkheim's notion of 'mechanical solidarity' characterized by strong cohesion as well as cooperative, collective action directed towards the achievement of group goals, which unfold within a clearly defined mythological continuum of 'truth.' 'Mechanical solidarity,' writes Turner of the Durkheimian concept, is primarily a feature of "small, nonliterate societies with a simple division of labor and very little tolerance of individuality." It is a type of solidarity that is based on a "homogeneity of values and behavior, strong social constraint, and loyalty to tradition and kinship"<sup>323</sup>—all of which contributes to potentiating the transformative potentiality of the rite of passage, Turner explains.

According to van Gennep, rites of passages facilitate human passage from "one magico-religious or secular group to another,"<sup>324</sup> and may be divided into three subcategories:

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<sup>320</sup> Arnold van Gennep: "Classifications of Rites" in *The Rites of Passage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960) (1909)

<sup>321</sup> Victor Turner: "Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow, and Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbolology" in *Rice Institute Pamphlet - Rice University Studies*, 60, 3 (1974), p. 65

<sup>322</sup> *Ibid.* (1974), p. 73

<sup>323</sup> *Ibid.* (1974)

<sup>324</sup> Arnold van Gennep: "Classifications of Rites" in *op.cit.* (1909), p. 11



1. preliminal rites (rites of separation), 2. liminal rites (transition rites), and 3. postliminal rites (rites of incorporation). The internal relation between these three subcategories will differ from one ritual context to the other. For example, transition rites may play an important part in ceremonies of betrothal, initiation, first pregnancies and births, while being reduced to mere formalities in rituals marking the birth of a second child or remarriage.<sup>325</sup>

While the first phase of preliminal rites of separation, according to Turner, comprises symbolic behaviour signifying the initiand's detachment from their earlier location—a social structure, a set of cultural conditions, or both—the ensuing liminal phase is characterised by extensive ambiguity, and is likened “to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness[.]”<sup>326</sup> Drawing its strength from the radical inversion of otherwise rigid social structures, the liminal phase's anti-structuring of all “ordinary regularities of kinship, the residential setting, tribal law and custom” induces the initiand “to think (and think hard) about cultural experiences they had hitherto taken for granted.” Thereby, they are taught that “they did not know what they thought they knew,” and that “[b]eneath the surface structure of custom was a deep structure, whose rules they had to learn, through paradox and shock.”<sup>327</sup>

The liminal phase is thus hinged on the closed society's strong obliging capacity to realise its deep potentialities of transformation and learning, importantly to ensure cultural continuity rather than break it: “Even the *breaking* of rules *has* to be done during initiation. This is one of the distinctive ways in which the liminal is marked off from the liminoid” (his italicisation).<sup>328</sup> Seeing the ritual process to an end, what is gained through the liminal phase's radical dissolution of habitual structures is a new foundation for the initiand's individuality and societal position, which is consolidated through the third ritual phase—“the rite of incorporation”—where they return to their “new, relatively stable, well-defined position in the total society.”<sup>329</sup> In short, liminal rites of passage tend to humble people down before permanently elevating them—like the dishonourable youth who was required to undress and kneel before the entire Danish military regiment before having Dannebrog flown over his head—

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<sup>325</sup> Ibid. (1909)

<sup>326</sup> Victor Turner: “Liminality and Communitas” in *The Ritual Process. Structure and Anti-Structure* (Piscataway: AldineTransactions, 2008) (1969), p. 95

<sup>327</sup> Victor Turner: Op.cit. (1974), p. 73

<sup>328</sup> Ibid. (1974)

<sup>329</sup> Ibid. (1974), p. 57

while liminoid carnivals and festivals conversely “elevate those of low status transiently before returning them to their permanent humbleness.”<sup>330</sup>

Turner’s distinction between liminoid and liminal states as the respective features of what he understands as ‘open’ and ‘closed’—modern and tribal—societies, is based on a notion that any activities or subjectivities of the former will be characterised by their independent and optional nature, while the latter are understood as static and largely historically detached. The distinction however conceals the potentialities of its own collapse: Of considering the transformative and learning capacities of ‘modern’ obliging experiences, such as forced vaginal labour in the closed circuit of the Danish health care system, or war’s suspension of the taboo on killing. Equally, it fails to address the way in which mythic structures operate in late modernity to sustain, produce, and reproduce, modern nation states such as the Danish.

Short-circuiting the theoretical logic that draws a distinction between open and closed societies (and which stubbornly equates modern and technically-advanced societies such as the Danish with the former, and poor non-industrial societies with the latter) anthropologist Peter C. Reynolds has argued that modern industrial societies, too, rest firmly on a mythological and ritual premise—albeit covert, rather than overt—which it is the task of their members to continually affirm and reproduce.<sup>331</sup> According to Reynolds, the modern technocratic society is based on a transformation of natural process into machinic constructions, which may be portrayed as the rational application of scientific principles, but “is far more easily explained by what anthropologists call *myths*: stories of past events, assumed to be true by members of a community, which justify the structure of human institutions and define appropriate action. In industrial society, however, myth is regarded as part of the primitive past that is superseded by science, so the technocracy must disguise its own mythology as seemingly objective descriptions of historical processes and natural events”<sup>332</sup> (italicisation his). Events and processes that—like the cultivation and Danification of the heathlands, and the usurpation of women’s reproductive capacities to craft the Danish nation—have been anything but objective.

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<sup>330</sup> Ibid. (1974)

<sup>331</sup> Peter C. Reynolds: “Introduction” in *Stealing Fire: The Atomic Bomb As Symbolic Body* (Palo Alto: Iconic Anthropology Press, 1991) p. xi

<sup>332</sup> Ibid.

With Reynolds, one could argue that contrary to the military ritual of the flag, which served to elevate the initiand from their previous dishonourable state, the case of contemporary Danish childbirth synthesizes the humbling mechanisms of both liminoid and liminal states of being: Through its operations, it introduces and consolidates the woman's new, stable, well-defined position in the total society, however not as elevated, but as one of permanent subjection.

Truth is that so-called 'open societies' are only open for some. For the rest, the narrative of their openness is a double-blow: Inaccessible to 'the modern obliged,' this narrative annuls the authorising liminal potentialities, which may have been offered to them by the overt mythological and collectivising ritual practices of so-called 'closed' societal settings. Instead, they are left to liminally linger in invisibility and darkness along with their untapped subjective and collective potentialities for transformation and learning.

## *Soldier's Heart*

As we have just learnt, the transformative potential of the initiation ritual is hinged on the liminal phase's radical dissolution of habitual structures to teach the initiand that "they did not know what they thought they knew," and that "[b]eneath the surface structure of custom was a deep structure, whose rules they had to learn, through paradox and shock."<sup>333</sup> Yet it requires the third and final phase of reincorporation into a collective—the redressing of the soldier, and his integration as an equal member into the ranks of privates—to bring this potentiality to fruition; something which is however largely impeded in Western modernity by the objectifying logics of capitalism and the fragmentation of the collective into nuclear family units—the "compulsive isolated family idea," as per Garcia<sup>334</sup>—a structural microcosmic mirroring of nation state logics. Keeping in mind, however, the potency, paradox and shock inherent to the liminal phase, the failure to see an initiation ritual through to its incorporation is an almost guaranteed recipe for trauma.

According to psychiatrist Jonathan Shay, the underlying condition of trauma, PTSD, has been known and described as far back as classical antiquity in poems such as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*<sup>335</sup> where the disillusioning experience of war is said to "have destroyed the people."<sup>336</sup> Similarly, Lady Percy's soliloquy in William Shakespeare's *Henry IV* (Part I, Act II, Scene 3) has been emphasised as a fitting description of a person suffering from traumatisation:<sup>337</sup>

O, my good lord, why are you thus alone?  
For what offence have I this fortnight been  
A banish'd woman from my Harry's bed?  
Tell me, sweet lord, what is't that takes from thee  
Thy stomach, pleasure and thy golden sleep?  
Why dost thou bend thine eyes upon the earth,  
And start so often when thou sit'st alone?  
Why hast thou lost the fresh blood in thy cheeks;  
And given my treasures and my rights of thee  
To thick-eyed musing and cursed melancholy?  
In thy faint slumbers I by thee have watch'd,  
And heard thee murmur tales of iron wars;

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<sup>333</sup> Victor Turner: Op.cit. (1974), p. 73

<sup>334</sup> Dora Garcia: Op.cit., p. 48

<sup>335</sup> Jonathan Shay: "Moral Injury" in *Psychoanalytic Psychology*, 31, 2 (Washington: American Psychological Association, 2014), pp. 182–191

<sup>336</sup> Johannes Haubold: *Homer's people: Epic poetry and social formation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 195

<sup>337</sup> Jonathan Shay: *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character*. (New York City: Scribner, 1994), pp. 165–66.

Speak terms of manage to thy bounding steed;  
 Cry 'Courage! to the field!' And thou hast talk'd  
 Of sallies and retires, of trenches, tents,  
 Of palisades, frontiers, parapets,  
 Of basilisks, of cannon, culverin,  
 Of prisoners' ransom and of soldiers slain,  
 And all the currents of a heady fight.  
 Thy spirit within thee hath been so at war  
 And thus hath so bestirr'd thee in thy sleep,  
 That beads of sweat have stood upon thy brow  
 Like bubbles in a late-disturbed stream;  
 And in thy face strange motions have appear'd,  
 Such as we see when men restrain their breath  
 On some great sudden hest. O, what portents are these?  
 Some heavy business hath my lord in hand,  
 And I must know it, else he loves me not.<sup>338</sup>

Later, during the 20<sup>th</sup> century world wars, the condition became known as 'shell shock,' 'combat neurosis,' and 'soldier's heart.'<sup>339</sup> The latter due to the exaggerated startle response, which is a common symptom of traumatisation making itself known as "a rapid, generalized motor response to a sudden, surprise stimulus"<sup>340</sup> such as, e.g., loud noises. Yet, it was not until 1980 that PTSD was standardised as a psychiatric diagnosis with the third version of the American Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III),<sup>341</sup> and later in WHO's International Classification of Diseases (ICD-10) in 1992.<sup>342</sup> Since then, the condition has undergone a series of revisions with the DSM-III-R (1987), the DSM-IV (1994),<sup>343</sup> the DSM-5 (2013),<sup>344</sup> and most recently the ICD-11 (2019), which took effect in 2022.

As Rick Mayes and Allan V. Horwitz have pointed out, not only did the 1980-launch of the DSM-III see the introduction of PTSD as a standardised diagnosis. It also presented a paradigm shift in the general conceptualisation of mental illnesses by transforming them "from broad, etiologically defined entities that were continuous with normality to symptom-based,

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<sup>338</sup> William Shakespeare: "Henry IV," Part I, Act II, Scene 3 on *Open Source Shakespeare*, [https://www.opensourceshakespeare.org/views/plays/play\\_view.php?WorkID=henry4p1&Act=2&Scene=3&Scope=scene](https://www.opensourceshakespeare.org/views/plays/play_view.php?WorkID=henry4p1&Act=2&Scene=3&Scope=scene) (last accessed July 1, 2022)

<sup>339</sup> Joshua A. Jones: "From Nostalgia to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder: A Mass Society Theory of Psychological Reactions to Combat" in *Student Pulse*, 5, 2 (2013), <http://www.studentpulse.com/a?id=727> (accessed October 5, 2021)

<sup>340</sup> Mark Hallett: "Chapter 20 - Electrophysiologic Evaluation of Movement Disorders" in Michael J. Aminoff (ed.): *Aminoff's Electrodiagnosis in Clinical Neurology*, Sixth Edition (Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders, 2012), p. 451

<sup>341</sup> Rick Mayes and Allan V. Horwitz: "DSM-III and the Revolution in the Classification of Mental Illness" in *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, 41, 3 (Hoboken: Wiley Periodicals, 2006), pp. 249-267

<sup>342</sup> Cæcilie Böck Buhmann & Henrik Steen Andersen: "Diagnostik og behandling af posttraumatisk stress-syndrom" in *Ugeskrift for Læger*, 179 (København: Lægeforeningen, 2017), p. 2

<sup>343</sup> Rick Mayes and Allan V. Horwitz: Op.cit., p. 251

<sup>344</sup> American Psychiatric Association: *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, DSM-5* (Washington: American Psychological Association, 2013). The DSM-5 features the shift from Latin to Arabic numbering in its abbreviation.

categorical diseases”<sup>345</sup> that would effectively sever the mentally ill from the healthy populace, and associate mental illness with deviant pathological traits of the individual, rather than read them as normal responses to traumatic conditions or events in society.

According to ethnopsychiatrists Cathrine Grandsard and Tobie Nathan, this individualised clinical approach to trauma and mental disorder is counter-productive at best, and harmful at worst, since it fails to address the external cause of suffering: “[M]ost models and interventions focus exclusively on individual characteristics of the trauma victim, his or her psyche, biology or cognitive processes (...) thereby excluding the causal, external event and its treatment,” they write.<sup>346</sup> In the synthesised view of Mayes/Horwitz and Grandsard/Nathan, the morbid structure of PTSD remains one of exteriority rather than interiority; one that is experienced upon exposure to extreme and life-threatening events.

Across DSM- and ICD-registers, dissociation—flashbacks, vivid memories, and intrusive dreams—is emphasised as a core feature of PTSD. Further, the DSM-5 specifies PTSD-related dissociation as either characterised by ‘depersonalisation’ or ‘derealisation,’ or both. The former in the form of “[p]ersistent or recurrent experiences of feeling detached from, and as if one were an outside observer of, one’s mental processes or body (e.g., feeling as though one were in a dream; feeling a sense of unreality of self or body or of time moving slowly).” The latter by “[p]ersistent or recurrent experiences of unreality of surroundings (e.g., the world around the individual is experienced as unreal, dreamlike, distant, or distorted).”<sup>347</sup>

Grandsard/Nathan describes these dissociative features as the effects of a ‘shattering of the self’ that happens in response to great fright<sup>348</sup>—an opening up of the self to becoming permeable to radical exteriorities and true otherness: “[N]ot our fellow “others” who are in fact identical,” they write, “but ‘others from another world,’ whose mere encounter causes a breach in our psyches, whose mere presence petrifies us.”<sup>349</sup>

“Taken a step further,” Grandsard/Nathan write, “cumulative fright compels the therapist to construct a new world for his or her traumatized patient,”<sup>350</sup> because the former is shattered beyond repair.

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<sup>345</sup> Rick Mayes and Allan V. Horwitz: Op.cit., p. 249

<sup>346</sup> Catherine Grandsard and Tobie Nathan: “PTSD and Fright Disorders: rethinking trauma from an ethnopsychiatric perspective” on *ethnopsychiatry.net*, 2011, [http://www.ethnopsychiatry.net/Nathan\\_Grandsard\\_paper.doc](http://www.ethnopsychiatry.net/Nathan_Grandsard_paper.doc) (accessed October 7, 2021), p. 2

<sup>347</sup> Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (US). Trauma-Informed Care in Behavioral Health Services. Rockville (MD): Op.cit.

<sup>348</sup> Catherine Grandsard and Tobie Nathan: Op.cit., p. 9

<sup>349</sup> Ibid., p. 18

<sup>350</sup> Ibid.

### *Take Me to Another World*<sup>351</sup>

In his letter to U.S. District Judge Liam O’Grady, dated July 18, 2021, the former soldier and U.S. Air Force intelligence analyst Daniel Hale writes how military service has forever damaged him: “though stress, particularly stress caused by war, can manifest itself at different times and in different ways, the tell-tale signs of a person afflicted by PTSD and depression can often be outwardly observed and are practically universally recognizable. Hard lines about the face and jaw. Eyes, once bright and wide, now deepset and fearful. And an inexplicably sudden loss of interest in things that used to spark joy.”<sup>352</sup>

On Tuesday, July 27, 2021, Hale was sentenced to 45 months in prison after pleading guilty to leaking a trove of government documents that expose the inner workings and severe civilian costs of the U.S. military’s drone programme. Before his sentencing, he had submitted a handwritten letter to the judge, which was made public by the Intercept on July 22, 2021, via [documentcloud.org](https://documentcloud.org).<sup>353</sup> Following his self-description of traumatic suffering as the motivation for his legal transgression, he writes that “[t]o say that the period of my life spent serving in the United States Air Force had an impression on me would be an understatement. It is more accurate to say that it irreversibly transformed my identity as an American, having forever altered the thread of my life’s story, weaved into the fabric of our nation’s history.”<sup>354</sup>

To explain how his 2012-deployment in Afghanistan came to lead to his violation of the American Espionage Act of 1917, Hale describes in detail the horrific acts of virtualised homicide that he had committed as a drone operator, and the severe moral injury this had inflicted upon him, manifesting in the form of persistent depression and PTSD.

With a basis in his long experience as a psychiatrist working with veteran soldiers, Jonathan Shay identifies two related, but distinct, strands of moral injury differing mainly in the ‘who’ of moral agency: “Moral injury is present when there has been (a) a betrayal of ‘what’s right’; (b) either by a person in legitimate authority (...) or by one’s self (...) (c) in a high stakes

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<sup>351</sup> Charlotte Johannesson (artist) and Lars Bang Larsen, Mercedes Pineda and Irene Villén (eds.): *Take Me to Another World* (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, 2021), published on the occasion of Johannesson’s solo exhibition, April 7–August 16, 2021

<sup>352</sup> Daniel Hale: “Letter to Judge Liam O’Grady,” Case 1:19-cr-00059-LO, Document 240-1, July, 22 2021, on [documentcloud.org](https://documentcloud.org), July 18, 2021, <https://s3.documentcloud.org/documents/21015583/daniel-hale-letter-to-judge-liam-ogrady.pdf> (accessed October 4, 2021), p. 1

<sup>353</sup> Ibid.

<sup>354</sup> Ibid.

situation.”<sup>355</sup> Both forms impair the “capacity for trust and elevate despair, suicidality, and interpersonal violence. They deteriorate character,” Shay writes.<sup>356</sup>

In court, Daniel Hale concluded that “I am here because I stole something that was never mine to take—precious human life (...) I couldn’t keep living in a world in which people pretend that things weren’t happening that were. Please, your honor, forgive me for taking papers instead of human lives.”<sup>357</sup>

Like the Vietnam veteran, who was described as experiencing an overarching sense of connection as he was falling from the sky, Daniel Hale’s letter also accentuates inter-human and transcultural solidarity and compassion as a contrast to nationalist demarcations and warfare, and as a deeper pulse with which to connect in the hope of restoring his own humanity and the world he inhabits:

[B]ecoming increasingly aware that the war had very little to do with preventing terror from coming into the United States and a lot more to do with protecting the profits of weapons manufacturers and so-called defense contractors, the evidence of this fact was laid bare all around me. In the longest and most technologically advanced war in American history, contract mercenaries outnumbered uniform-wearing soldiers 2 to 1 and earned as much as 10 times their salary. Meanwhile, it did not matter whether it was, as I had seen, an Afghan farmer blown in half, yet miraculously conscious and pointlessly trying to scoop his insides off the ground, or whether it was an American flag-draped coffin lowered into Arlington National Cemetery to the sound of a 21-gun salute. Bang, bang, bang. Both served to justify the easy flow of capital at the cost of blood—theirs and ours. When I think about this I am grief-stricken and ashamed of myself for the things I’ve done to support it.<sup>358</sup>

After his deployment, Hale dedicated himself to anti-war activism in the context of which he was invited to participate in a peace conference, where he encountered Fazil bin Ali Jaber, whose brother and cousin, Salem and Waleed bin Ali Jaber, had been killed by American reaper drones on Hale’s watch in 2012. The encounter made a stark impression on Hale—yet, when offered a well-paid desk job in the military, he decided to delay returning to college even if he was starting to wonder if he would be “contributing again to the problem of money and war by accepting to return as a defense contractor. Worse was my growing apprehension that everyone around me was also taking part in the collective delusion and denial that was used to

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<sup>355</sup> Jonathan Shay: Op.cit., p. 182

<sup>356</sup> Ibid.

<sup>357</sup> Ryan Devereux and Murtaza Hussein: “Daniel Hale Sentenced to 45 Months in Prison for Drone Leak” on *The Intercept*, July 27, 2021, <https://theintercept.com/2021/07/27/daniel-hale-drone-leak-sentencing/> (accessed October 4, 2021)

<sup>358</sup> Daniel Hale: Op.cit., p. 4



justify our [exorbitant] salaries for comparatively easy labor. The thing I feared the most at the time was the temptation not to question it.”<sup>359</sup>

In the face of the worlds that are created and consolidated by capitalist warfare in Afghanistan—and of the violence and cynicism with which it is carried out in the name of Hale’s national collective, the United States of America—Hale concludes that it is moral injury that lies at the crux of his post-traumatic suffering. An injury that may only heal through his active contribution to supporting the advancement of dissident counter-worlds against the American war machine—even if only temporarily—by leaking the papers.

At this point, it is fair to ask what it is that the repentant American soldier and a Danish birthing mother share through trauma that justifies this lengthy description and my comparison of the two?

With or against their will, both labour at the service of the nation.

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<sup>359</sup> Ibid., p. 9

## *Dirty Labour*

In his recently published book *Dirty Work: Essential Jobs and the Hidden Toll of Inequality in America*,<sup>360</sup> journalist Eyal Press examines a line of jobs—including Hale’s profession as drone operator—which he labels ‘dirty work,’ since they involve varying levels of abuse directed against humans or animals, often in the form of outright violence or use of force. Press borrows the term ‘dirty work’ from sociologist Everett Hughes’ excoriation of the relations between in- and out-groups—good people and dirty workers—in post-war Germany and USA: “[T]he distinctions between *in* and *out* may be drawn in various ways, and nothing is more important for both the student of society and the educator than to discover how these lines are made and how they may be drawn in more just and sensible ways”<sup>361</sup> (his italicisation).

Departing from Hughes’ assertion that ‘dirty work’ does not first and foremost originate in the lacking morality of particularly crude people—which ‘good’ ordinary people would otherwise like to tell themselves—but rather from a complicated enmeshment of various social, economic, and political, factors (similar to those that set the Kjeltrings apart as its own cast of untouchables in Midwestern Jutland), Press takes aim at the resultant moral injury of the dirty workers, which may manifest through a line of psychological and somatic symptoms such as PTSD, feeling queasy, or losing one’s hair or appetite.<sup>362</sup>

In her article “Women’s Work, Dirty Work,” sociologist Sharon C. Bolton links Hughes’ notion of dirty work with gynaecology, childbirth, and the private domain of women’s reproductive health through a qualitative study carried out among gynaecology nurses. And extending the view of reproduction as a case of society’s dirty work from the nurse to the labouring mother herself, cultural theorist Paula A. Treichler emphasises the direct relations between childbearing and nation-building: “Whatever else a culture does or does not do, if it wishes to reproduce itself, it must produce new members. Because cultural reproduction depends upon human reproduction, questions of childbearing are invariably significant in the life of a culture,”<sup>363</sup> she writes, thereby cementing labouring women’s complicity with the nation state: “Certainly productivity in childbearing [is] linked to the labor-intensive needs of both

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<sup>360</sup> Eyal Press: *Dirty Work: Essential Jobs and the Hidden Toll of Inequality in America* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2021)

<sup>361</sup> Everett C. Hughes: “Good People and Dirty Work” in *Social Problems*, 10, 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press on behalf of the Society for the Study of Social Problems, 1962), p. 8

<sup>362</sup> Eyal Press: “Dual Loyalties” in *op.cit.*, p. 28

<sup>363</sup> Paula A. Treichler: “Feminism, Medicine, and the Meaning of Childbirth” in Mary Jacobus, Evelyn Fox Keller, and Sally Shuttleworth (eds.): *Body/Politics—Women and the Discourses of Science* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 123

colonialism and capitalism, interests that have at once placed childbirth within the realm of the public interest and given the state certain oversight responsibilities.”<sup>364</sup>

Treichler’s analysis resonates in the queer-theoretical writings of Lee Edelman, who understands biological reproductive work such as childbearing and labour as normative and system-supportive activities of ‘sameness.’<sup>365</sup> As such, he criticises what he calls ‘reproductive futurism’ with the idea of the innocent child in need of protection as its emblem. Edelman deliberately refrains from engaging or complicating the agency of women—or the historically contingent lack thereof—in establishing this order.<sup>366</sup> Thereby, his excoriation of the reproductive imaginary equates women with the symbolic charge endowed to them by patriarchal society and render them guilty by mere association as complicit breeders of the status quo.

Taking it one step further, Italian feminist writer and partisan Joyce Lussu understands the traditional mother as the soldier’s direct flipside: “These two things complement each other. Because she stays home, innocent with the children. And he steps out to protect the family and the nation. But of course, women are not innocent in the phenomenon of war. They have contributed to the myth of the strong man, who defends the territory and wife and children,”<sup>367</sup> Lussu writes, thereby forefronting the structural similarities between the nation state and the nuclear family (my translation from the Danish version).

That women’s activities within, and contributions from, the private sphere of sexuality and reproduction may amount to military collaboration and complicity, is—according to Danish historian Anette Warring—a consistent feature of national ideology, which becomes particularly visible during wartime. Warring has examined the history and outcomes of the sexual fraternisation between German private soldiers and the so-called ‘German girls’ (i.e., ‘tyskerpiger’) during the Second World War, which culminated with the Danish resistance movements’ hair-cutting actions of August 1943.<sup>368</sup> Warring writes:

If the nation’s women fail to live up to national ideals of respectable and virtuous behaviour by devotedly allowing their sons and husbands to die in fight for the nation, and if they do

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<sup>364</sup> Ibid., p. 130

<sup>365</sup> ‘Sameness’ i.e. ‘unchangeability’ See: Lee Edelman: *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004)

<sup>366</sup> Ibid., p. 165 n. 10

<sup>367</sup> Joyce Lussu: “Den traditionelle moder er bagsiden af soldaten” In Kiki Amsberg & Aafke Steenhuis (eds): *Kærlighed og magt* (Copenhagen: Tiderne Skifter, 1992), pp. 285-297, quoted in Anette Warring: “Køn, seksualitet og national identitet” in *Historisk Tidsskrift*, 16, 3

(Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen/SAXO Institute, 1994), pp. 293-314

<sup>368</sup> Ibid., p. 299

not comply with the nation's traditions, institutions, and practices regarding sexuality, reproduction, and marriage, they are seen as a threat towards its very survival."<sup>369</sup>

Despite the seemingly disparate struggles of soldiers and mothers then—taking and giving life, respectively—their contributions to the national project (and the dirty labour and potential moral injury implied) mirror each other in ominous ways.

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<sup>369</sup> Ibid., p. 308 (my translation from the Danish)

*Blood Moon*

(diary entry, September 27, 2015)

My partner is traveling, and I am home alone with my one-year-old son who is sleeping by my side. I therefore cannot set the alarm to wake me up during the night, but I am so excited that I manage to wake myself up a number of times—enough to experience the different phases of the rare astronomical convergence of a super moon with a total lunar eclipse causing the appearance of a blood moon on the Nordic night sky.

I see it rise, getting tainted. And I dream about it all night. The projection of myself-as-part-of-the-planet-Earth into space. Megalomaniac impulses, or: My dissolution into something much larger, which I cannot create or control, but that I may witness, ride, or resonate.

This was an important encounter.

## Chapter 2

### Active Mythic Thinking

#### *Tropicália*

We left Denmark in January 2016, shortly after the Danish Broadcasting Network launched the television programme *Knald for Danmark* (i.e., ‘Fuck for Denmark’). Supposedly, the programme was intended as a satirical attempt to inspire Danish couples to have more children in order to maintain the size of the population. I never watched the show, but the overt nationalist bent of the title, and of the PR advertising it, gave me the chills: The low fertility rates of 1.7 children per woman is primarily a concern among Denmark’s native white population, while in year 2000 immigrant women from so-called ‘non-Western’ countries<sup>370</sup> birthed an average of 3.3 children.<sup>371</sup> Since, the two groups’ fertility rates have approximated each other, according to economists Marianne Frank Hansen and Peter Stephensen as a direct result of targeted political efforts to limit family reunification from non-Western countries.<sup>372</sup>

On this backdrop, the title seemed to resonate with broader political aspirations since the late 1990s to protect Denmark against rising levels of immigration and globalisation based on an underlying narrative that so-called ‘ethnic Danes’—and everything specifically ‘Danish’—was increasingly endangered. In combination with my own labouring experience, the title thus fitted my paranoid mind with the complete scenography for a proto-fascist tale of a Danish Lebensborn<sup>373</sup> ‘Strukturmutter’<sup>374</sup> and her unwilling but disempowered daughters that

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<sup>370</sup> Marianne Frank Hansen & Peter Stephensen: “Danmarks Fremtidige Befolkning: Befolkningsfremskriving 2012” on *Danish Research Institute for Economic Analysis and Modelling (DREAM)*, 2011, [https://dreamgruppen.dk/media/9964/r2012\\_01.pdf](https://dreamgruppen.dk/media/9964/r2012_01.pdf) (accessed November 22, 2022), p. 75

<sup>371</sup> Ibid.

<sup>372</sup> Ibid.

<sup>373</sup> “Heinrich Himmler founded the Lebensborn project on December 12, 1935, the same year the Nuremberg Laws outlawed intermarriage with Jews and others who were deemed inferior. (...) The purpose (...) was to offer to young girls who were deemed ‘racially pure’ the possibility to give birth to a child in secret. The child was then given to the SS organization which took charge in the child’s education and adoption. (...) The first Lebensborn home was opened in 1936 (...) Ultimately, there were 10 Lebensborn homes established in Germany, nine in Norway, two in Austria, and one each in Belgium, Holland, France, Luxembourg and Denmark.” See: “The Nazi Party: The ‘Lebensborn’ Program (1935 - 1945)” on *Jewish Virtual Library*, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-quot-lebensborn-quot-program> (accessed November 18, 2022)

<sup>374</sup> The ‘Strukturmutter’ is a concept originally coined by Harald Szeemann, curator of dOCUMENTA 5 (1972). The concept was appropriated and repurposed by visual artist Lea Porsager for her dOCUMENTA 13 installation, *The Anatta Experiment* (2013). My use of the word here is a paranoid inversion of both Szeemann’s and Porsager’s understanding of their ‘Mutters,’ whom they both trusted with revolutionary capacities: “In 1978, Szeemann used the image of the multi-breasted Goddess *Artemis of Ephesus* to structure the catalog for his exhibition *Monte Verità – Le Mammelle della Verità*: One breast for Lebensreform, one breast for Dance and Art, one for Sexual Revolution, and so on. (...) Casa Anatta became Strukturmutter’s body. Not Szeemann’s Strukturmutter, but a structure with *Urmutter* issues, enabling the 7 anattaists to revolutionize their individual *mythologies* (to use Szeemann’s term) and become electric impulses flickering along Mutter’s neural pathways.” See: Lea Porsager: “Anatta Experiment” on *antipyrine.dk*, <https://antipyrine.dk/products/lea-porsager-anatta-experiment> (accessed December 10, 2022)

would carry her many children and labour in one eternity at the service of an exploitative racist patriarchy hospitable to no one. I was desperate to leave.

It was therefore a lucky coincidence that my partner was offered a position in São Paulo including visas and temporary residency status for the whole family in Brazil. While I had never envisioned myself as part of an expatriate community reliant on elitist and exclusionary insurance schemes in the place of the universal welfare system I came from, this was where I would soon find myself, and my initial relief at repositioning myself beyond the reach of the Danish state cannot be exaggerated. What I did not understand at the time, however, was that my newly gained Brazilian liberty was precisely as suffocating and racist as the Danish enclosure I was running from: Both were wooing my blue-eyed blondness and wanting me to spread whatever it meant to them at the expense of people slightly more melanated than me. While in Denmark this impulse is sought legitimised by right-wingers through the stated purpose of cultural and ethnic preservation—i.e. forced ‘first nation’ narratives<sup>375</sup> that link contemporary Denmark to a mythic Viking heritage and a thousand-years’ native land and people<sup>376</sup>—Brazil has a history of targeted ‘branqueamento’: A series of public measures that were launched between 1889 and 1911 in response to the country’s abolition of slavery in 1888<sup>377</sup> with the specific purpose of diluting the population’s blackness through a surge of whiter-than-African immigration from Europe, the Middle East, and Japan, among others.

While my partner and I were both struggling to read the topography of our new terrain, we found ourselves being equally difficult for our surroundings to decipher: White-skinned and employed in the arts, in Latin America we could belong nowhere but among the elites, while in Denmark we had been part of a lower middle class precariat struggling to make ends meet between artistic practice and different day jobs, as well as occasional unemployment benefits for my part. Yet, coming from Denmark and having access to such social benefits is already in many ways comparable to being part of the global elites on the level of social security and general livelihood. However you would look at it, the class registers home and away did not translate. Even very wealthy people in Latin America may witness on a daily basis, when passing through the city, levels of poverty and hardship that the average low-

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<sup>375</sup> Padraig Kirwan and David Stirrup: “‘I’m Indigenous, I’m Indigenous, I’m Indigenous’: Indigenous Rights, British Nationalism, and the European Far Right” in Padraig Kirwan and David Stirrup (eds.) *Tribal Fantasies: Native Americans in the European Imaginary, 1900-2010*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) pp. 59-84

<sup>376</sup> Richard Jenkins: “‘Roast Pork and Lasagne’: Modern Danskhed” in op.cit., p. 219

<sup>377</sup> Juanma Sánchez Arteaga: “Biological Discourses on Human Races and Scientific Racism in Brazil (1832-1911)” in *Journal of the history of biology*, 50 (Berlin: Springer Science+Business Media, 2017), pp. 267-314

income Dane may never encounter—and conversely: In spite of the inherent privileges of our specifically Scandinavian trajectories through life, these had also provided us with embodied trans-class experiences that our new elitist peers did not have, such as my long track record as a buzz-girl and waitress, and my working as a live-in maid for a wealthy family as a young adult; both formative experiences that have shaped my ethical and political orientations in life.

Regarded through the rigid lens of Brazilian class society, my social mobility from domestic subservience to art school and ultimately living and working in the international art world, would seem close to impossible. Similarly, the experience and reality of my own class journey initially made it difficult for me to truly comprehend or acknowledge the hardwired nature of the racialised classist structures I was contributing to and upholding by way of my sheer presence as a white body in the new world I had arrived in. As a consequence, it took a while before I was able to perceive the deep chasms separating the people I would encounter when visiting a home or navigating the city. I would often find myself identifying with the working people, maids, and servants, while they and everyone else by racial default would equate me with the gentry. It was an unnerving mess.

In hindsight, it would have been the perfect outset for a critical ethnography of the lives and minds of the Latin American upper middle class and their staff, because through my own working experience in the service sector I could in many ways—but, importantly, far from all<sup>378</sup>—relate to some of the consciousnesses and concerns of the latter, while formally passing as the former. But this was not my in- or aspiration at the time. When we arrived in Brazil, I was still struggling with the emotional turmoil and the deep sense of un-belonging that my labour had instilled in me. Even if our son was two years old at the time of our relocation, I still felt like a gaping wound.

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<sup>378</sup> As indicated by my personal history, the Danish welfare system facilitates levels of social mobility—not least through its generous universal study grants—that are largely unthinkable in many other countries including Brazil.



## White Cow

Through an internationalisation stipend from the Danish Arts Foundation, I succeeded in securing a studio at the downtown contemporary art institution Pivô, where I would commence working shortly after our arrival in São Paulo. Before leaving Denmark, I had initiated a new project in the vein of *Mirror Therapy* that would likewise attempt to envision potentialities for radical other-becoming via—not ‘in spite of’ or ‘beyond’—what is immediately experienced as utter destruction. Through the radically transversal figure of Io, I had begun probing the mythographic relations between the physical properties of the Galilean satellite and its mythological namesake—the priestess Io, a cow-woman from Greek-Roman mythology—as well as her coincidental associations with binary code (1 and 0, I and O), and the Italian first person pronoun, ‘io.’

Since my dramatic birth had severely troubled my sense of self and my orientation in the world, Io resonated strongly with the volatile and chaotic nature of my newly-acquired mental state, and I felt completely aligned with the shapeshifting self that was coincidentally called forth by translating the word ‘io’ from Galileo’s Italian into the English ‘I.’ I felt somehow seen, when I learnt that the Io-moon is the most volcanically active body in our solar system, since this was in direct accord with what I had become: Constantly collapsing, constantly renewing, unpredictable even to myself, and thereby completely predictable, all the same, looping as I was in trauma’s echo chamber. I searched my way through all of NASA’s web-based image archives and downloaded every satellite depiction of the moon I could find, from the two 1977-Voyager missions, through the Galileo and Cassini missions in 1989 and 1997, to the 2006-New Horizon mission.<sup>379</sup>

Never before had I considered using my own personal experience as the outset or object for artistic scrutiny. On the contrary, I had always gone to great lengths to make sure that my artworks be conceptually and thematically independent of me as a person. Not because I did not want to share or to be stingy with myself, but because I thought it would be inappropriate to bring in my own narrative or account, which I regarded as parenthetical and spoilt in comparison with larger local and global struggles and inequalities. My impulse had

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<sup>379</sup> NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory and California Institute of Technology: “NASA Photojournal: Images of Io” on *Photojournal*, NASA, <https://photojournal.jpl.nasa.gov/target/io?subselect=Spacecraft%3AVoyager+1%3A> (accessed October 15, 2021)

therefore always been to use my artistic sensitivity ‘beyond myself,’ and in solidarity with what I perceived to be more acute or important struggles than my own.

With Io this all changed, as she—‘I’—came furiously galloping onto the stage in the incarnation of a white cow.<sup>380</sup> First in response to the small invitation afforded by the mistranslation of the Italian ‘io’ into the English ‘I.’ Having set a lot of selves in motion, now Io prompted my self to step forth. If I were to convincingly convey the perspectives of any of those other selves—the moon, the maiden, the code, the cow—I would have to acknowledge my own stakes in the entanglement too. This meant that for the first time in my professional artistic life, I invited my own artistic fabulation—my imaginative and emotional capacities—in on a conscious and active level. Not that I have not previously made decisions based on my own artistic judgement, of course, but I have always made sure that the overarching decisions of any project would surpass gut feeling, and be based on cautiously developed conceptual machineries driven by the inner necessities of a given thematic, and of my applied materials,<sup>381</sup> which I imagined granting as much—or more—authority in deciding on the onward course of action as myself.

In my earlier practice, this attempt to dilute authorship had gone hand in hand with a stark insistence on material factuality: I would not appropriate my materials as representative vessels to mediate something alien to themselves, I told myself, and I understood this stance as an analogy for my ethical orientation in life, trying not to instrumentalise others for personal or professional ends. As such, I would always think that I worked with presentation rather than representation, and that my primary responsibility and engagement as an artist would be to identify the take or manoeuvre that would prompt any given material to unfold beyond itself and become image-generating in its own right. E.g., my series of video feedback installations, *RETROACTION* (2008-14),<sup>382</sup> where the physical properties of the set-up (the space and the internal relations between the projectors and cameras) generated the appearance of a fluctuating graphic pattern across the projection screen. And similarly in *Mirror Therapy* (2015-16),<sup>383</sup> where the material properties of—and the art- and geopolitical histories related to—the Afghan rock lapis lazuli would direct the

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<sup>380</sup> In the Greek/Roman myth, Jupiter transforms the young woman Io into a white heifer to hide her from his jealous wife Juno.

<sup>381</sup> See: Marie Kølbæk Iversen (artist): *RETROACTION*-series [video installation] (2008-14); *Mirror Therapy* [stone DIA slide installation] (2015-16), *Slide* [stone DIA slide installation] (2014) See: Marie Kølbæk Iversen: [portfolio] on [mariekoelbaek.com](http://mariekoelbaek.com), [http://mariekoelbaek.com/portfolio\\_2022.pdf](http://mariekoelbaek.com/portfolio_2022.pdf) (accessed December 4, 2022)

<sup>382</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>383</sup> *Ibid.*

development of the work series. In both these cases, I understood my own role as artist as that of collaborator to, rather than master of, my materials. And I understood my initial probing, tests, and incisions, into the material as ‘questions’ to which the material could respond in different ways. Through this back-and-forth negotiation between the material and myself, the work would develop beyond what I would have been capable of imagining beforehand. This way of working thus functioned as a learning process and a source of curiosity for myself as much as it was a mode of expression targeted at an audience. However, then, I would tend to understand as the materials’ ‘responses’ only what could be made physically tangible, materially or sensorially perceivable. Consequently, this would immediately rule out working with any being, phenomenon, or entity, whose presence might be merely virtual, ephemeral, or physically out of reach.

Looking at the unapologetically digital satellite images of lunar *Io* that I had downloaded to my computer from NASA’s archives, I would have to develop an entirely new working method to engage with them, since the moon itself is indisputably beyond my reach. And suddenly, it seemed that the chairs had turned, and that I was now the one prompted to respond to the probing questions of an alien entity making incisions into me, testing my answers. Having already been invited in as a self through the mistranslation from ‘*Io*’ to ‘*I*,’ I thus asked this self to outline ways to represent *Io*’s reality of perpetual volcanic collapse through the images based on the artistic intuition of the ‘*I*’ that was me. And I went through the digital pile of images and grouped them for a series of four short videos, which—together and apart—would attest to *Io*’s restlessness, malleability, and the moon’s perpetual undoing through a series of seamless loops that would structurally reflect the protracted character of her lunar orbit.<sup>384</sup>

Answering to the physical properties of *Io*-the-moon—its hyper-volcanicity and constant changeability—I decided that the video-installation would also be ever-changing and thus adapt to every new exhibition context it would feature within: That both the number of videos, their internal relations, and the screening-technology applied, would be subject to ongoing change, so that the experience of viewing the work would always change slightly, just like the moon itself is also always changing. And I titled the work *Io/I* with reference to both the Italian-English mistranslation setting the project in motion, and to the different names assigned to the moon by the two Renaissance astronomers Galileo Galilei and Simon Marius, who

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<sup>384</sup> To see the four videos, refer to attached folder: 2\_appendix B - digital/*Io-I*/videos/

discovered it during the same January days in 1610. While Galilei was first to present his discovery of Io and the other Jovian moons, which he named Jupiter I (Io), Jupiter II, Jupiter III, and Jupiter IV, it has been Marius' names that have been used by posterity to assign these moons, namely: Io, Europa, Ganymede, and Callisto.

My title *Io/I* thus references both Marius' and Galileo's names for the moon.









Marie Kølback Iversen: *Io/1*  
Tallinn Photomonth, Kai Art Centre, 2019





Marie Kølbaek Iversen: *Io/I*  
The Moon, Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, 2018



### *What's in a Name?*

A few months after we arrived in Brazil, on July 5, 2016, NASA's Juno satellite arrived at Jupiter after traveling 2.8 billion kilometres across the galaxy, documenting Io 'en passant.' Fitted with advanced custom-made cameras and specialised measuring devices developed by the world's foremost researchers, the satellite's mission was to uncover as many of Jupiter's secrets as possible: His strong gravitational field, his intense auroras, his cloud being.

A NASA compilation of mission names refers to the Juno mission by the acronym Jupiter Near-polar Orbiter: JUNO.<sup>385</sup> However, since its launch in 2011, the project itself has consistently emphasised the name's mythological association to the Greco-Roman goddess Juno, Jupiter's wife,<sup>386</sup> whose jealous character is appropriately close to the inquisitive nature of the space probe. NASA's Juno mission website states that "[i]n Greek and Roman mythology, Jupiter drew a veil of clouds around himself to hide his mischief. It was Jupiter's wife, the goddess Juno, who was able to peer through the clouds and reveal Jupiter's true nature. The Juno spacecraft will also look beneath the clouds to see what the planet is up to[.]"<sup>387</sup> As such, two seemingly contradictory trends make themselves visible as they converge on the mission's trajectory: The overt positivist progressionism of advanced modern science, and the active mythic thought it is based upon.

While naming a space probe after the mythological companion of the target planet may seem like an innocent play on names and not itself a feature of active mythic thinking, a closer look at the convergences between naming acts and historical events related to Jupiter and the Jovian system may prove otherwise. Starting from the mytheme of Jupiter disguised as a cloud, I attempt to experimentally trace and weave the mytho-historico bases for the cosmographical mapping of our universe, which was sparked by Galileo Galilei's 1610-discovery of Jupiter's four largest moons—a discovery that served to substantiate Copernicus' heliocentric worldview and led to the Copernican revolution.

The image of cloud-veiled Jupiter is drawn from the Io-myth, which also inspired the naming of Jupiter's innermost moon, Io—a volcanic world in constant eruption. Cross-

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<sup>385</sup> "Mission Acronyms & Definitions" on *nasa.gov*, NASA, [https://www.nasa.gov/pdf/224264main\\_AMPM\\_4-25-08\\_Acronyms.pdf](https://www.nasa.gov/pdf/224264main_AMPM_4-25-08_Acronyms.pdf) (accessed November 20, 2019)

<sup>386</sup> "Juno Launch. Press kit/August 2011" on *jpl.nasa.gov*, NASA, [https://www.jpl.nasa.gov/news/press\\_kits/JunoLaunch.pdf](https://www.jpl.nasa.gov/news/press_kits/JunoLaunch.pdf) (accessed November 20, 2019)

<sup>387</sup> "Juno Overview" on *nasa.gov*, NASA, [https://www.nasa.gov/mission\\_pages/juno/overview/index.html](https://www.nasa.gov/mission_pages/juno/overview/index.html) (accessed November 20, 2019)

reading between Ovid's version of the myth in *Metamorphoses*,<sup>388</sup> and Aeschylus' dramatizations in *Prometheus Bound* and *The Suppliants*,<sup>389</sup> provides me with an overview of the narrative, which starts with the river god Inachus crying over his daughter Io, who is missing:

Jupiter had seen her walking along her father's river and immediately started lusting for her. Thus, he ventured out to seduce her by talking to her in dreams. When she kept resisting his attempts, he finally forced Inachus to dispel her from his home. Disguised as a cloud, Jupiter raped Io when she was passing through the meadows of Lerna.

From her position on Mount Olympus, Juno saw the heavy amassment of clouds over the Mediterranean and instantly knew that it was her husband who was up to no good, so she came down to confront him. Seeing her coming, Jupiter transformed Io into a white heifer to hide her from his wife, but Juno saw through the deceit and demanded the cow as a present. Jupiter could do nothing but comply and give her to Juno. To prevent Jupiter from visiting Io anew, Juno placed the cow under the watch of Argus Panoptes—the god with many eyes. To liberate Io from his wife's dominion, Jupiter sent Mercury with his sword, his syrinx,<sup>390</sup> and caduceus<sup>391</sup> to kill Argus.

Mercury succeeded, but as soon as Juno learned what had happened, she became mad with jealousy and sent a gadfly to bite Io every time she stopped to rest. As such, Io was sent roaming the Earth, transfigured, restless, and in pain. At last, she arrived in Egypt where, by the redemptive touch of Jupiter, she gave birth to her son Epaphos and regained her maiden form. Horns however remained on her forehead, whereby she was fused—at narrative and cultic levels, practically, historically, and mythologically—with the Egyptian fertility and mother goddess Isis, epitome of female authority; she who has gained her insight through pain.

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<sup>388</sup> Ovid: *Metamorphoses*, trans. Otto Steen Due (København: Gyldendal, 2005) (8 CE), pp. 30-36

<sup>389</sup> Aeschylus and Philip Vellacott (transl.): *Prometheus Bound and Other Plays* (London: Penguin Books, 1961) (479-242 BCE), pp. 20-86

<sup>390</sup> Panpipe

<sup>391</sup> Sleep wand

Understanding the gadfly's bites as the pain of recurring labour contractions, and Io's transformations as a reflection of the phases women go through in childbirth, the Io-myth and Io's eventual liberation as Isis<sup>392</sup> can be understood as a mythological comfort to birthing women. And zooming out—de-essentialising her particular pain—it stands as a consolation to all sufferers that this too will end. Nothing is forever.

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<sup>392</sup> "I am Praise; I am Majesty; I am Bat with Her Two Faces; I am the One Who Is Saved, and I have saved myself from all things evil." See: Raymond Oliver Faulkner: *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts* (Oxford: Oxford Clarendon Press, 1969) p. 181, Utterance 506 and Jenny Hill: "Goddesses associated with Isis" and "Isis" on *Ancient Egypt Online*, <https://ancientegyptonline.co.uk/isisgod/> and <https://ancientegyptonline.co.uk/isis/> (accessed November 16, 2022)

### *Time and Space Travel*

500 years separate Aeschylus' and Ovid's renderings of the Io-myth in their literary works, *The Suppliants* and *Metamorphoses*. The latter sees the Greek-Roman syncretisation of Io with the Egyptian cow- and mother goddess Isis, which occurred in the face of geopolitical developments in Mediterranean Antiquity. Millennia of trade relations, wars and reciprocal colonisations and settlements amongst Greeks, Phoenicians, Egyptians, and Semites, among others, led to a high degree of cultural and religious exchange, which we see directly reflected in the region's myths as they have been told and retold.

This means that in addition to reading the Io-myth as a sexual and birthing account revolving around the girl Io, who upon being raped by Jupiter is transformed into a heifer and driven by Juno's gadfly on a desperate flight, until she is ultimately saved—and with Ovid deified upon the delivery of her son, the touch-born Epaphos—it may also be understood as an account of colonization and migration in the Mediterranean and beyond with the white cow Io traveling far and wide, planting her offspring as she goes along. In Aeschylus' rendition of the myth, which was written some 400 years before our time, Io's apotheosis—that is, her deification as Isis—is not mentioned. Instead, he focuses on Io's wanderings from Argos in Greece, across Asia Minor, the Middle East, India, to Egypt, and on the prediction that the Danaïds—50 sisters in the sixth generation after Io—will return to Argos and establish a new civilization after they have all, except for one, killed their kindred husbands. As such, what is emphasized in Aeschylus' account are the intercultural exchanges between Greece and its geographical surroundings in the centuries preceding and ensuing Aeschylus' own time.

Approximately year 8 CE, Ovid published the *Metamorphosis*, in which Io's apotheosis as Isis is not emphasized either, even if it is mentioned towards the end of the fable as a conclusion to her plight and journeys. As such it manifests the results of the exchanges that Aeschylus' versioning of the myth attests to and portends: Marked cultural, mythological, and religious syncretisation, including the assimilation of Egyptian mythology into Greek-Roman religious and cultic practice.

This syncretisation was not uncontested in Antiquity, however. For example, the writer Aelian recounts how Egyptians generally disagreed that Isis should be understood as the

consummation of Io.<sup>393</sup> Rather they insisted that Isis is a deity in her own right, since she has been worshipped in Egypt through time immemorial and long before Roman mythographers fused her with Io.

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<sup>393</sup> Claudius Aelianus: "Apis" in *On the Characteristics of Animals*, Volume II, Book XI (Cambridge/London: Loeb Classical Library and Harvard University Press, 1959) (c. 175 – c. 235 CE), p. 367

## Modern Science

According to Aeschylus and Ovid, Io is liberated upon giving birth to her child, and with Ovid she is subsequently transformed into “A Goddess now, through all th’ Aegyptian State: And serv’d by priests, who in white linnen wait.”<sup>394</sup> Io becomes the goddess Isis.

Traveling 1,600 years forward in time and moving 1,843 kilometres westwards from Ovid’s location in present-day Romania to Ansbach in Germany, we encounter the Renaissance astronomer Simon Marius, who in 1614 named Jupiter’s innermost moon after the cow-woman Io from Greek-Roman mythology. Although making his discoveries during the same January days in 1610 as Galileo Galilei, German astronomer Simon Marius did not publish his records of discovering Jupiter’s four largest moons until 1614.<sup>395</sup> This caused Galileo to accuse Marius of plagiarism when his *Mundus Iovialis* was finally released, which for centuries compromised Marius’ reputation until he was finally posthumously vindicated in 1907 by a Dutch jury confirming that he had made his discoveries independently of Galileo. Regardless of this dispute, however, Marius’ names have been the ones used by posterity to assign the moons, not Galileo’s. In his own words, from *Mundus Iovialis*, Marius named the moons after “Io, Europa, the boy Ganymede, and Callisto, who greatly pleased lustful Jupiter”<sup>396</sup> (my accentuation). The question is what it means to tie these four victims of Jupiter’s ‘lust,’ of whom Io is our main focus and protagonist here, to their assailant in astronomical time?

Galileo and Marius made their discoveries in a period marked by what could be called ‘constitutional misogyny,’ the Central European witch-hunts reaching their peaks between 1580 and 1630, according to feminist Marxist scholar Silvia Federici.<sup>397</sup> As Federici has shown, that this period would mark the birth of the scientific revolution to deliver humanity from the superstitions of the Dark Ages was immediately bad news for women, who—at best—came to rank among the ‘natural phenomena’ for science to unveil and disenchant.<sup>398</sup> Working around female trauma, pain and sexual injustice via the cosmological metaphor involuntarily

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<sup>394</sup> Sir Samuel Garth, John Dryden (transl.): “Ovid’s Metamorphoses” on *The Internet Classics Archive*, <http://classics.mit.edu/Ovid/metam.html> (accessed October 15, 2021)

<sup>395</sup> Jay M. Pasachoff: “Simon Marius’s *Mundus Iovialis*: 400th Anniversary in Galileo’s Shadow” in *Journal for the History of Astronomy* 46, 2, (New York: SAGE Publishing, 2015): pp. 218-234

<sup>396</sup> Arthur Octavius Prickard and Albert van Helden: “The World of Jupiter, English Translation of *Mundus Iovialis*” in *Simon Marius and His Research. Historical & Cultural Astronomy* (Cham: Springer, 2018)

<sup>397</sup> Silvia Federici: “The Great Witch-Hunt in Europe” in *Caliban and the Witch* (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 2004), p. 166

<sup>398</sup> Pierre Hadot: “Artemis and Isis” in *The Veil of Isis*, trans. Michael Chase (Cambridge and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 239

provided to me by Marius is not original however; in *The Body in Pain* Elaine Scarry states that there is a long tradition for invoking remote cosmologies as analogies of pain. On her side she mentions “very distant Seyfert galaxies, a class of objects within which violent events of unknown nature occur from time to time.”<sup>399</sup> To Scarry, the temptation to use such analogies is in itself a sign of pain’s triumph. Yet to me, invoking Io in all her multiplicity—maiden, moon, code, cow, Marius, Galileo, me, you as ‘me’—is an attempt to lift her pain and trauma out of the realm of the particular and insist that it is shareable beyond the threshold of any of her specific abstractions. And beyond shareable; that it is—as the 2011-decision to launch a probe named ‘Juno’ demonstrates—a myth still in the process of being told, and thus relevant for us to engage with today.

While the insistence on Isis-as-Io in Marius’ naming evokes one line of problematics, another is raised through the second introductory sentence in his book: “...who greatly pleased lustful Jupiter.” In this lies a diminution and a collapse of the complex histories and traumas of each of the moons’ mythological namesakes, including the boychild Ganymede who was abducted by Jupiter to become his cupbearer on Mount Olympus. The Roman name for Ganymede is ‘Catamite’—a word which in time has become a derogative term used to refer to boys groomed for sexual purposes and the recipient part of male anal intercourse. While the ancient Greeks did practice pederasty as part of social upbringing, Marius’ representation simplifies the complex relations between Jupiter and each of his ‘moons’ and renders it a uniquely exploitative sexual one—which Marius, notably, seems to sanction, placing Jupiter at the centre with his ‘dirty-working’ conquests orbiting as void servile beings lacking initiative, interest and agency of their own.

In other words, just as we saw Aeschylus and Ovid incorporating historical events, processes, and worldviews, into their mythographies, Marius’ naming of the moons may be interpreted as yet another example of active mythic thinking: That we consolidate our worlds, and shock-bolster our cultures against historical change, through the myths we tell and retell. But, where Aeschylus’ retelling of the Io-myth thematises intercultural exchange in classic antiquity, and Ovid lets Io’s painful wanderings culminate in her deification as authoritative Isis, Simon Marius engages with Io’s name and transformation group from a radically different angle; one that appears biased by the misogynist heritage of his time.

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<sup>399</sup> Elaine Scarry: “Introduction” in *The Body in Pain* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 3-4

As Federici shows in *Caliban and the Witch*,<sup>400</sup> the programme, which saw the launch of capitalism coincide with the enclosures of the commons and the witch-hunts, was central to the combined attempts of the elites, the church, and the state, to devalue and suppress the autonomy of the ‘proletariat’<sup>401</sup> during the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries—not long before Marius made his discoveries and named the moons.<sup>402</sup> The co-optation of female reproductive capacities was critical to the success of this programme,<sup>403</sup> and the misogyny which followed from this co-optation contributed to shaping a male-dominated normative gaze that make flat parodic distortions of female humans and life-worlds—and in the eyes of which a woman’s liberation corresponds to her degree of sexualization, while the patriarchy deprives her of her means of birth control in a proprietary move similar to the enclosing of the commons:<sup>404</sup> Clamping down on the contraceptive knowledges traditionally held by wise women, labelling them ‘witches’ and rendering them—or replacing them with—dirty workers such as the previously mentioned Dannekoner.

While birthing Io is momentarily rendered powerless by pain, Isis was believed to hold magical capabilities by far exceeding any other god in the Roman-Greco-Egyptian pantheon—precisely because of the insights she obtained in the shapeshifting form of Io. Capabilities and insights that must however be neutralised, or muted, if to instil the fragmentated and fragmenting social order characteristic of the capitalist system, which has been likened by historian Philippe Pignarre and philosopher of science Isabelle Stengers to evil sorcery:

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<sup>400</sup> Silvia Federici: Op.cit.

<sup>401</sup> “[T]he very term *proletarian* originally referred to poor women who served the state by bearing children.” See: Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker: “Tyger! Tyger!” in *The Many-headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000) p. 332

<sup>402</sup> Silvia Federici: “All the World Needs a Jolt” in op.cit., pp. 48-50

<sup>403</sup> “[S]o far are procreation and population changes from being automatic or ‘natural’ that, in all phases of capitalist development, the state has had to resort to regulation and coercion to expand or reduce the work-force. This was especially true at the time of capitalist take-off, when the muscles and bones of workers were the primary means of production. But even later – down to the present – the state has spared no efforts in the attempt to wrench from women’s hands the control over reproduction, and to determine which children should be born, where, when, or in what numbers. (...) No one can describe in fact the anguish and desperation suffered by a woman seeing her body turned against herself[.] (...) The criminalization of women’s control over procreation is a phenomenon whose importance cannot be overemphasised, both from the viewpoint of its effects on women and its consequences for the capitalist organization of work. As is well documented, through the Middle Ages women possessed many means of contraception[.] (...) The criminalization of contraception expropriated women from this knowledge that had been transmitted from generation to generation, giving them some autonomy with relation to child-birth.” See: Silvia Federici: “Accumulation of Labor and Degradation of Women” in *ibid.*, pp. 92-92

<sup>404</sup> “[A] new ‘sexual contract’ (...) was forged, defining women in terms – mothers, wives, daughters, widows – that hid their status as workers, while giving men free access to women’s bodies, their labor, and the bodies and labor of their children. (...) [P]roletarian women became for male workers the substitute for the land lost to the enclosures (...) for once women’s activities were defined as non-work, women’s labor began to appear as a natural resource, available to all, no less than the air we breathe and the water we drink.” See: Silvia Federici: “Accumulation of Labor and Degradation of Women” in *ibid.*, p. 97



[W]e will restrict ourselves to associating the word sorcery with the risks linked, in popular parlance, with the word ‘soul’: to sell your soul, to be soulless, to have your soul eaten or sucked out, or captured. (...) to place capitalism in the lineage of sorcery is not to take an ethnological risk but a pragmatic one. Because if capitalism enters into such a lineage, it is in a very particular fashion, that of a system of sorcery without sorcerers (thinking of themselves as such), a system operating in a world which judges that sorcery is only a simple ‘belief’, a superstition[.]<sup>405</sup>

Reminiscent of Reynold’s ‘covert mythologies’ of the modern,<sup>406</sup> and Kohn’s vision of “a world with no self, no souls, and no futures, just effects,”<sup>407</sup> the analysis of Pignarre/Stengers resists the temptation to go dystopian, however. Instead, they proceed to propose strategies to protect oneself against capitalist capture, among which, they write, is the “rediscovery/reinvention of old resources, the destruction of which has probably contributed to our vulnerability.”

Seeking to locate such resources within the historical cultural context of the West—rather than appropriating strategies against sorcerous capture from other cultural realms—is, according to Pignarre/Stengers, a way of reclaiming our own ‘heritage of the defeated.’ The heritage of those, who were subjected to “the last great eradication not to concern colonised peoples but which happened in the very place in which capitalism was invented (...) those whose existence depended on the *commons* of which they were expropriated”<sup>408</sup> (italicisation theirs). Such as, for example, traditional healers and wise women, who for centuries and across Europe were persecuted and stigmatised as witches for using and sharing their knowledge.

Such as, for example, the pastoralist farmers and dirty-working Kjeltrings of Midwestern Jutland, who saw their sources of sustenance disappear with the enclosures and cultivation of the heath commons during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries to consolidate the nation state; as Federici and Pignarre/Stengers show, theirs were by no means isolated cases.

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<sup>405</sup> Philippe Pignarre & Isabelle Stengers: “Do you believe in sorcery?” in op.cit., p. 40

<sup>406</sup> Peter C. Reynolds: Op.cit., p. xi

<sup>407</sup> Eduardo Kohn: “Soul Blindness” in op.cit., p. 128

<sup>408</sup> It is unclear whether Pignarre/Stengers consider Jewish populations as part of this ‘eradication,’ since one would otherwise think that the Holocaust should count as “the last great eradication (...) which happened in the very place in which capitalism was invented.” See: Philippe Pignarre & Isabelle Stengers: Op.cit., pp. 136-137

## *n\_body crash*

With his naming, Marius undid the Roman syncretistic mythic structure that rendered Isis the consummation of Io—and a mythologisation of female authority acquired through birth—by maintaining her as Io and locking her in eternal orbit around her assailant. Thus, taking the cue from Pignarre/Stengers to start artistically ‘rediscovering/reinventing’ old resources from my own cultural realm as a modern European, I turned to Io as cipher—mytheme—of suppressed femininity, that is: Would-be authoritative women rendered complicit in sustaining the power structures of their own oppression through the capture and appropriation of their reproductive capacities.

As such, in addition to *Io/I*—the video installation previously mentioned—I initiated a line of artworks that engaged different aspects of Io’s transformation group, counting the opera *Moonologue* (2018),<sup>409</sup> the choral work *Gravitational Shift* (2018-22),<sup>410</sup> the interactive web-work *n\_body crash* (2020),<sup>411</sup> as well as a series of drawings and aluminium sculptures<sup>412</sup> based on archaic, historical, modern, and contemporary, imageries of Io across her different instantiations as ancient priestess, birthing woman, cow, astronomer, moon, binary, me, you as ‘me,’ etcetera (2018-19).

Because: Even if Isis is all-the-more attractive and reassuring a role model for female subjectification than burning Io, it is Io whom we are given to work with to possibly aid the eventual delivery of Isis as Isis. But how? In the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire gives us a clue. He states that “only power that springs from weakness is strong enough” to deliver oppressed and oppressor from the dehumanizing logics of oppression.<sup>413</sup>

In this light, it is promising, comforting, to know that Io holds weakness in abundance. And fire.

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<sup>409</sup> To listen to *Moonologue* and read the libretto, refer to attached folder: 2\_appendix B - digital/Moonologue/album\_Moonologue/

<sup>410</sup> *Moonologue* and *Gravitational Shift* have both been produced in close collaboration with electro-acoustic composer and classic singer Katinka Fogh Vindelev. See: Katinka Fogh Vindelev (composer) and Marie Kølbaek Iversen (librettist): *Moonologue* [music album] (Ebeltoft: Antipyrine, 2018) and Katinka Fogh Vindelev (composer) and Marie Kølbaek Iversen (artist): *Gravitational Shift* [music album] (Copenhagen: MoBC records, 2022). To listen to *Gravitational Shift*, refer to the vinyl record forwarded to the committee by post as part of appendix C. For more information, refer to attached folder: 3\_appendix C - analogue/

<sup>411</sup> *n\_body crash* was produced as a digital commission for Kvadrat and curated by South into North (Julia Rodrigues and Francesca Astesani). See: Marie Kølbaek Iversen: “n\_body crash” on *n-body-crash.io*, Kvadrat, 2020, *n-body-crash.io* (accessed December 4, 2022)

<sup>412</sup> For drawings and sculptures, refer to the monography *Io/I* forwarded to the committee by post as part of appendix C. Marie Kølbaek Iversen: *Io/I* (Ebeltoft: Antipyrine, 2019). For more information, refer to attached folder: 3\_appendix C - analogue/

<sup>413</sup> Paulo Freire: *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (London: Penguin Books, 1996) (1968), p. 26



Marie Kølbaek Iversen and Katinka Fogh Vindelev: *Moonologue*  
Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, 2018 (above) and KHIØ Artistic Research Week, 2019 (below)





**ARIEL READINGS**

I HAVE COME HERE TO THE PRINTS OF ANCIENT FEEL, MY MOTHER'S, LAND I ASK YOU YOU LOOK  
BENIGNLY UPON THE WOMEN I CARE, LOOK UPON OUR RACE ANCIENT IN HISTORY SHOW THAT YOU  
REMEMBER ALL YOU AVOID LAD YOUR HAND ON TO  
RECKEYLOS: THE SUPPLIANTS LINES 91-93B

( DK )

ARIEL Readings er en serie af offentlige arrangementer, hvor vi læser udvalgte af den litteratur, som har inspireret og dannet udgørelsen af kunstnerens praksis. Ved at skabe veje ind i stoffet vil vi med ARIEL Readings forene nye læsere og musici i debatten om det politiske, æstetiske og sociale felt. Arrangementerne finder sted den første søndag i hver måned i samarbejde med hver udstilling.

Litteraturen er udvalgt af kunstnerne og gæstcuratoren fra ARIEL's udstillingsprogram med det formål at sammensætte et afsluttende og åbenlyst arkiv: ARIEL ARCHIVE.

Til dette event er litteraturen og andet materiale blevet udvalgt af Marie Kølbaek Iversen, som vil lede læsekredsen.

Det er ikke nødvendigt at læse på forhånd.

( ENG )

ARIEL Readings is a series of public events oriented towards literature as communication and a vital part of artists' research. ARIEL Readings examines the material and aims to foster new conversation and mutual debates in the political, aesthetic and social field. The events will take place the first weekend after each exhibition opening.

The literature is selected by artists and guest curator from ARIEL's exhibition program, so to establish a publicly accessible archive: ARIEL ARCHIVE.

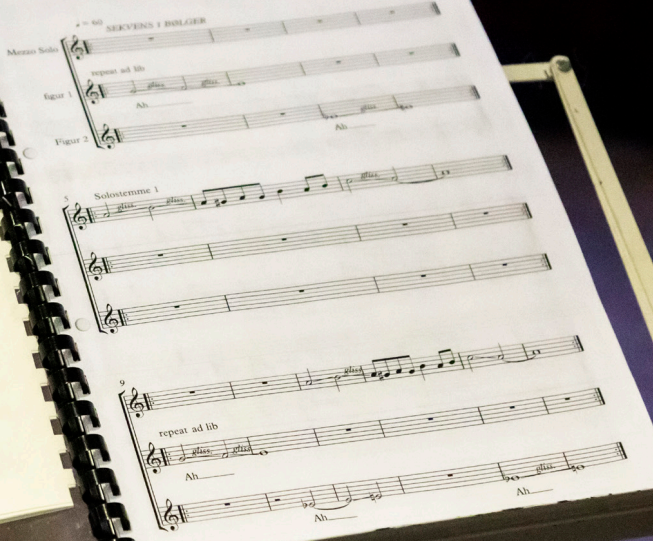

For this event the literature an other matter has been selected by Marie Kølbaek Iversen, who will guide the reading circle.

It is not necessary to read in advance.

WWW.MARIEKOLBAEK.DK

**LITTERATUR / LITERATURE:**  
PETER C. REYNOLDS - STEALING THE FIRE  
THE ATOMIC BOMB AS SYMBOLIC BODY  
GALILEO GALILEI - SERENUS NUNCIUS  
ASCZYNSKY - PROMETHUS SOUND  
SADIE PLANT - ZERO + ONES - DIGITAL  
WOMEN - THE NEW TECHNOLOGY

ARIEL READINGS 68 TO LIB  
TUESDAY OCTOBER 20TH 5-7PM  
SIGN UP: ARIEL@EMINENSIA.COM  
FREE ADMISSION / GRATIS ADGANG  
LANGUAGE: ENGLISH/DANISH



Marie Kølbaek Iversen and Katinka Fogh Vindelev: *Gravitational Shift*  
ARIEL—Feminisms in the Aesthetics, 2020





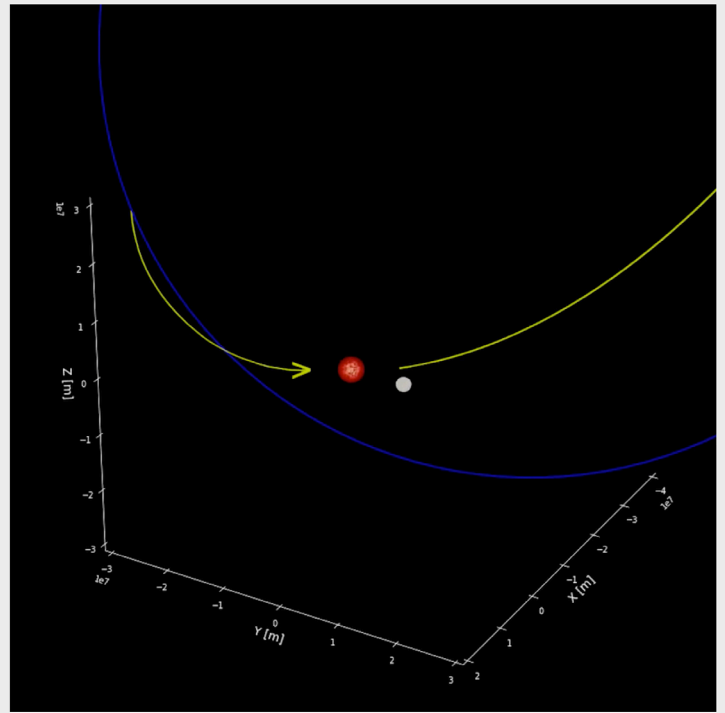
## JOVIAN WORLDS

On July 5 2016, **Juno** arrived at Jupiter after traveling 2.8 billion kilometres across the Milky Way. Fitted with advanced custom-made cameras and specialised measuring devices developed by the world's foremost researchers, the satellite's mission was to uncover as many of Jupiter's secrets as possible: His strong gravitational field, his intense **auroras**, his cloud being.

A **NASA** compilation of mission names refers to the Juno mission by the acronym Jupiter Near-polar Orbiter.<sup>1</sup> However, since its launch in 2011, the project itself has consistently emphasised the name's mythological association to the Greco-Roman goddess Juno, Jupiter's wife,<sup>2</sup> whose jealous character is appropriately close to the inquisitive nature of the space probe. NASA's Juno mission website states that "[i]n Greek and Roman mythology, Jupiter drew a veil of clouds around himself to hide his mischief. It was Jupiter's wife, the goddess Juno, who was able to **peer** through the clouds and reveal Jupiter's true nature. The Juno spacecraft will also look beneath the clouds to see what the planet is up to."<sup>3</sup>

The image of cloud-veiled Jupiter is drawn from the **Io-myth**, which also inspired the naming of Jupiter's innermost moon, Io—a volcanic world in constant eruption. The myth starts with the river god Inachus crying over his daughter Io, who is missing:

Jupiter had seen her walking along her father's river and immediately started lusting for her. So he ventured out to seduce her by talking to her in dreams. When she kept resisting his attempts, he finally forced Inachus to dispel her from his home. Disguised as a cloud, Jupiter raped Io when she was passing through the meadows of Lerna. From her position on Mount Olympus, Juno saw the heavy amassment of clouds over the Mediterranean and instantly knew that it was her husband who was up to no good, so she came down to confront him. Seeing her coming, however, Jupiter transformed Io into a white **heifer** to hide her from his wife, but Juno saw through the deceit and demanded the cow as a present. Jupiter could do nothing but comply and give her to Juno. To prevent Jupiter from visiting Io anew, Juno placed the cow under the watch of **Argus Panoptes**, the god with many eyes. In an attempt to liberate Io from his wife's dominion, Jupiter sent Mercury with his sword, his **syrinx**,<sup>4</sup> and **caduceus**<sup>5</sup> to **kill** Argus. Mercury succeeded, but as soon as Juno learned what had happened, she became mad with jealousy and sent a **gadfly** to bite Io every time she stopped to rest. As such, Io was sent roaming the Earth restlessly and in pain. Eventually, she passed from Europe to Asia via the Bosphorus<sup>6</sup> strait (which was named after her), and finally arrived in Egypt where Jupiter took pity and redeemed her with his touch. In the same instant, she gave birth to a child, the touch-born Epaphos, and regained her maiden form. Horns however remained on her forehead, and Io was thereby fused—at narrative and cultic levels, practically and mythologically—with the Egyptian fertility and mother goddess **Isis**.



Astrophysical simulation of lunar Io's liberation from the gravitational field of Jupiter by the aid of a passing asteroid cluster. Visualisation of frontpage binary code. Click video to pause/play.

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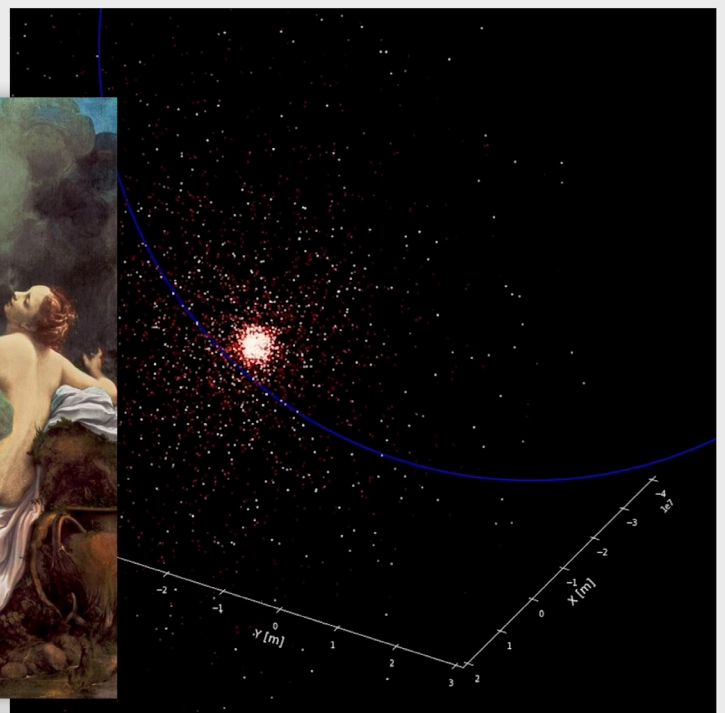
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Antonio Allegri da Correggio: *Jupiter and Io* (detail), 1533



Astrophysical simulation of lunar Io's liberation from the gravitational field of Jupiter by the aid of a passing asteroid cluster. Visualisation of frontpage binary code. Click video to pause/play.

*North*  
(diary entry, August 2016)

The North is prismatic, I think upon returning to Brazil after a month's vacation. The low passage of the Copenhagen sun makes the light refract in the naked city. Long shadows thrown from buildings, trees, bicycles, people. In Northern Europe, time is measured in the body by way of the changing seasons and the shifting light; the opening and closing of pores. In Brazil, I have no shadow, my pores are always open. The body cannot be sealed off, it happens all the time. It suspends my sense of time.

I do not know Brazil well enough to propose an alternative quality to counter the prismaticism of my North. But I know that I am the only one in my immediate surroundings to associate the word 'North' with a crystalline quality similar to that of snow. Positioned south of the Equator, the Brazilian North is just an intensification of the heat and sweat so new to me.

My decision to travel to Rio Branco in the North-Western Brazilian state of Acre to participate in the II World Ayahuasca Conference was sparked by my having read Philippe Pignarre and Isabelle Stengers' call for 'learning fright' as a method to establish a relation of negotiation rather than submission to 'that which obliges': Those facets of our existence that are marked by obligation rather than optionality. In the cultural context of the modern West—the case of their study—'that which obliges' is understood as the totalizing and destructive forces of late capitalism<sup>414</sup> and its implacable logic of fragmentation and exploitation.<sup>415</sup> As such, Pignarre/Stengers depart from the view put forward by someone like, e.g., Victor Turner that modern existence is largely un-obliged. On the contrary, they suggest that strong forces of obligation persist in the modern and may be named by the singular name of 'capitalism.'

In *Capitalist Sorcery—Breaking the spell*, Pignarre/Stengers lean on the writings of ethnopsychiatrists Tobie Nathan and Catherine Grandsard,<sup>416</sup> who in an extrapolation of anthropologist Patrick Deshayes' ethnographic account of the Huni Kuin tribe's fright rituals with ayawaska,<sup>417</sup> unpack the ability to cope with being frightened as a potent entry point to 'neo-worlds' beyond the logical contingencies of the present. The Huni Kuin is an Amazonian Indigenous tribe of the Pano linguistic family residing in and around Acre and along the Purus river in Peru. Of their ritual work with fright, Grandsard/Nathan via Deshayes write: "The ability to cope with being frightened is (...) equivalent to the ability to perceive different worlds based on unknown logical principles."<sup>418</sup>

It is this capacity—to cope with being frightened to perceive worlds based on unknown logical principles—which Pignarre/Stengers experimentally adopt into their anti-capitalist endeavour by saying that fright holds the potential of making the frightened think

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<sup>414</sup> "[W]e ascribe what obliges us to anonymous universality [i.e., capitalism], valid for all, that we have allowed ourselves to be defined by instead of learning to negotiate with." See: Philippe Pignarre & Isabelle Stengers: "Learning Fright" in op.cit., pp. 64-65

<sup>415</sup> Els Lagrou: "Copernicus in the Amazon: Ontological turnings from the perspective of Amerindian ethnologies" in *Sociologia & Antropologia*, 8, 1: (Rio de Janeiro: Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, 2018), p. 134

<sup>416</sup> Catherine Grandsard and Tobie Nathan: Op.cit.

<sup>417</sup> Deshayes use the name 'Kaxinawa' to designate the tribe, but the Huni Kuin themselves reject this name and consider it insulting. See: Patrick Deshayes: "L'ayawaska n'est pas un hallucinogène" in *Psychotropes*, 8 (Paris: De Boeck, 2001/2), pp. 65-78 and Elsje Maria Lagrou: "Huni Kuin (Kaxinawá)" on *Povos Indígenas no Brasil*, Instituto Socioambiental, March 28, 2018, [https://pib.socioambiental.org/en/Povo:Huni\\_Kuin\\_\(Kaxinawá\)](https://pib.socioambiental.org/en/Povo:Huni_Kuin_(Kaxinawá)) (accessed August 26, 2021)

<sup>418</sup> Catherine Grandsard and Tobie Nathan: Op.cit., p. 18



beyond the given,<sup>419</sup> and that trauma victims may be seen as the active explorers of new worlds and orders if constituted accordingly.<sup>420</sup>

A strong affect encountered in the face of life-threatening events, fright is however rarely framed as an agent of futurity and betterment. It differs from ambient fear; while fear is rooted in an anxiety that something bad might happen, fright is the psychological and physiological response to an actual life-threatening event that is happening – “as though a foreign entity had penetrated by surprise inside her system (...) such powerful fear is provoked when a person is faced with the experience of her own death,”<sup>421</sup> Grandsard/Nathan write. As such, fright compels us to “conceptualize otherness, true otherness, not our fellow ‘others’ who are in fact identical, but ‘others from another world,’ whose mere encounter causes a breach in our psyches, whose mere presence petrifies us.”<sup>422</sup>

When the individual realises that they cannot escape an imminent threat, and that fight-or-flight is not a viable option, they respond by mentally and physically shutting down.<sup>423</sup> Among other effects, as previously explained, this may lead to an altered state of consciousness producing dissociative visions. And to Grandsard/Nathan, it is precisely such visions obtained through fright, which may serve to unlock trauma and engender what they term ‘neo-worlds,’ in which “the succession of events and their implications make some sort of sense.”<sup>424</sup> This returns us to the liminal phase’s extensive ambiguity and transformative potentiality as previously discussed, drawing on Victor Turner and Arnold van Gennep, by rendering fright itself the very interface that might enable the exploration of worlds and orders based on unknown logical principles.

But, the second half of the sentence—“that trauma victims may be seen as the active explorers of new worlds and orders if constituted accordingly”—is equally important: As Turner with Durkheim and van Gennep have argued, liminal exploration cannot stand alone, since it requires a binding human collective to realise fright’s transformative potentiality through the third ritual phase of incorporation. To this end, the optional liminoid coming-together of modern individuals in voluntary activities offered within the ‘open’ society is not

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<sup>419</sup> “Fright (if recognized as such, as marking the power over us of what we consider non-negotiable) may make us think.” See: Philippe Pignarre & Isabelle Stengers: “Learning Fright” in op.cit., p. 65

<sup>420</sup> Philippe Pignarre & Isabelle Stengers: “Learning Fright” in ibid. p. 65, and Catherine Grandsard and Tobie Nathan: op.cit., p. 16

<sup>421</sup> Tobie Nathan and Catherine Grandsard: Ibid., p. 5

<sup>422</sup> Ibid., p. 18

<sup>423</sup> Inga Schalinski, Maggie Schauer and Thomas Elbert: “The Shutdown Dissociation Scale (Shut-D)” in *European Journal of Psychotraumatology*, 6, 1 (Milton Park: Taylor & Francis, 2015), p. 1

<sup>424</sup> Tobie Nathan and Catherine Grandsard: Op.cit., p. 16

enough, since true transformation is hinged on the subjection to obliging forces that predispose liminality: “Optation pervades the liminoid phenomenon, obligation the liminal[.]”<sup>425</sup> Turner writes: “One *works* at the liminal, one *plays* with the liminoid”<sup>426</sup> (italicisation his).

However, contrary to Turner’s presumption that society-wide liminality does not exist in the modern, and that modern liminality is thus only to be found “in the activities of churches, sects, and movements, in the initiation rites of clubs, fraternities, masonic orders and other secret societies,”<sup>427</sup> I read Pignarre/Stengers’ analysis as an indication that it does. And that it is, in fact, precisely to be found in the capacity assigned to it by Turner himself: Namely within the obliging and totalising realm of work,<sup>428</sup> epitomised in globalised modernity by the employee’s dependence on money, i.e., capital(ism),<sup>429</sup> but also—as I have shown—through women’s reproductive labour at the service of the nation state. This is not to say that all work or labour is liminal, but that liminality is always work. I therefore suggest we look towards the work we are obliged to do to ensure the survival of ourselves and our kin—but also to the situations where we find our bodies and intimate relations turned against ourselves or co-opted by the state—to locate modern liminality.

Regardless of whether we talk of labouring mothers or private soldiers, the liminal character of their dirty work does precisely what liminality has always done in initiation rites: It facilitates their passage from one group to another<sup>430</sup> and secures their “new, relatively stable, well-defined position in the total society”<sup>431</sup> while shock-bolstering this same society against change. In a modern Western context, Pignarre/Stengers understand such workers as complicit ‘minions.’<sup>432</sup> Relaying Hughes’ assertion that the distinctions between in and out, good and bad, clean and dirty, may however be drawn in various ways,<sup>433</sup> I find ‘dirty workers’ (or, with

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<sup>425</sup> Victor Turner: Op.cit. (1974), p. 74

<sup>426</sup> Ibid. (1974), p. 86

<sup>427</sup> “*Liminoid phenomena* (...) are often parts of social critiques or even revolutionary manifestoes—books, plays, paintings, films, etc., exposing the injustices, inefficiencies, and immoralities of the mainstream economic and political structures and organizations.” (italicisation his) See: Ibid. (1974)

<sup>428</sup> Ibid.

<sup>429</sup> Philippe Pignarre & Isabelle Stengers: “Minions” in op.cit., p. 31

<sup>430</sup> Arnold van Gennep: “Classifications of Rites” in op.cit., p. 11

<sup>431</sup> Victor Turner: Op.cit. (1974), p. 57

<sup>432</sup> “We are hypothesising then that if the grand strategy of head-on mobilisation is ineffective, it is because it bypasses what the labour of many thousands of minions produces (...) Individually, each minion is evidently incapable of creating the kind of grand alternative that eliminates a whole swathe of politics. But it is through them that capitalist functioning exists in the ungraspable manner proper to it, with (...) little in the way to recourse to brutal violence. (...) [I]t is perhaps all these ‘minions’ who put us on the right path, who tell us how to name capitalism. Because they do not present themselves, they do not think of themselves, as ‘in the service of capitalism.’ The question is much rather: do they think at all? (...) Now, we are certainly, nearly all us, inside, affected, but we must be capable of saying that *we are not all of us minions*. We must be able to differentiate between the workers kicked out by an operation of ‘rationalisation of human resources’ and the person who detailed the plan[.]” See: Philippe Pignarre & Isabelle Stengers: “Minions” in op.cit., pp. 31-32

<sup>433</sup> Everett C. Hughes: Op.cit., p. 8

a pun, 'dirty labourers') to be a more empathetic term, since it avoids the determinism of the former as well as the lure of identifying captured individuals wholesale with the forces behind their capture. In this way, I hope to avoid alienating potential allies, as Lee Edelman did when—launching his otherwise timely and legitimate critique of reproductive futurism—screening-out female labourers from his project of negativity against the status quo.

To me the notion of 'dirty worker' suggests the possibility of a distance between an individual and the work they (are obliged to) do to survive, leaving space for them to potentially aspire towards something else than their function within the system. As such, rather than "naming the beast,"<sup>434</sup> as Pignarre/Stengers suggest (capitalism, minions, etcetera), I suggest attempting to name ambiguity: The ambiguity of identity, and the potentials such ambiguity may harbour for shifts in alliances and orientations. Not least since, as Pignarre/Stengers themselves in fact warn, denouncing 'minions'—naming and shaming them—often contributes to fabricating them: "Accused of betrayal, the person who confirms the accusation by becoming what we call a minion doesn't reveal his or her 'true nature' but has been produced by a 'yes'<sup>435</sup> that has something to do with what used to be called 'damnation'," Pignarre/Stengers write: "The fabrication of minions is a permanent production. (...) And it always has something of the initiation about it, with recruitment into the group of those who 'know'. But it is a dark initiation, involving adherence to a knowledge that separates the people from what they often continue to feel, and what they now dismiss as a dream or a manifestation of sensitivity one should protect oneself from."<sup>436</sup>

Pignarre/Stengers thus account for an important part of the social initiation processes that 'minionise' people to become 'dirty labourers.' However, by going with the word 'dirty labourer' instead of 'minion' I wish to engage that which Pignarre/Stengers claim these people "often continue to feel," and thus with the possibility—or hope, at least—that it is possible to reach the human behind the systemic function; someone with emotional capacities and a moral register (however suppressed) to resonate an appeal for change. Someone, for example, like Daniel Hale, the veteran drone operator.

Due to their obligated passage across moral registers, liminal dirty labourers—both those who have compromised their own morality, as well as those who have had it

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<sup>434</sup> Philippe Pignarre & Isabelle Stengers: "Daring to be Pragmatic" in op.cit., p. 21

<sup>435</sup> Cf. Dora Garcia's "eonic time, the breakdown of linear time, the time of "Yes""—noting, as she does, with Freud, that the unconscious knows neither negation nor time. See: Dora Garcia: Op.cit., p. 40

<sup>436</sup> Philippe Pignarre & Isabelle Stengers: "Minions" in op.cit., pp. 33-34

compromised by others<sup>437</sup>—may know something deep through liminality that their societies do not. For instance, if Hale were to project his vision for society, it would likely be based on inter-human and transcultural solidarity rather than nationalist demarcations and warfare, since he “couldn’t keep living in a world in which people pretend that things weren’t happening that were.”<sup>438</sup> Consequently, he decided to leak classified military papers instead of continuing to take “precious human life.”<sup>439</sup> To me this suggests that—if we care to engage rather than denounce them—the knowledges and consciousnesses of our societies’ dirty labourers may be both potent and subversive tools to inspire and facilitate radical systemic change. They have everything to gain, and very little to lose. But societies rarely want to change, which may in turn explain the motivation for reincorporating dirty labourers into the total society as ‘morally injured’ or ‘traumatised.’ While this can be seen as an acknowledgement of the fact and profundity of their obliged knowledge, it is also a way of blocking the necessary transformation it would imply if recognised beyond the level of pathology.

None of this marks the West against other ritual cultures, however. Conversely, as previously argued, both myth and ritual operate as shock absorbers<sup>440</sup> to ensure cultural continuity.<sup>441</sup> As such, following my line of thought, inspired by Pignarre/Stengers but moving beyond their Marxist outlook, Western modernity too seeks to perpetuate itself by first instilling in dirty labourers deep anti-structural<sup>442</sup> knowledge through the paradox and shock of their work, and then—through their incorporation into structured society—muting this knowledge as ‘traumatised.’ Thereby the status quo is re-affirmed, along with the ‘deep structure’<sup>443</sup> that sustains it, which—according to Turner—is the very purpose of the initiation rite of passage.

What the modern West lacks with a view to transformation in comparison to many other ritual cultures is not true liminality, as I have shown, but liminal figures in positions of authority that are capable of establishing a society-wide relation of negotiation rather than

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<sup>437</sup> As previously explained Jonathan Shay identifies two related, but distinct, strands of moral injury differing mainly in the ‘who’ of moral agency: “Moral injury is present when there has been (a) a betrayal of ‘what’s right’; (b) either by a person in legitimate authority...or by one’s self...(c) in a high stakes situation.” See: Jonathan Shay: *op.cit.*, p. 182

<sup>438</sup> Ryan Devereux and Murtaza Hussein: *Op.cit.*

<sup>439</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>440</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss: “One Myth Only” in *op.cit.* (1971), p. 607

<sup>441</sup> Victor Turner: *Op.cit.* (1974), p. 73

<sup>442</sup> “I have used the term ‘anti-structure’ (...) to describe both liminality and what I have called ‘communitas.’ I meant by it (...) the liberation of human capacities of cognition, affect, volition, creativity, etc., from the normative constraints incumbent upon occupying a sequence of social statuses, enacting a multiplicity of social roles, and being acutely conscious of membership in some corporate group such as a family, lineage, clan, tribe, or nation, or of affiliation with some pervasive social category such as a class, caste, sex- or age-division.” See: *Ibid.*, p. 75

<sup>443</sup> *Ibid.* (1974), p. 73

submission to ‘that which obliges’:<sup>444</sup> Measures to render insights acquired through fright potential sources of authoritative agency, and to allow liminal knowledges to inform and transform the formation of the total society.

According to anthropologist Merete Demant Jakobsen,<sup>445</sup> this is the traditional capacity of ritual intermediaries commonly known as ‘shamans,’<sup>446</sup> whose practices specifically do not concern their own personal development or wellbeing but is conversely oftentimes directly at odds with the immediate interests of the shaman her- or himself, in that it requires them to undergo extensive, frightening and often painful rituals<sup>447</sup> to settle the score with the spirits on behalf of their community. The desired outcome of shamanic rituality is thus generally aligned with that of the initiation rite: To transform subjects in an unchanging system in order to ensure cultural continuity. However, shamanic rituals differ from initiation rites in the ‘who’ of ritual agency and transformation:<sup>448</sup> While the initiation rite sees the ritual ‘passenger’—the initiand—subjected to a process of transformation initiated by others, the shamanic ritual shifts ritual agency towards the ritual ‘passenger’—the shaman—and authorises them to initiate widespread transformation in case the society’s viability depends on it.

It all sounds very speculative and complicated; it is not. I simply wonder what Western society would look like if laid out according to the visions of someone who had been subjected by it and forced to familiarise themselves with its deep obliging structures? To this end, the notion of ‘minion’ might have a place in this discussion anyhow, since it serves to identify those dirty labourers who delight in contributing to the perpetuation of an oppressive status quo,<sup>449</sup> and mark them against those who are dirty labourers of need, not choice. While the former, according to Turner’s definitions, will signify as ‘liminoid’ due to the optional

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<sup>444</sup> Philippe Pignarre & Isabelle Stengers: Op.cit., pp. 62-67

<sup>445</sup> Merete Demant Jakobsen: “The Greenlandic Angakkoq” in *Shamanism. Traditional and Contemporary Approaches to the Mastery of Spirits and Healing* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1999), pp. 111 and 131

<sup>446</sup> To use the word ‘shaman’ is not uncontroversial. It specifically derives from the Evenki and Tungusic peoples of Siberia but was applied by early modern scholars to designate people or ‘ritual agents’ among different societies across the globe working with (what they understood as similar functions of) ecstatic trance and spirit journeying for visionary and healing purposes. In this way, the practices of the Greenlandic ‘angakkuq,’ the Sámi ‘noaidi,’ the Amazonian ‘pajé,’ and the Korean ‘mansin,’ were all gathered under this umbrella term despite their disparity. In Brazil, Indigenous people are however also using the term ‘shaman’—xamã—to designate a function/person that embodies what is understood to be the cross-culturally shared features of different tribes’ healers. In this sense, while the word reflects the presupposition of generalized trans-cultural similarities that may not be legitimate, it has been given a new use and meaning by and among some of those peoples it was meant to designate, who have appropriated it for their own purposes as a type of ‘job description’ to be used in cross-cultural exchange. As such—despite its problematic etiology—the word ‘shaman’ may still be a relevant term to use, since it denotes the understanding of a particular form of ritual agency in the contemporary.

<sup>447</sup> Merete Demant Jakobsen: Op.cit. pp. 124-125

<sup>448</sup> Remembering Jonathan Shay’s distinction between two related, but distinct, strands of moral injury differing mainly in the ‘who’ of moral agency. See: Jonathan Shay: Op.cit., p. 182

<sup>449</sup> Philippe Pignarre & Isabelle Stengers: “Minions” in op.cit., pp. 32-33

character of their vocation, it is the obliging liminality of the latter—and the potential knowledge they hold—that I am interested in here.

But I am getting ahead of myself now, since my immediate ambition for travelling to Acre was far more modest: I went, because Pignarre/Stengers' call for learning fright echoed with my personal aspiration to confront and challenge the obliging forces that had led to my own near-total submission in childbirth two years prior. To see if I might conceive of ways in which fright's transformative potentialities would also be available to me somehow. And if the memories and insights from my days of suffering might harbour the potential to carry me beyond the looping pain of trauma.

## *Auto-Ethnography*

Due to the immediately private nature of my trip, I did not keep a detailed diary of my journey stating precisely when I went where, how, and why. All I have are the digital traces I left for myself in the form of emails, images, notes, and WhatsApp messages. As it is now six years ago, the deleterious effects of memory have erased events and passages deemed by it to be irrelevant—I cannot recall, for instance, anything from my journey from São Paulo to Rio Branco; nothing from the planes or my lay-over in Brasília. The first thing I remember is arriving in Rio Branco airport close to midnight on October 17, 2016, feeling alone, exposed, and alert. Undoubtedly my sporadic lack of memories from my five days in the western-most Brazilian capital reflects my shifting levels of emotional response to different events and circumstances. In other words, I remember that which made an emotional impression on me, and by the same token am now left with a number of scenes rather than a chronological account of events.

Thus, my account of attending the II World Ayahuasca Conference, AYA2016, organized by the ICEERS Foundation at Universidade Federal do Acre (UFAC) between October 17 and 22, 2016, is a subjective account of the conference as it was experienced by me. I however believe it to be relevant to my object of study, namely the transformative potentiality of fright, even if neither my account nor the facts or events it testifies to may be understood as reducible to (my) individual psychology. Because when fright is transformational rather than traumatising, it becomes so through collective processes answering to what nobody is able to produce alone.<sup>450</sup>

In the following, therefore, mine is merely one of many possible viewpoints, but one that I happen to have privileged access to.<sup>451</sup>

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<sup>450</sup> Philippe Pignarre & Isabelle Stengers: “Reclaim” in *ibid.*, p. 139; Arnold van Gennep: “Classifications of Rites” in *op.cit.* (1909), p. 11, and Victor Turner: *Op.cit.* (1974), p. 65

<sup>451</sup> I did not set out to make an autoethnographic study at the AYA2016, but the potential of—and my engagement with—the data I returned with may be understood along those lines. “In terms of analytic advantages, autoethnography offers distinctively grounded opportunities to pursue the connections between biography and social structure (...) Although few of us spend much time exploring the connections between our personal lives and our scholarly interests and activities, many of us are aware that such connections exist and could likely trace some of them if called upon to do so[.]” See: Leon Anderson: “Analytic Autoethnography” in *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 35, 4 (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2006) pp. 389-390

## *Air is Body*

I think I remember exiting the plane, but maybe this memory is inherited or made-up, stereotypical as it is: The tropical night confronting my airplane-airconditioned self like a pitch-black hot humid wall. I enter the terminal building with the other travellers, many of whom are likely conference participants like myself. The building is a bright light in the middle of what to me is a heart of darkness—at the time I had lived in São Paulo for ten months, but it had been difficult to find a way to visit the forest, and we had only managed to go on a few organized daytrips with tourist travel agencies, while many Paulistãos<sup>452</sup> had plainly discouraged our family from going deeper into the forest and for longer stretches of time stating the many natural and cultural dangers: Mosquito-borne diseases, ferocious predators, poisonous snakes, lawless groups and gangs, ‘savage peoples’—the latter referring to either criminal organizations, crude industrialists, or Brazil’s Indigenous population, depending on who said it, and who they thought we were, receiving their opinions and advice. There is no doubt that my blond exterior in a Brazilian context cast me as someone belonging to a different class than my post-proletarian Danish upbringing had conditioned me for, and thus as someone with a different set of expectations and points of departure into the forest than mine. While I had probably been more capable than they thought, and that I was made to believe myself, my having been a scout for the majority of my childhood and also quasi-homeless in the city of Copenhagen as a young adult without job or savings, my apparently elitist appearance could make me stand out as a vulnerable target for desperate people, just like my pale flesh might seem an exotic treat to the many jaguars they made me imagine were roaming the dark forest in search of easy prey. One thing is certain: Had I fallen victim to either, whatever scouting skills or welfare state urban hustler-tactics I might have possessed, they would have been useless and pathetic.

So even if I had been longing to go to the forest for a long time, I arrived in the Amazonian state of Acre after having been in Brazil for ten months without experiencing the rain forest at night. And now the October night surrounding the tiny airport seemed to me alive—I had no idea what lifeforms were hiding in the dark other than the clue provided by the many large insects flocking the fluorescent tubes above the conveyor belt in the arrival hall, and this radical ‘unknowledge’ was food for vivid imagination, both frightening and awe-

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<sup>452</sup> ‘Paulistão’ is person from the city of São Paulo, while ‘Paulista’ designates someone from the São Paulo state.



inspiring. In São Paulo they joke that Acre may not exist, and waiting for my luggage to arrive I had no idea what reality dawn would shed light upon: The world harboured by the Acrean night seemed to me a fantastical mythic entity—an imaginary realm that I was about to enter with my physical body, step by hesitant step.

Yet like (other) nightly dreams where the unknown is interwoven with mundane fragments of daily life, here there were cabs too. I hailed one, which took me through the night like a spaceship through indistinct dark matter to the hotel that had been recommended by the conference organizers: The Rio Branco Ibis hotel, just down the street from the university. But even the fact that it was a globally generic Ibis hotel—and beyond my limited budget frame so a potential financial stressor—could not disenchant the phantasmagorical experience of entering Acre at night. On the contrary, it felt as if even the seemingly well-known and stubbornly modern—airplane, taxi, Ibis—was being impregnated by forces of transformational imagination already consistently undoing the cartography by which I would normally navigate: I stand on solid ground, above which is the Sky. The sky is bright, the sky is dark, the sky is air. Air is cool, ethereal, light. Air is humid, is water, is body. Light is a bug. The hotel is a docking station, an entry point, a mouth.

Day breaks, and I pull the curtains aside my hotel window and see tired palm trees struggling under the weight of a merciless sun's beams.

## *E/Affects*

Entering the hotel's restaurant to have breakfast, I became so shy when realising that everyone in the room knew each other. Most were conference participants like myself, and they acted as if they had already converged in similar fora on several previous occasions. I did not mind sharing a table, but I knew no one, and when a couple finally joined me and began dutifully conversing me, their surprise at my participating in the conference without having ever tried ayawaska or other psychotropic remedies was evident.

Because it was de facto a university conference—the II World Ayahuasca Conference; a world conference—I had imagined that I could just blend into an undifferentiated crowd of researchers and from a quasi-unbodied perspective absorb the knowledge and discussions that would unfold between participants and the different conference tracks: Academic, spiritual, community, Indigenous. Amidst the expectant chatter and reunion joy unfolding around me at the hotel breakfast, I felt self-conscious of my beaming alienation as if I had unknowingly crashed their party. And while I had been trembling with fear at the thought of the very serious, and allegedly subversive, frightening, and transformative, potentials of the conference's subject matter, many of the other participants appeared indifferent or even giggly when discussing which of the after-hour ceremonies they might be attending that evening: Santo Daime? União do Vegetal? Barquinha? Or maybe an Indigenous ceremony with one of the region's tribes?

This blew my mind. I had not even considered the possibility that the conference would be flanked by nightly ceremonies arranged for the occasion. Suddenly, the whole thing seemed a freak extension of experience economy into spiritual realms that I had thought would be resistant to it—could be nothing but resistant to it—but in the place of my imagined liminal and transformative potentiality, a psychoactive fun fair arose. And when entering the elevator to pick up my bag in my room before heading towards the university, I encountered a man who was not part of the conference, but still overjoyed to learn that it was taking place during his stay in Rio Branco: "I too consecrate ayawaska!," he burst out jubilantly. When I confided that I had never tried it but was attending the conference as a first step to learning more about the ritual or collective mechanisms that might make fright an agent of transformation rather than trauma, he fell silent as if I had crossed him somehow. This all gave me the first impression that within the global ayawaska community—however loosely organised—what is important is the

substance of ayawaska as well its effects and affects in the individual, not necessarily the potential agency of such e/affects in the world.

Arriving at the university, however, my breakfast-scepticism was somewhat alleviated, since the organising ICEERS foundation seemed genuinely invested in seeking to explore the multifaceted and refracting discourses of ayawaska locally and globally. Upon obtaining my conference pass from the facilitators at a reduced price as a (temporary) Brazilian resident, they told me that in fact there was another Danish participant at the conference. This threw me a bit because I felt so incredibly far from home and because it had been no simple journey for me to arrive there. In fact, I felt that my journey to arrive at UFAC had already begun during those late hours of the night at the Danish labour ward in 2014. Might this other Dane have a similar trajectory?<sup>453</sup>

I was hard for me to imagine how one could arrive at this conference easily, but then again—the giggling and joviality at the hotel breakfast had already surprised me in this regard.

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<sup>453</sup> I finally met him on the third day of the conference, and we were very different, as were our motivations for being there. He had subletted his home north of Copenhagen to travel indefinitely across the rain forest and participate in as many ceremonies with native plant medicines, as he could. He stated that he was ‘vomiting his way through the Amazon’ with reference to the regurgitating effects of ayawaska. If we were both there to save ourselves somehow, we did so in very different ways. After a short chat and a soda, we said goodbye without exchanging contact information. He gave me a small bag of cocoa beans as we parted, but I accidentally spilled them into my bag.

## Tension

Before attending the conference, I had primarily encountered discourses relating to shamanism and fright rituality through the theoretical writings of Western academics such as Philippe Pignarre & Isabelle Stengers, Catherine Grandsard & Tobie Nathan, Eduardo Kohn, Michael Taussig, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and Patrick Deshayes. From their different academic vantage points, these may be said to navigate a field of tension between, on the one hand, attempting to provide as truthful a rendition as possible of the practices and worldviews of their Indigenous sources. And, on the other, extrapolating from such sources narratives and theoretical structures to sustain a certain argument aimed at audiences beyond the Indigenous communities themselves. Despite their ethnographic bases in Indigenous epistemologies, then, I understand the exchange that I engage myself in as the reader of such texts, to remain largely on the Western home ground of academics, Westerner to Westerner.

As a countermeasure to this Western-centrism, and to attempt bringing the exchange concerning ayawaska closer to its originating communities, ICEERS had decided to relocate the 2016-instantiation of the World Ayahuasca Conference from Ibiza to Acre, which in the 1930s saw the emergence of the syncretic religion Santo Daime<sup>454</sup> that is credited with disseminating ayawaska to the world. Santo Daime was founded by Raimundo Irineu Serra, known as Mestre Irineu, who had travelled to Acre to look for work in the rubber camps and, during his travels, come in contact with local Indigenous people, who had offered him the psychotropic beverage, which inspired his spiritual awakening and the foundation of the Santo Daime church.<sup>455</sup>

However, despite ICEERS' good intentions to return the debates concerning ayawaska to its geographic source, my impression of the conference attests, first and foremost, to the difficulty of facilitating equal exchange across continued asymmetric colonial divides: Regardless of its seemingly singular topic—ayawaska—the conference made it painfully

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<sup>454</sup> “Santo Daime was formally recognised by the Brazilian government as a religion in 1986, and at the same time, ayahuasca became explicitly legal for religious use. (...) Its sermons feature elements of Catholicism, African rituals and indigenous traditions. (...) The focus of Santo Daime is fundamentally Christian. (...) Ceremonies are held according to the official Santo Daime calendar, with ‘works,’ or ceremonies, that take place roughly three times a month. These tend to run from sunset until dawn. The hallucinogenic tea is administered throughout[.]” See: Lucinda Elliott: “The rise of Brazil’s Santo Daime religion” (2019) on *New Humanist*, <https://newhumanist.org.uk/articles/5509/the-rise-of-brazils-santo-daime-religion> (accessed November 25, 2022)

<sup>455</sup> Beatriz Caiuby Labate & Tiago Coutinho: “‘My Grandfather Served Ayahuasca to Mestre Irineu’: Reflections on the Entrance of Indigenous Peoples into the Urban Circuit of Ayahuasca Consumption in Brazil” in *Curare. Zeitschrift für Medizinethnologie. Journal of Medical Anthropology*, 37, 3 (Berlin: VWB – Verlag für Wissenschaft und Bildung, 2014) p. 188

clear that when talking about the brew, a European researcher and an Amazonian pajé—‘shaman’—were talking about wildly different things: Unlike the white Western participants, who for the most part had an academic or indigenista<sup>456</sup> stake in the subject matter, the Native speakers were not there to present or defend a scientific stance, hypothesis, or result. The field of tension navigated at the conference was not one of acquired interest, theory, or make-belief to them, and contrary to the white academic participants, and the more or less casual visitors like myself, it was—is—not a discourse they could easily opt out of if they wanted.

This was emphasised, when on Tuesday October 18, the young Indigenous leader Mapu Huni Kuî of the Huni Kuin tribe took the stage to assert that “to talk about the medicine<sup>457</sup> is to talk about the life and livelihood of Indigenous peoples<sup>458</sup>—the two cannot be separated. According to Mapu, the Huni Kuin regard ayawaska as the teacher of medicines at large: “The master is not me,” he stressed: “It is ayawaska.”<sup>459</sup> Mapu thus advised the audience to “believe in the medicine rather than its provider, who is just a portal,”<sup>460</sup> and to always ask nature for permission before taking any leaves and vines: “You have to explain why you need it, and sing to it, pray for it.”<sup>461</sup>

He concluded his presentation with extending an invitation to visit the Huni Kuin tribe or to attend one of their healing séances in the cities.

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<sup>456</sup> ‘Indigenista’ is the Brazilian-Portuguese term for non-Indigenous people dedicating themselves to the Indigenous decolonial struggle.

<sup>457</sup> I.e., ayawaska.

<sup>458</sup> Glenn Shepard, Moacir Biondo e Mapu: “Política e Sustentabilidade I: Glenn Shepard, Moacir Biondo e Mapu” [conference panel] at // *World Ayahuasca Conference. AYA2016*, ICEERS, October 17 – October 22, 2016 (Rio Branco: Universidade Federal do Acre, October 18, 2016), <https://youtu.be/8InfAa801zk> (accessed June 29, 2022): 00:43:00

<sup>459</sup> *Ibid.*, 00:53:40

<sup>460</sup> *Ibid.*, 00:53:50

<sup>461</sup> *Ibid.*, 00:52:20

### *Co-existing Realities*

Mapu's presentation was followed by a panel featuring—in addition to Mapu—medical anthropologist and ethnobotanist Glenn H. Shepard jr. and Moacir Tadeu Biondo, autodidactic researcher of medicinal plants and teacher of permaculture.<sup>462</sup>

Drawing on each their specialised knowledge and personal experiences with spiritual plant remedies, Mapu opened the floor by reiterating his call for respect when using ayawaska and other medicines with a natural origin: “If you do not use it in the right way, you are not going to be safe. And this will influence on the general use of ayawaska among Indigenous peoples, since bad rumours may lead to a total ban on ayawaska,” he warned. Shepard jr. went on to state that ayawaska has its own agency: “It calls forth the qualities that the religions describe, even if taken in an immediately recreational setting”—a capacity, which is even further pronounced in the case of the ‘dark ayawaska,’ brugmansia, also known as angel's trumpet or toé, which according to Shepard jr. “is very dangerous, and the people who use it on a regular basis die. It drags you to the dark side.”

Biondo expanded: “Brugmansia will take you to the spiritual underground, which only very great shamans can do. It is related to the spirits of the water world, to the spirits of abducted children, to parallel worlds.” Those who can “endure the plant may spend hours in the water and come out without even being wet. It is a medicine of co-existing realities,” he explained.

After a few questions and comments—among them, a white middle-aged man confessing how ayawaska has freed him from his anxiety and opened him up to the realisation that he is the light of the Universe—the session ended and people left the auditorium to have lunch, which was served by local food vendors in a sort of pop-up mini street food market installed outside the auditorium building. Yet again, the meal as a natural occasion to socialise made me self-conscious of my solitude, and yet again tables were few, and I ended up in the awkward situation of being seated with a group of people who—this time—did not care to introduce me into their conversation. So, I hurried to finish my plate and went for a walk to look at the adjoining stalls.

The crafts were beautiful—headdresses, beaded necklaces, colourful ponchos, women's bags. I tried not to seem too desperate but was relieved to find that some of the

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<sup>462</sup> Ibid.

vendors cared to small talk a bit and momentarily lift me out of my solitude. Since ayawaska was the crux of the conference, it was a natural conversation starter, and just like the people I had encountered at breakfast, the vendors seemed surprised to learn that I had never tried it: Then what was I doing there?

But as I expanded on my motivations, it seemed to resonate with them—however from across the vast cultural distance that was separating us, had I not climbed into the wormhole bending time and space to overlap Scandinavian and Amazonian imaginary terrains for a while. To my psychedelically virgin mind, the act of ‘trying ayawaska’ had become an enormously fatalistic feat akin to some kind of initiation rite, which one may or may not survive. Further, with the argumentation of Grandsard/Nathan in mind, I had managed to convince myself that my birth was somehow an equivalent experience, and that I needed not venture back into the darkness and dissolution to try to understand how fright experiences might be constituted as agents of learning, transformation, and futurity. Instead, I hoped I would be presented with tools, information, or strategies by the different speakers at the conference to help me extract meaning from my own near-death experience. But the two women at a stall— aunt and niece—did not seem to share my fatalist impressions; I could try it or not, they said. But if I wanted to be able to put the things together that I was fantasising about, it might be a good idea, no? This nourished a budding sensation that I may have to cross that boundary within, even if prior to the conference I had been very clear that in no way was I interested in participating in an ayawaska circle if I was offered the opportunity. Not only out of fear of the substance’s e/affects, but also because of the dubious manner in which ayawaska is distributed in our contemporary world through continued colonial networks, the upholding of which I had no wish to contribute to.

Before joining the conference, it had been very difficult for me not to understand every instance of a white Westerners’ use of ayawaska as a transgressive act of complicity with colonialism that I did not want to commit. Further, according to urban myth, it is the spirit of ayawaska that seeks out its apprentice, not the other way around. It would therefore feel wrong and desecrating for me to be making such a decision on my own; to pay a fee and go by bus or boat to whichever ‘authentic’ ‘ancestral’ setting hosting the circle. As such, my mind’s schematics had laid out the moral terrain accordingly: I was allowed to attend the conference, watch and learn, but I could not try it, since taking ayawaska would equal my assuming the role of coloniser appropriating a sacred mystery that was not mine to enjoy.

Yet, this moral scheme came with an important omission: Taking ayawaska or not, I was still there as a physical body and a clearly decipherable Northern European 'sign' in Acre, that is: A very tangible effect of the same colonialism that I was trying to wish away with my schematic proscriptions. It was a new realisation to me but seemed completely obvious to the women: The damage is long done, the space is full of gringas and gringos. Thus, in that specific context, wanting to learn but not participate in an ayawaska circle simply meant favouring the conference's Western-academic tradition over the Indigenous' own. And that would be even worse, no? The young niece went on to suggest that if I changed my mind, I might join one of Mapu's circles, since he was open to transcultural exchange and healing. Still, I was not entirely convinced—to me, taking ayawaska was neither a plan nor a wish, but to my surprise began to appear as a counter-intuitive ethical imperative that I did not know what to do with. And even if Mapu did indeed seem friendly and engaged, he was also a fierce young man and Indigenous leader, and I was unsure if I could trust him with the gendered and culturally specific nature of my trauma.

So, I thanked them for the conversation and for their kind advice and purchased a small mahogany bow and arrows for my son, and a hand-made latex pouch for myself.



## *Futuro?*

Unfortunately, my mediocre Portuguese-skills rendered the first three presentations of the afternoon's psychology-session rather impenetrable to me, and flipping through my notebook I find that I have not taken a single note aside from writing down the presenters' names and the titles of their presentations. But before the fourth presenter's name—psychologist Rafael Costa—I have drawn a small star indicating that his talk about 'shamanic cosmopractices' and cosmopolitics somehow came through.<sup>463</sup> I have also taken notes—far less than for the previous English-language and dubbed presentations—but still: "The shaman is a diplomat that introduces other knowledges/visions to her or his community," I have written. And, shifting to Portuguese, I continue: "É uma prática da liberdade; não pode ser controlada, mas é afirmação da vida."<sup>464</sup> And then I have drawn an arrow pointing to and encircling the word "futuro?"

After the session, the presenters gather around the stage, and they are clearly familiar with each other and talk and laugh. I wait a bit to see if the group dissolves, and if I might be able to grab hold of Costa on the way out, so I can ask where I might get my hands on his research in writing. But the group clings together as they head for the exit, so I have to overcome my shyness and interrupt them to get hold of him. He is friendly and pleased with my interest, but also still socially engaged with the group, so when I ask how I may source his research in writing, he hands me his paper from the session, "here," he smiles, and leaves. I fold the sheet meticulously along the middle and place it in the back of my notebook. My plan is to read it when I come back to the hotel. But upon returning to my room in the evening, I am so tired that I fall asleep as soon as I lay my head on the pillow.

But on September 3, 2021—almost five years after the fact—I finally got myself together to reading Costa's presentation for the II World Ayawaska Conference, AYA2016, which is partially based on his doctoral thesis from 2009.<sup>465</sup> It opens with an anecdote about the French poet and playwright Antonin Artaud, who—in relation to a presentation at a Mexican university—had asked his audiences why they as Latin American intellectuals were so

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<sup>463</sup> Rafael Barroso Mendonça Costa: "Ayahuasca: uma cosmoprática xamânica," in "Psicologia e Saúde Pública. Maria Rebel, Antonio Roazzi, D. Daldegan, R. Costa, C. Ribeiro" [conference panel] at *II World Ayahuasca Conference. AYA2016*, ICEERS, October 17 – October 22, 2016 (Rio Branco: Universidade Federal do Acre, October 18, 2016), <https://youtu.be/W5-5ZcdFNF4> (accessed June 30, 2022): 00:46:14-01:01:46

<sup>464</sup> "It is a practice of liberty; it cannot be controlled, but it is an affirmation of life." (my translation from the Portuguese)

<sup>465</sup> Rafael Barroso Mendonça Costa: "Ayahuasca: uma experiência estética," [Doctoral dissertation] (Niterói: Universidade Federal Fluminense, 2009)

preoccupied with European ideas and movements—surrealism and psychoanalysis—when through their indigenous countrymen they had access to “an ancient science profoundly connected to nature and to healing methods that science could not yet dream of?” (my translation from the Portuguese).<sup>466</sup>

Taking Artaud’s question to the Latin American intellectuals as point of departure, Costa stresses the importance of engaging in psychology’s most important practice: Listening. To listen to the Indigenous communities, from which *ayawaska* originates, and to be sensitive to the knowledges that may be conferred from its use, in order to secure a continued place in the world, not just for these knowledges, but for the peoples, cultures, and communities, from which they stem.

Setting out to bridge the gap between so-called ‘modern’ and Indigenous worlds in his presentation, Costa experimentally expands on the notion of ‘shamanic diplomacy,’ which he draws from the anthropological concept of ‘perspectivism’ coined by anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro. According to Viveiros de Castro, via Costa, perspectivism understands the Amerindian shaman as an intermediary between widely different and often opposing spiritual entities and perspectives. Acting as cosmic mediator between mundane and spiritual realms, between diverse forms of agencies and communities in the Amazon, Amazonian shamanism may be seen as a political art; an act of cosmic diplomacy. Whether designated as ‘pajé’ or ‘shaman,’ this function should however not be understood as a constant attribute that defines the shamanic subject as a fixed entity, Costa warns. Rather, the shaman is a passageway; an ‘event’ in constant motion even if physically they do not move out of the spot. Drawing on the notion of *ayawaska* as a ‘teacher plant’<sup>467</sup> capable of facilitating spiritual movement and cosmic intermediacy, Costa moves on to ask what knowledges may be conferred from its use if we attune ourselves to its lessons?

In an attempt to answer this question, he connects Foucault’s notion of ‘care of the self’<sup>468</sup> with the aesthetics of ‘mirations’ (from the Portuguese ‘*mirações*’: A *daimista*<sup>469</sup> term denoting the wonders or visions produced by *ayawaska*), and thereby arrives at a

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<sup>466</sup> Rafael Barroso Mendonça Costa: Op.cit. (2016)

<sup>467</sup> Through its epithets of ‘*planta Maestra*’ or ‘*planta professora*’

<sup>468</sup> James Wong: “Self and Others: The Work of ‘Care’ in Foucault’s Care of the Self” in *Philosophy Faculty Publications*, 6, 2013, [https://scholars.wlu.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1005&context=phil\\_faculty](https://scholars.wlu.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1005&context=phil_faculty) (last accessed June 30, 2022)

<sup>469</sup> I.e., pertaining to the syncretic religion of Santo Daime, which understands and uses *ayawaska* as sacrament.

détournement of the contemporary Western understanding of the Self as a sealed-off entity, and of self-care as an inherently individual practice.

Through the words inscribed above the entrance to the ancient Apollo temple in Delphi—“Know Thyself”—Costa explores the archaic Greek relation between self-care and knowing as an occidental twin or double of the ‘other-direction’ inherent to shamanic self-awareness: In classic antiquity, he writes, Apollo devotees were required to observe a long line of what Costa calls ‘ethical procedures of self-care’—diets and moderation—in order to gain audience with the temple’s priestesses and breathe in the magic fumes capable of conferring mystical knowledge about ‘themselves.’ Thus contrary to Nietzsche, who according to Costa regarded ascetic practices as negations of life, Costa shows how the emphasis on self-care practices anchored in an ethics of moderation is in fact a transcultural, transhistorical, and life-affirmative, cultic feature: One that he finds emerging at the heart of ayawaska spirituality. Via the notion of self-care through moderation—and effectively, the moderation of the Self—the teacher plant connects the self of the individual with the selves that surround it, spiritually as well as physically, thus paradoxically rendering self-awareness a collective mode of orientation.

This radical ‘other-direction’ is, according to Costa, precisely what distinguishes Western psychology from Amazonian shamanism. He writes: “According to Viveiros de Castro, Amazonian shamanism clearly demonstrates that what really makes us think is the outside, other entities, the cosmos”<sup>470</sup> (my emphasis and translation from the Portuguese)—that is: An inversion of the ontological structures underlying the Western psychoanalytical tradition where mystical experiences are often sought explained (away) through processes of what Costa calls ‘obscure auto-observation.’<sup>471</sup>

More than anything then, Costa writes, the attempt to comprehend the full scope of the practice of self-care as an other-directed practice, requires projecting the visionary experience of ‘mirations’—i.e. ayawaska wonders and visions—across the spectrum from Ethics through to the clinical potentialities of the experience, “like a vector for the transformation of subjectivities and of ways of living”<sup>472</sup> (my translation from the Portuguese). Concluding that it is difficult, if not impossible, to truly fit the mystic experiences of mirations into psychology’s fixed categories of the Self, the Unconscious, the Oedipal, etc., Costa turns his gaze towards

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<sup>470</sup> Rafael Barroso Mendonça Costa: Op.cit. (2016)

<sup>471</sup> Ibid.

<sup>472</sup> Ibid.

contemporary art in the hope that as a discipline it may be better suited than psychology to unfold the visionary landscapes and the potent transformative agencies of ayawaska visions.

Of the tendency among contemporary artists,<sup>473</sup> to dive into ayawaska mirations as the outset for artistic exploration, Costa writes: “Perhaps, what we are witnessing is a new Renaissance movement with an outset in Amazonian shamanism and its archaic techniques of trance,”<sup>474</sup> not unlike the “Italian Renaissance period, which saw the encounter of medieval art and Greek archaic culture” (my translations from the Portuguese).

Having spent years unpacking the lo-transformation group and acquainting myself with the darker sides of the European Renaissance and Enlightenment periods, my own personal enthusiasm for a new Renaissance in the same vein is slight. Costa, on the other hand, expresses hope that it may contribute to the growing tendency to link different life-worlds in Brazil—between the forest and the cities—to the advantage of all: Improving the general livelihood in the indigenous villages, through the installation of clean drinking water and the establishment of agricultural grassroots cooperatives, for example, and—via the increasing cosmopolitan and cosmopolitical activity of Indigenous shamans—to unite people across the spectrum in the fight to preserve the Amazon forest against deforestation.

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<sup>473</sup> E.g., Marina Abramovic, Ernesto Neto, and Aru Kuxipá, among others.

<sup>474</sup> Rafael Barroso Mendonça Costa: Op.cit. (2016)

## *Shamanic Diplomacy*

Beginning to address the complex topic of “Culture, Indigenous Cultural Heritage, and Modernity,” the Wednesday October 19 morning session is opened by the young leader of the Kuntanawa tribe, Haru,<sup>475</sup> who explains how, through its visionary capacities, ayawaska has been key to reviving Kuntanawa culture, which had been thought extinct, but has seen a renaissance during the past 25-30 years. Like Mapu, who stated that “the master is not me, it is ayawaska,” Haru also encourages letting ayawaska “talk for itself instead of talking about it”—in his view, it is superficial to talk about ayawaska without drinking it.

Having consumed ayawaska regularly since the age of seven, Haru has used it in his ongoing exploration of what he calls ‘the people of the forest’ and their historical trajectories, which he claims are completely entangled with the history of ayawaska: In the beginning, he explains, all Indigenous peoples were one people, but then the first death came, and along came ayawaska to enable people to connect with the spirit world. Therefore, “when you talk about ayawaska, you talk about me,” he says: “Ayawaska and Indigenous people is one vibration.” Although stating that “ayawaska is a universal thing among Indigenous peoples of the forest,” it is importantly “uninvented by humans, but rather provided by God for humanity.” As such, ayawaska teaches humanity “how to care, to protect life, to cure and heal.”

“What do we want to do with ayawaska?,” he asks. “She already knows what she wants to do with us.”

According to Haru, the contemporary use and dissemination of ayawaska beyond Indigenous worlds come with the specific purpose of bringing together humanity on a universal level: To “make a global alliance to defend the planet and the forest”; “to acknowledge the potency of the forest and stop degrading our forest”; “to call on our government to govern better, instead of the current situation where money rules.” Ayawaska allows us to “look at each other as human beings; it becomes a part of you and it lives in you,” Haru explains. This is how ayawaska surpasses the confines of the Ego, which according to Haru is nonetheless “good, because it leverages us,” but he also warns that “we cannot let Ego go beyond us.” Thus, by drinking ayawaska we learn how to open up to our surroundings instead of focusing on

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<sup>475</sup> Huru Kuntanawa: “Mundo indígena II: Ayahuasca, culturas, patrimônio indígena e modernidade.” [conference panel] at *II World Ayahuasca Conference. AYA2016*, ICEERS, October 17 – October 22, 2016 (Rio Branco: Universidade Federal do Acre, October 19, 2016), <https://youtu.be/QIKmlcJGoZQ> (last accessed June 30, 2022): 00:03:57-00:20:51

ourselves; “how to adapt to other concepts and go beyond ethnic groups. We are humanity, we are all from here. The planet is only one planet,” he stresses. Yet “ayawaska is a very powerful brew, which has to be respected and taken under the right conditions.” And while it is “open for anyone,” it is important to understand that it is not a drug, and that it has to be protected against foul use because the latter risks leading to a general ban.

Therefore, while he is generally supportive of non-Indigenous use of ayawaska as an awareness-expanding and potentially world-enhancing measure, Haru also calls on users to truly respect Indigenous history and visions by undergoing both “psychological and physical preparation before cooking the brew in order to be able to connect with the spirit of the plant.” This, according to Haru, is that of a snake extending beyond Indigenous realms as “a bridge to bring Indigenous values to the world—not something to be extracted and stolen from its originating culture.”

Nozinho Gonçalves da Silva Apurinã follows Haru on the stage to talk about the Apurinã tribe’s traditional healing practices with ayawaska.<sup>476</sup> The Apurinã do not drink the brew, but rather infuse it in a bath, e.g., for a youth who has been unsuccessful hunting, or who is imagining or hearing things in nature, but is incapable of locating or identifying the animal. In this case, the Apurinã pajé will tell the person’s grandmother or aunt to prepare a bath with ayawaska for them. At night, after the bath, the youth will dream about the being that has been haunting or mocking them and become capable of singling it out. The next day, they will be able to find the animal.

Gonçalves da Silva Apurinã is an older middle-aged man, and unlike the younger leaders, who seem self-confident and fierce, he comes across as soft-spoken and somewhat shy. He does not seem to particularly like being in the spotlight, but nonetheless takes the stage, because he wants to get his message across to the young people and the many foreigners present: That it is important to him that we comprehend how precious ayawaska is to his community as an invaluable healing medicine. Thus, he directs a plea to everybody present to respect the brew by refraining from commercialising it: “It is not a commodity, it is a medicine—a medicine with the purpose of serving humankind.”

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<sup>476</sup> Gonçalves da Silva Apurinã: “Mundo indígena II: Ayahuasca, culturas, patrimônio indígena e modernidade.” [conference panel] *II World Ayawaska Conference*, ICEERS, October 17 – October 22, 2016 (Rio Branco: Universidade Federal do Acre, October 19, 2016) <https://youtu.be/QIKmlcJGoZQ> (accessed June 30, 2022), 00:48:19-00:53:49

“Money could never buy our science,” Gonçalves da Silva Apurinã insists. And he concludes his short presentation by explaining how he cannot share deeper insights regarding the shamanic practices of his people, not because they do not exist, but because he is not authorised by his pajé to do so.

## *Shamanic Diplomacy 2.0*

Unlike the academic presenters on previous panels, neither Haru Kuntanawa nor Nozinho Gonçalves da Silva Apurinã—or any of the other Indigenous panellists contributing to this morning panel—read from a paper they had prepared beforehand. Rather they speak freely and directly, which contributes to lifting the discussion beyond the conference’s academic sphere of imagining and theorising. While agreeing that humanity should work together to save the planet, they also appear hesitant with regards to the prospects of primarily anchoring this effort in the dissemination of their medicine to the world. But they also find themselves in a gridlock, realising that if they do not share their heritage, and show how to engage with the medicine properly, and in a safe way, other forces and actors will step in and make things much worse—not only for people participating in unsafe ceremonies, but also for the Indigenous communities who risk losing access to their medicine through a legislative ban. Yet via their combined statements, they nonetheless express varying levels of regret that *ayawaska* should necessarily be used as a panacea to unite a troubled humanity, with themselves as providers or teachers.

All are dressed in a combination of traditional indigenous attire and modern Western clothing with bead jewellery around their necks, wrists, and waists. Several wear large feather headdresses and black or red facial paint. Some are dressed in traditional woollen woven tunics with elaborate graphic patterns, and one man is holding what from my limited knowledge seems to be a ritualistic object fusing a spear with a musical instrument or pipe. At a non-verbal level, through their clothing and attitudes, they seem to thus challenge the conference’s ambition to uncritically unite and consolidate—(smooth over, even, with the conference’s main sponsor, Dr. Bronner’s slogan: “We’re All One!”)—the stark cultural differences that are the conference’s necessary and unavoidable premise.

The panel leaves me with the impression that it requires radical other-becoming on many levels of the exchange to change beyond the strained colonial relations characterising the conference. This makes the premises of unity and unification—of solidarity, alliances, and complicities—a pressing question.



## *Mediating Hostility*

Here, I find it necessary to pause for a short while to account for the ways in which clothing and design has historically been used in an Amazonian context to assert or negate potential alliances between different groups and peoples. In 2001, anthropologist Peter Gow published *An Amazonian Myth and its History* as the outcome of an extensive fieldwork carried out in the Peruvian Amazon during the 1980s. The book examines the ways and modalities through which myths extend into the lived world of the Yine (Piro)<sup>477</sup> to connect the known with the unknowable, and to demonstrate humanity against the non-human.

The Yine is an Amazonian tribe closely related to the Apurinã, whose language likewise derives from the Southern Arawakan linguistic family. Arawakan is lexically similar to Pano<sup>478</sup>—the language spoken by people of the Huni Kuin and Yawanawá tribes also participating in the AYA2016 conference—and Gow’s ethnography may serve to shed light on the way in which clothing and design can be used to mediate or accentuate hostility between peoples who do not immediately ‘live well together’<sup>479</sup> (such as, e.g., the Western and Indigenous groups present at the AYA2016).

To the Yine, human designs differ from the designs on non-human animal skins by not being intrinsic “spontaneous demonstrations (...) of their specific identities”<sup>480</sup> on their skin, but rather based on the skill, thoughtfulness, and knowledge of the older women who produce them. As such, it is not designs themselves, but the skill, thoughtfulness, and knowledge, with which they are produced that accentuate the fleeting fact of humanity, since the overall phenomenon of design extends far into the non-human realm; a realm from which every human is however drawn when as a new-born they are separated from the placenta—the ‘first design’<sup>481</sup>—which in analogy to the intrinsic animal designs are likewise a spontaneous part of the foetus.

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<sup>477</sup> In his book, Gow uses a “number of nomials which seem to currently be falling from favour in the literature of South-Eastern Peru, such as ‘Piro’ and ‘Campa’. These are increasingly being replaced by the supposedly more authentic designations of ‘Yine’ and ‘Ashaninca’ respectively. (...) Many Campa people do, indeed, call themselves *ashaninca*, but it is not their name: it is a deictic which I could use quite justifiably to mean ‘Scottish people’. (...) I fall back here on such nicknames as ‘Piro’ and ‘Campa’, which have the twin virtues of being common to the ethnographic literature and of being actually used by the people they designate here to refer to each other” (italics his). 21 years have passed since the publication of Gow’s book in 2001, and from my outsider’s orientation within the field of contemporary Amazonian ethnography it appears that practice has shifted away from nicknames such as ‘Piro,’ ‘Campa,’ ‘Kashinawa,’ etc., which now seem to be increasingly regarded as condescending. See: Peter Gow: “Introduction” in op.cit., p. 31:

<sup>478</sup> “Yine language” on *Wikipedia. The Free Encyclopedia*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yine\\_language](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yine_language) (accessed November 24, 2022)

<sup>479</sup> Peter Gow: “A Piro Myth in its Context: A Man who was Tired of Living” in op.cit., p. 42

<sup>480</sup> Peter Gow: “Design: Human and Animal Designs” in *ibid.*, p. 116

<sup>481</sup> Peter Gow: “Design: Births, Human and Miraculous” in *ibid.*, pp. 107-108

To the Yine, according to Gow, the application of designed patterns onto clothing, or onto the human skin in the form of facial or body paint, pervasively associates the adorned persons with jaguars.<sup>482</sup> This means that when they gather for ritual and festive occasions in body paint and with bead jewellery, they do so in the stylized appearances of group-living jaguars—the hypertrophy of terror multiplied, mythologized in the Yine myth of *The Birth of Tsla*:

In the myth, miraculous Tsla is conceived as the result of the ominous union between a human woman and a male jaguar. Tsla is born along with his brothers, the twin-‘Muchkajine,’ the ‘Long Ago White People,’<sup>483</sup> after his father’s collective of herd-living jaguars have torn their mother’s body apart and hung her guts—and by association, her placenta—in a bush for Tsla’s jaguar grandmother to eat. From these guts, Tsla and the Muchkajine appear, and together they trick the remaining jaguars to leap into their deaths in the river, with the exception of the grandmother-jaguar who escapes into the forest. Since then, jaguars have been solitary hunters rather than herd-living animals.<sup>484</sup>

According to Gow, festive and ritual gatherings bring together people, who have chosen to live apart in separate villages because they do not ‘live well’ together.<sup>485</sup> Since hosts and guests are by definition not co-residents ‘living well together,’ they have traditionally gathered in the adorned appearance of herd-living jaguars—predators par excellence—to come across as at once terrifying and beautiful; as the ritual embodiment of the mythic characters from the *Birth of Tsla*, as it were. As such, the festive “decoration with designs is a use of the illusion of jaguar appearance to mediate the hostility between different villages.”<sup>486</sup>

According to Gow, the observation that since the 1980s Yine people seem to prefer ‘white peoples’ clothes’ over traditionally designed Yine attire for festive and ritual gatherings should not be interpreted as a symptom of the fragility of Indigenous Amazonian cultures against white Western influence.<sup>487</sup> Rather it may be interpreted as a transformation of transformations, following the logic of Claude Lévi-Strauss’ notion of ‘transformation group:’ A

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<sup>482</sup> Peter Gow: “Design: To look like Jaguars” in *ibid.*, pp. 120-121

<sup>483</sup> Peter Gow: “Design: The Transformations of Design” in *ibid.*, p. 129

<sup>484</sup> Peter Gow: “Design: ‘The Birth of Tsla’ in *ibid.*, pp. 103-105 (my summation)

<sup>485</sup> Peter Gow: “A Piro Myth in its Context: A Man who was Tired of Living” in *ibid.*, p. 42

<sup>486</sup> Peter Gow: “Design: To look like Jaguars” in *ibid.*, p. 123

<sup>487</sup> Peter Gow: “Design: The Transformations of Design” in *ibid.*, p. 126

shift in mythic orientation away from the ominous interrelations between humans and jaguars, mythically represented by the fatal circumstances of Tsla's engendering, towards the mythic Muchkajine—the 'Long Ago White People'—linguistically invocative of the 'kajine,' i.e., contemporary white people, with whom Yine people are continuously working to negotiate and transform their strained relations.

Gow writes that, to the Yine, wearing white peoples' clothes may reference the myth's 'Muchkajine,' with whom mythological Tsla co-exists peacefully. At the same time, however, replacing the preceding jaguar-attire, it may also be interpreted to mythically establish white people as another primordial Other, which—just like jaguars—stands in ontological opposition to Yine humanity,<sup>488</sup> and against which one must apply skill, thoughtfulness and knowledge to defend oneself and assert one's humanity. The shift in clothing may thus be seen as indicative of the historical developments playing out in the Amazon throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with white people and the sedimentation of gringo modernity increasingly replacing jaguars as the primary threat towards Yine livelihood and cultural continuity. What Gow then calls 'the transformation of a transformation'<sup>489</sup>—i.e., the change in festive attire since the 1980s—thus reflects a cultural sensitivity towards a shifting terrain with different predators taking the stage to challenge and confront Yine futurity.

On this backdrop, the fact that Indigenous panellists decided to don, not white peoples' clothes, but full traditional attire for their presentations at AYA2016 suggests that these relations are still being negotiated, and that the scores remain unsettled.

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<sup>488</sup> Ibid.

<sup>489</sup> Ibid., p. 127

## Cross-/Culture

This understanding of clothing as a potent cipher of dissidence to mediate hostility finds an important precursor in a Brazilian context in the legendary speech<sup>490</sup> delivered by Indigenous activist, intellectual, and writer, Ailton Krenak to the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies at the National Constituent Assembly on September 4, 1987.<sup>491</sup> Dressed in a white suit, a crisp shirt, and tie, the then 33-year-old Krenak had overcome his immediate decision not to take the floor in order to confront the deputies with the repressive realities of Indigenous life in colonial Brazil. Krenak had been officially invited to speak to the assembly but was then barred from entering the plenary because he was wearing his usual clothes.<sup>492</sup> Having therefore borrowed the white suit from a deputy-friend of his, he went on to address the crowd while slowly covering his face in black genipap paste as an expression of his mourning for the fact that as an Indigenous citizen he could not be accepted in the context. Only if he shed his Indigenous identity by donning white peoples' clothes could he be seen as an equal contributor to the constitution of the post-dictatorial Brazilian state.

Genipap paste is widely used among Amazonian Indigenous groups for mourning rituals.<sup>493</sup> Further, it is applied to the faces of relatives to a person drinking brugmansia—the 'dark ayawaska,' toé—so that the intoxicated will not recognize them in their hallucinatory state. Among the Yine, according to Gow, consuming brugmansia is mythically linked to stripping oneself of one's clothes, i.e. one's humanity.<sup>494</sup> Kinspeople therefore have to hide their faces from the gaze of their temporarily non-human relative, who sees the world from the point of view of death, no longer acting like a human but rather like a malign powerful being: A deadening gaze, which is structurally reminiscent of the forces that barred Ailton Krenak from entering the plenary by requiring him to 'kill' his Indigenous identity and conform to the norms of white Western bourgeois society in order to be seen and heard as an equal fellow human being.

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<sup>490</sup> Ailton Krenak: "Invocação à Terra. Discurso de Ailton Krenak na Constituinte" in *Cadernos SELVAGEM* (Rio de Janeiro: Dantes Editora Biosfera, 2021) (1987), [https://selvagemciclo.com.br/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/CADERNO27\\_CONSTITUINTE.pdf](https://selvagemciclo.com.br/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/CADERNO27_CONSTITUINTE.pdf) (accessed December 7, 2022). Refer to appendix A at the end of this dissertation for English translation

<sup>491</sup> Ailton Krenak: "Discurso de Ailton Krenak, em 04/09/1987, na Assembleia Constituinte, Brasília, Brasil" [pdf with integrated video] in *GIS - Gesto, Imagem e Som*, 4, 1, October 24, 2019, (1987) <https://www.revistas.usp.br/gis/article/view/162846/157198> (accessed February 15, 2022)

<sup>492</sup> Ailton Krenak and Maurício Meirelles: "Our Worlds Are at War" in *e-flux journal*, vol. 110, June 2020, [http://worker01.e-flux.com/pdf/article\\_335038.pdf](http://worker01.e-flux.com/pdf/article_335038.pdf), (accessed February 15, 2022), p. 1

<sup>493</sup> Ibid.

<sup>494</sup> Peter Gow: "Hallucination" in *op.cit.*, p. 137

Far from a strategically essentialist<sup>495</sup> act of self-othering then, Krenak's painting his face in genipap paste during his speech functioned as a ritual gesture that symbolically removed him from the sight and reach of the malign Western forces whose deadening gaze would actively be seeking his annihilation.

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<sup>495</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism" in *Critical Inquiry*, 12, 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), p. 244

## *Radical*

The English word ‘radical’ comes from the Late Latin words ‘rādīcālis’—“of or pertaining to the root, having roots, radical”—and ‘radix,’ simply meaning “root.”<sup>496</sup> To be a radical may be understood as being firmly rooted, or wishing to change something from the roots and up, or both.

In both meanings, the word implies a long gaze into time: Towards the historical past from where a certain culture or phenomenon is thought to spring, and to the distant future where the seeds we plant in the present may blossom. Radical action and perspectives thus necessarily surpass the limited finitude of singular human lives. Coming to us from the past, it may be understood as the strong remembrance of cultural codes and practices. Projected into the future, it means dedicating oneself and one’s actions beyond the limitation of one’s individual life span. As such, radical thought and action link the notions of remembrance and futurity to that of substantial and dedicated transformation.

Ailton Krenak’s 1987-speech at the National Constituent Assembly marked a radical vantage point for Indigenous activism, futurity, and becoming, in the context of—and actively aspiring beyond—the modern democratic Brazilian state. By returning the gaze from an Indigenous non-assimilationist position (speaking up, instead of being spoken of and for), he effectively questioned the fundamental premises on which the post-dictatorial country should be built by calling out the narrow normative structures that define humanity from a white Brazilian perspective.

At the AYA2016, Krenak’s stance was resonating forcefully.

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<sup>496</sup> “The Roots of Radical” on *Merriam-Webster*; <https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/radical-word-history> (accessed November 25, 2022) and “radical” on *Wiktionary: The Free Dictionary*; <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/radical#Etymology> (accessed November 25, 2022)

### *Shamanic Diplomacy 3.0*

Aspiring to be as accurate as possible, and to compensate for my lacking note keeping and chronological overview by tracing the conference's online trails, I discover that ICEERS has shared their recordings of almost all the AYA2016 presentations on Youtube.<sup>497</sup> Among them, also a short video tribute<sup>498</sup> to the 103-year-old pajé Tatá of the Yawanawá tribe, who died shortly after the conference, but is seen in the video blessing the official opening of the AYA2016 conference on Monday October 17; the day prior to my arrival in Rio Branco.

Tatá was born before the Yawanawá's first contact with whites, and his life bridged the transition from traditional Yawanawá lifestyle, across rubber slavery and life at the missions, to rural modernity. He was the last living pajé raised and initiated in the traditional ways of his tribe, and since the mid-00's he has guided a younger generation of, primarily female, aspiring pajés in their quest to revitalise Yawanawá traditional customs and diverse cultural heritages.

In the tribute video, we see the old pajé being assisted onto the auditorium stage by two middle-aged men, who also appear to be prominent tribal members. All three are wearing white shirts and dark trousers, and Tatá is standing in the middle of the triad, which is positioned in front of a line of people—Indigenous as well as whites—seated on the stage. Tatá and the two men assisting him are wearing red facial paint, red-and-yellow feather headdresses, and short or rolled-up sleeves to cleanse their hands and lower arms in an incense smoke arising from a bowl that is extended towards them by a younger man bowing down before them. The young man is wearing blue jeans and a white-and-blue chequered shirt. His face is likewise painted with red paint, but he is not wearing a headdress.

Tatá turns towards the audience and starts speaking inaudibly—then he cleanses his hands in the incense's smoke, while the organisers hurry to fetch a microphone, which is brought in by another blue-clad youth to amplify Tatá's speech. He hands the microphone to the man left of Tatá. The man holds it in front of Tatá, who then goes on to address the crowd in Pano for about a minute's time. Then he puts his cleansed hands together and blows through

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<sup>497</sup> *II World Ayahuasca Conference. AYA2016*, ICEERS, October 17 – October 22, 2016,

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLFSYWkLS73y6hwEaBHmIJyyQ9XCbMauc1> (accessed December 4, 2022)

<sup>498</sup> "AYA2016—In Memoriam—Tatá Yawanawá," [conference panel] at *II World Ayahuasca Conference. AYA2016*, ICEERS, October 17 – October 22, 2016 (Rio Branco: Universidade Federal do Acre, October 17, 2016), <https://youtu.be/Mf1sm0xdII> (accessed September 15, 2021)

them in different directions—to the front, to the sides, down- and upwards, behind him, all around—with a whistling hissing sound.

Afterwards, one of the white-clad men who assisted Tatá on stage, takes the microphone to translate Tatá's blessing into Portuguese: "Today, here in the city of Rio Branco, there are great authorities present. I would like to ask the Great Spirit, who grants this opportunity, for this event to be an event of good understanding, of good works, and that from this event we may become brothers and draw the [onwards] path for our lives. That our lives may continue on Earth, where we may enjoy the soil, the water, the forest, and that we may continue to remain alive. I am old, I will be making my passage soon, but my time, my family, is going to continue, and this event here in the city of Rio Branco is the blessing for all humankind on Earth. Many thanks. Maybe these will be my last words; my message left here for all of you."

The audience applaud the aging pajé, and journalists step forward to take pictures from below and on the stage. The assisting leader goes on to provide a bit of context for Tatá's blessing and his inauguration of the conference: "Along with Yawá, who is not present here today, Tatá is the last shaman here in Acre. Those two are the oldest people among the Yawanawá in the Indigenous lands of Rio Gregório. Tatá has lost his vision and sees almost nothing. Likewise, Yawá is unable to hear anything. I don't know whether there exist in other Indigenous lands older shamans or anyone more advanced than the two of them."

He pauses, and a woman steps forward to whisper something into his ear, after which he concludes: "Tatá also left a hug for Tião.<sup>499</sup> A hug for Tião and his family that he may participate in this event as a great warrior, as a great chief of nation. [Tatá] says that Tião is also his chief of nation, and that he has great respect for him."

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<sup>499</sup> Tião is the nickname for Sebastião Afonso Viana Macedo Neves/Tião Viana, who served as Governor of Acre for the Worker's Party between 2011 and 2019.



## *Vomiting the Fantasmatics*<sup>500</sup>

I lean back and dig my fingers into the stamped surface of the cool soil. I am seated behind a young indigenista couple. The ground is covered by leaves that have fallen from the tall trees above us, their crowns barely discernible against the dark sky. The trunks are slightly lit by the fire at the centre of the circle, where people are lined up in front of the pajé to receive each their serving of the concoction.

As a first-timer, I was among the first to be served, and the heavy taste of the brew still lingers along the sides of my tongue, nauseatingly drawing itself backwards towards my throat, triggering a continuous surge of water in my mouth. The indigenista woman spits into a cup; I would wish I had a cup to spit into too, but swallow instead. After a while, the bad taste wanes.

Looking at the group of people gathered in the forest adjacent to Gaia Aldeia do Ser, I try to come to terms with my decision to join the ceremony. We had arrived at the retreat centre in the forest on small minibuses departing from different locations and hotels in the city of Rio Branco. The participants came from every corner of the Americas and Europe, and while my fellow passengers all seemed excited on the bus, they also appeared to consider it a casual thing to do. They had all participated in numerous circles before, and a large American man dominating my recollection of the bus trip, boastfully presented us with his ayawaska kit, including a thick grey blanket that he told us would keep mosquitos from biting him, and vomit off his clothes.

We had been told that the ceremony would end by midnight, so I was wearing only sandals, a thin long-sleeved jacket over an equally thin t-shirt, and long-legged thin trousers. A large Thai silk scarf would be my only guard against mosquitos, and I cursed myself for my lack of foresight.

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<sup>500</sup> Unfolding the artistic research of Lygia Clark, psycho-analyst and cultural critic Suely Rolnik applies the terms ‘corpo vibrátil’—resonant body—and ‘fantasmatics.’ The former to describe the capacity of (human) bodies to be “vulnerable to the new problems that pulsate in each context and at each moment, so as to bring them into the visible and/or the utterable.” According to Rolnik, it is a capacity that encompasses all sense organs that may allow themselves to be affected by radical otherness—in fact “the whole body has this power to resonate to the forces of the world,” but this power may however be challenged by “fantasmatics” inscribed in the memory of the body, resulting from the traumas experienced in past attempts to establish this kind of sensible relation with the world—attempts which have been inhibited by a lack of reverberation in a surrounding milieu inhospitable to this quality of relation with the otherness of the world,” Rolnik writes (my accentuation). See: Suely Rolnik and Rodrigo Nunes (transl.): “The Body’s Contagious Memory” on *transversal texts*, January 2008, <https://transversal.at/transversal/0507/rolnik/en> (accessed on August 27, 2021)

I had come across the poster advertising the ceremony on the door to the women's toilets at UFAC. The university halls were full of posters and flyers promoting various ayawaska circles taking place during the conference, but none of them had appealed to me. Yet this one stood out: Instead of the other flyers' exoticizing depictions of, e.g., male shamans extending their hands towards the sky to signal authenticity and ancestrality, it featured nothing but a close-up image of dark leaves and an elegant typography announcing the focus of the ceremony: *Força Feminina*—feminine strength—as well as the name of the female shaman leading the ceremony, and the location.

I immediately understood that I had to participate. That this was my chance to confront my trauma, even if it meant daring another encounter with the dark forces I had met during birth. I was frightened, but still determined to locate the organisers, who had set up a stall in one of the university corridors. I told them about my motivation for joining the ceremony, and asked them whether they thought it would be a good idea. If it was a responsible or, on the contrary, an irresponsible thing to do when battling trauma? I also tried to sense whether as a white European—and as someone actively needing help—I would be welcome in the circle, or if my participation would be a nuisance to the providers and the other participants. They did not answer my questions, but instead returned them to me: What did I think? I did not know. Eventually, we agreed that I could come to the retreat centre in the evening and see if it felt right to participate once I was there. If not, I would be free to return to the city on one of the minibuses. But the buses left as soon as we had arrived. And despite my anxiety, I was surprised to sense my decision settle within. I was scared, but felt a growing determination to see it through, even if the whole thing was delayed by several hours, and the ceremony did not start until approximately 10 PM.

I had been told that one can never know what to expect; that ayawaska will treat you the way she decides, but also that the medicine is a mother. Caring. Some people throw up, I was told, others pass through the entire ceremony without feeling anything. Having ingested my serving, I was secretly hoping to fall into the latter category—it was already enough of an experience and accomplishment for me to have mustered the courage to attend the circle and down the concoction. If from then on, I could be spared too much drama I would be thankful.

People were still waiting in line. The young couple and I exchange smiles; they speak English and tell me that I am free to ask for their help if I need it. They have participated

in many circles before and are familiar with the process, and this helps soothe my nervousness. They tell me that yoga breathing techniques will be good once the hallucinations kick in. I know yoga; I can do it. I return their smiles affirmatively, then fix my gaze on the fire while scratching the ground's top layer with my nails. The last participants are being served, and then the pajé and her helpers collect the bowl and ladle and carry them inside the building. Meanwhile, the couple extend their hands towards me to invite me to join them by the fire. I hesitantly follow suit, and we stand around for a bit, until the pajé and another woman return holding Tatá's hands, guiding and assisting the elderly pajé into the circle. The sight moves me. I think of my own grandparents and imagine how it would feel to hold their hands while assisting them into a celebratory dance. I can almost sense their hands seizing mine, and it moves me to witness the care that extends between the generations before me: Tatá supporting his young descendants and their reclamation of Yawanawá culture to the extent of participating in a circle despite his high age. The respect that travels from the younger women in Tatá's direction through the physical support and their inviting him into the ceremonial space as a defining character. With the forest as time machine, I witness the transmission across generations of intimate knowledges and specific histories—social and embodied memories—of this location in time and space, and of the people who inhabit it.

It does not immediately translate beyond those engaged—Tatá, the female pajé, and the other women—still, it reminds me of my own kin, and of the care with which we have supported each other through life despite hurt and disagreement: My grandmother's soft hand and firm grip, as I support her elbow while walking her from her apartment to the communal area of the care home. The dedication with which my mother supports my son in the exploration of his world. My own memories of feeling held and connected.

They join hands, the rest of us follow suit.

We start walking around the fire, singing. It is a call and response with Tatá as lead. I feel awkward to begin with, but after a while my anxiety fades, and I delight in the singing and dancing, which remind me of the circular folk dances that my mother loves to teach. I do not feel embedded into the Amazonian reality as much as I feel a parallel resonance rising between the celebration I am partaking in, and the ones I grew up with. I have danced and sung in many circles before, occasionally around a fire too, and all those times now come to me and fuse with the celebration. I could have danced all night, but after a while the circle dissolves as people start succumbing to the power of the brew. The fire burns less bright now. No more

spectacle, it is time to look inwards. I feel my anxiety returning as a stinging sensation in my nose and throat and the pulsating sound of blood in my ears. People retreat to the peripheries of the lighted circle. Some vomit, and their moans blend with the soft music from a lone guitar, which reminds me of lying in bed as a child, listening to my father play: Tender tunes rocking me into the night like the ones now rising towards the Amazonian sky.

The young couple are also under the influence of the brew, but I feel nothing. I am relieved. I relax a bit at the thought that maybe I am one of those that are not sensitive to the effects of ayawaska. Then it would only be a matter of waiting it out—staying clear while the others pass through their intoxicated states. I look around but there is not much to see. The fire is but embers now, and I am the only one still sitting. So, I fold out my jacket and lie down on my back with my scarf as cover, grateful that it was not the horrific take-over of my mental capacities and nervous system that I had anticipated. Grateful towards the ayawaska mother that she had understood how I needed a slow descent; how I needed to stay in control; how she had let me.

I close my eyes. I do not know what time it is, but it is late. I doze off to the comforting sound of the guitar still playing. Musing, I think of my paranoia prior to attending the circle: My fear of the brew and of not being truly welcome as a white. I am proud that while everyone else around me seem to be losing it—throwing up, raving around—I manage to lie still, calm and clear, without needing any help. Because, even if I have calmed down, I would still feel shy about asking the pajés for help. I still feel like I am transgressing, I guess. So, I make it my top priority to pass through the night without disturbing anyone or behaving inappropriately, and take comfort in my decision, which I feel is responsible and sensible.

I exhale, and enjoy sensing the ground beneath me, which reminds me that I too am rooted, albeit far, far away. But the ground I spring from is geologically connected with the earth supporting me here, and I feel thankful to be held; for the way the ground's support allows me to sense and perceive my body from within, not without. I feel my feet, I feel my knees, and now I feel something like a finger massaging my right ovary from inside. Like an air bubble passing through my intestines but moving with more dedication. It pauses for a while in a tender and painful place, close to where they pierced my skin to tear me open and pull out my son through a hole in my stomach. But the finger is gentle and its touch soothing as it eases the tension that the wound had instilled. I relax to a deeper level, and now the finger moves upwards, carefully eliminating blockages one organ at a time, and finally arrives at my thyroid

gland, which has been slightly swollen. Growing from a finger to a full hand now, it gently rests over my throat as if energetically warming and healing my breath and speech centre. I inhale deeply, and then: On a bright green backdrop, a giant luminous frog appears, filling its vocal sac at the pace of my exhale. I regard it stupefied. Then I take off.

I arrive in a laboratory that unfolds between two fronds of a fractalizing palm tree's leaves. The hand lifts its index finger, instructing me that there is no shame in being white or Western. People should be judged by their actions, not by their provenance, and while Western science is indeed capable of and responsible for many evils, it is not inherently evil itself. It too may contribute to global betterment if used in the right way. It is very simple, the hand insists, mocking my pre-ceremony self-complicating anxieties: We are all just people. The laboratory dissolves, and now we are headed towards the sky above the trees, but I am not looking down, only up—or forward, for the Earth is not under me; it is behind me now. I am exhilarated. I fly at the speed of light, upwards, forwards, stars and galaxies rushing by. I keep accelerating. I see light and dark coming and going, rhythmically taking turns like breakers on the shore, and now I am on that shore marking the ever-receding edge of time. I stop and observe it, but I am both breakers, sea, and shore, and my feet on the sand in the water; and the edge, too, is me and not me at all. The surf draws lines into the sand as breakers cave their way into the beach. A small sandbank, and after the water's passage: No bank anymore. Cold winds blowing, and sand flying from the dunes, and I see the dunes disappear with time, and I see the ground like a dune and a sandbank disappear. The sea and wind eat their way into the shore, consuming the beach until the very last grain of sand. Upon seeing that grain disappear, I realise that I have arrived at the end of the world as I know it; the world of tangible materiality. Now there is nowhere for me to return my physical body to, and it hits me like a sudden chilling panic: How can I return from immateriality? What have I done? What about my son? I turn around again but can no longer see the radiant edge of time; I see but darkness. Still, I hear the lecturing hand's admonition: You already knew that everything would vanish. Why does it frighten you? I try to inhale and evoke the circle and the fire behind visions of flipping-folding dimensions upon dimensions. Images of the other participants whiz by, but then again subside as I am sucked back into space.

Now I am really scared. Even if I am capable of returning to the circle if I invest all my mental capacities in the effort, I cannot keep grounded. It is as if I have become oriented towards an opposite gravitational pole that draws me towards it whenever I care to relax.

I need help, I think, but I do not dare disturb the pajés with my gravitational challenge. If only I knew how to focus and concentrate for long enough to keep grounded. Oh. Rainbow fractals pulling me into the dark that knows not even the slightest grain of sand. Eternal darkness, no stars or embers even. Åh. I am desperate at the thought of having to die in this night, in this jungle, away from my family, at my own initiative. I curse myself for my selfishness and delusion. My poor son, I think. My poor mother. Embodying the string that connects me to my home, I have stretched it, drawn it far across the Atlantic, across the Equator, into the Amazon, into this night.

I strike the string and let it sound for a while. Then it breaks. I collapse.

I need help and reach out for the young couple lying on the ground in front of me. Luckily, they care to talk, and they are not upset as I am, so they walk me around—a bit further into the forest, and then into the illuminated building. Such relief. Under the fluorescent light I ascertain that I have a body, even if I cannot feel it. But the rainbow fractals of my immaterialisation keep haunting me, and I need to talk to stay grounded. By now I cannot walk. So, they support my weight as I talk of birth and neglect. Of dark waves consuming me, and how it was not the sight of death but the indifference of my caregivers that had hurt me so. How my birth had radically alienated me from the Danish collective I had thought of as mine. How embarrassed I was to have understood the full extent of its foundational brutality, only when I found it targeted against myself. How that whole realisation had cast my decision to reproduce in a radically different light, but, paradoxically—tragically—at the very point of delivery: The point of my Danish reproductive fact.

The young couple hold and support me as best they can, listening patiently to my rambling speech, the woman rotating and rocking her pelvis, and now it dawns on me that she is pregnant. When she spat in the cup, it was the concoction. She did not down it? Okay, I think, I have passed through what you are headed towards, I will fill you in. But before I get to continue my speech, we are interrupted by a Yawanawá man my age, who in Portuguese offers to help rid me of the many spirits that have besieged me and are causing the wild hallucinations and my gravitational upset. The couple explains to him my affliction: That I had nearly died in labour two years prior, that it is death's darkness that is drawing me in. He instructs me to sit down, and with a hissing whistling sound he blows the spirits away from me. Away from my head. Away from my neck and shoulders. Away from my back and arms. "Melhor?," he asks: "Are you better?" I nod. I am not sure.

It is difficult to acknowledge the depth of one's darkness, but it is impossible to escape it without acknowledging it. Yet I feel I have a thing going for me nonetheless, mediating my visions to the pregnant couple: I tell them how much I hate Denmark and the idea of the nation state, thinking of the 2015-surge of refugees arriving in my country only to find themselves alienated, mocked, spat on, and rejected. I tell them how genuinely disappointed I am in my country(wo)men who inhumanely trade the lives of others for their own security. I snort, thinking of my birth: "Which security?!" I am furious. I want to be anyone but me. How could I return to the ground if it is me I would have to return to? I curse my ancestors for their weakness and submissiveness in relation to the enclosures of the heath. I curse their descendants for their cynic indolence and complicity with the Danish state, from which follows the logic of weaponizing its borders to preserve our arrogated wealth in the illegitimate shire that is contemporary Denmark.

But now my ancestral showdown is interrupted once again. This time by a white indigenista—one of the organisers—whom I remember deliberately avoiding at the university stall. She has deep-set pit-like eyes, a distant gaze, a cold smile. She takes me by the arm, not my hand, and draws me towards the door: "It is no good just to stand here and talk. You have to come to the fire. You cannot do any proper work here in the light!" I resist, but she mocks my resistance: "You have been rambling long enough, it is time to move forward. You have to purge!" "Purge?" "Purge! Vomit!," she illustrates her intention by pointing two fingers into her mouth: "If your body does not do it instinctively, you have to help it along."

"Here, come sit by this tree," she instructs me and draws my shaking body towards a small palm tree, where she sits me down. Then she brings forth a small tube with a bend at the middle, which she inserts into my right nostril: "Don't breathe in, when I blow." But I inhale even so and the rapé tobacco snuff makes me cough while instantly kindling a host of sparkles all over my skull. She inserts the pipe into my other nostril and blows again. The contour of my body is drawn by sweat emerging from every pore. I am no longer free-floating, but I am still weak. She seems annoyed with my weakness: "Now purge!," she insists, and lifts my hand towards my mouth. But I cannot. She then goes on to fetch a young man whom she places besides me: "He's Indigenous. He'll look after you," she says, disregarding how humiliating and condescending that comment and situation is for both of us. I cling to my little tree and try to shove my fingers down my throat, like she had instructed. I feel an immense resistance towards her interference but am also keen on moving beyond my current state, so I try to vomit.

At first, my attempts only make me drool, then I regurgitate a bit, and finally the sharp taste of ayawaska returns at full force and installs itself in my nose. I hate vomiting, but it feels good to have ejected the brew and to reject its rendition of me as a spectral waning character. A ghost.

I moan at every cramping purge, and the moans grow in intensity until amounting to the level of screaming. The shy voice inside that had told me not to trouble anyone is overruled by another: "They too have to hear your screams." So, I scream. Deep from my womb and clear from my chest; shrill from the back of my head and not human at all. The screams wave across me, and I channel their energy, which is also building me up—not just from the outside in; also from this body and outwards. It aligns me with the deep sorrow and anger of the devastated forest. With the desperation of every marginalised being. I scream for the ominous role I play in the globalised game of exploitation. I scream for my helplessness and my wish to change. I scream for the hope for my child. Eventually I cry.

The pit-eyed organiser returns: "Are you better?" I do not know. "I think so," I lie, in the hope that she will leave me alone. "Now come to the fire." "But it is too dark..." The young man has to leave. The couple is nowhere to be seen. My legs are shaking, and I have difficulty walking and slide in a pool of vomit. But at least I have a contour again. "Okay, you can sit here on the threshold then," she says and brings me to the porch of the house, where the light from inside blends into the pitch-black night. "But don't look into the light; focus on the darkness," she says and is off again.

When a little later she passes by, she does not notice me. In her hands she is holding a stack of paintings—her own?—featuring tantric patterns, ineptly painted fractals, a deformed rainbow jaguar. She offers the paintings for sale as souvenirs to the other participants, who are back on their feet and on their way to the city. I am relieved to have her off my back, and the place is quiet now that everyone has left. I am alone, except for the core crew of pajés and their helpers, and I still feel spectrally exposed. I am calmer than before, but it is as if a part of me keeps fluttering around the delineation of my body, incapable of really settling, and I continue to be besieged by acute intangible fears that come and go.

Now the pajés turn towards me and, with the help of an English interpreter, they ask me how I feel. This time I am honest: "I am not well." They ask me to come to the fire, but I am far away, unable to walk, and also still too scared to venture back into the dark surrounding the fire, so they lie me down on the porch.



In Portuguese I hear someone asking “Do you think she will make it?” They think I do not understand, but I understand every word. I even understand when in Pano they hesitantly confirm. They start shouting and blowing all over my body with a particular focus directed towards my abdomen, my chest and throat, and with their hands, they massage me upwards and out; downwards and out. They splash water on me, and I feel how the inhuman forces release their hold on me as the pajés massage my body. Out of the flipping-folded space: A human body, a woman. I twist, or my body is twisted, and I follow suit. Then they stop and move aside. I am lying alone on the porch and feel how the energies gather and go down with the wind. I am breathing. And then I see the sky brighten and the sun rise above the treetops. My legs are trembling as I rise, but they carry my weight, and I can walk again. There is still an echo of song in my ears, and my skin remembers the touch of their hands like persistent trails of energy running from the centre of my body outwards. I cherish the sensation and do not want to lose it.

Together, we walk towards the exit of the retreat centre. A taxi is waiting. The pajé gets in first, I follow. I am myself again, but terribly cold, so she lends me her jacket, while I chatter my teeth all the way to the Ibis hotel. My hair and scarf are full of dead leaves, dirt on my trousers, my feet smeared in vomit.

Humbled, I cross the doorstep to the hotel.

Then head to my room and call my family.

### Chapter 3

## Bringing the War Home

### *Sum*

Through this dissertation I have sought to outline the interrelations between historical processes and myth from the vantage point of art, that is: Through the constructedness—artificiality—of mythic narratives, which nonetheless predispose and orient the historical fates of humans, cultures, and societies, alike. To start critically acquainting myself with the mythic structures that inform our present, I have engaged in a practice of ‘active mythic thinking’ as a method of learning and of attempting to become capable of negotiating with ‘that which obliges.’<sup>501</sup>

In the first chapter, “Rites of Passage,” I zoomed in on the particular case of Denmark to show how the homogenising myth of the nation state is hinged on the oppression and forced forgetting of historical ‘ambiguities of identity.’ Starting with my own account of nearly dying in childbirth, I showed how, since the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Danish state has relied on the systematic co-optation of women’s reproductive powers through the work of midwives and the so-called Dannekoner. These would contribute to culturally streamlining the population through what, according to Arnold van Gennep, “can be viewed as having considerable and social importance”—pregnancy and childbirth—“since they assure to the future mother and father an entrance into a special segment of society, the most important one of all, and the one which constitutes society’s permanent nucleus”.<sup>502</sup> The family as reproductive unit and key to futurity.

That far from everyone had equal access to project themselves into the future, was illustrated by ‘the ritual of the flag,’ which saw a young man of Kjeltring descent obliged to assimilate to the Danish nation to obtain or maintain a sense of future; a hope of marrying, reproducing, living well. Outlining the processes of forced forgetting that would actively suppress and marginalise the Kjeltrings, I have shown how Denmark’s consensus and homogeneity mythology stands in marked opposition to the patchwork of peoples and cultures that were the actual foundational premise of the Danish nation state.

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<sup>501</sup> Philippe Pignarre & Isabelle Stengers: “Learning Fright” in *op.cit.*, pp. 62-67

<sup>502</sup> Arnold van Gennep: “Pregnancy and Childbirth” in *op.cit.*, p. 49

In comparison with the plight of other colonised cultures in- and outside of Europe, the ‘near-colonisation’<sup>503</sup> of the West Jutlandic pastoralist heath farmers and Kjeltrings was inarguably mild. Bue Rübner Hansen asserts that “[v]iewed from the perspective of the violence, the destruction, and the victims, the European colonisation of the world is incomparable to the East Danish colonisation of (...) Jutland. But seen from the perspective of economic politics and governance, there are continuities: not in intensity, but in pragmatics and strategies”<sup>504</sup> (my translation from the Danish).

The East Danish colonisation of the heath populations consisted mainly in disciplining measures to assimilate them, since—despite Steen Steensen Blicher’s racializing claims to the contrary—the difference between ‘Kjeltring’ and ‘Dane’ was primarily a difference in practices, worldviews, and orientation. This meant that the Danish nation state could eliminate the Kjeltrings without having to physically kill them. Instead, through targeted Danifying measures—including the suppression, forced forgetting, and distortion, of cultural heritage, the homogenisation of language, and the resignification of the pastoralist and nomadic heath populations “as poor and in need of commodities and assistance”<sup>505</sup>—the voided ‘heathen’ bodies were readied to host Danes instead; fabricated as a ‘minionised’<sup>506</sup> dirty labourers to serve the nation state through the gendered tasks of birthing new members, and defending the territory, respectively.

Shifting my focus between these two distinct, but related, dirty labourers—the birthing mother and the warring soldier—the dissertation went on to trace the clinical symptomology of being “faced with the experience of [one’s] own death,”<sup>507</sup> as Catherine Grandsard & Tobie Nathan have described fright. Thus temporarily abandoning the national and societal level that faced the Kjeltrings and pastoralist heath farmers with the experience of their cultural death, I zoomed in on the implications of such death-fright in the individual subject.

With Everett Hughes and Jonathan Shay, I learnt how fright in a modern Western context often signifies as disabling trauma in the form of PTSD and/or moral injury, despite the radical other-direction characteristic of its dissociative features—the latter which inspired

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<sup>503</sup> As opposed to distant-colonisations.

<sup>504</sup> Bue Rübner Hansen: Op.cit.

<sup>505</sup> Els Lagrou: Op.cit. (2018), p. 137

<sup>506</sup> Philippe Pignarre & Isabelle Stengers: “Minions” in op.cit., pp. 33-34

<sup>507</sup> Tobie Nathan and Catherine Grandsard: Op.cit., p. 5

Philippe Pignarre & Isabelle Stengers to promote trauma victims as the potential explorers of new worlds and orders if constituted accordingly.<sup>508</sup> Pignarre/Stengers' proposition made me think (and think hard);<sup>509</sup> pondering what it might take to change the constituting of traumatised people from disabled victims to active explorers.

This turned me towards Peter C. Reynolds, who understands the modern West as a mythologically sanctioned entity relying on what he labels the 'covert mythology' of science,<sup>510</sup> which led me to hypothesise whether the disabling—and disablingly individualistic—view on fright upheld through Western clinical psychology might itself be a mythic construct? Thus inspired to probe the mythic foundations of Western science and how its individualistic practices might signify for the traumatised, I decided to engage one of the very myths that spawned it: Not Reynolds' "The Lone Galileo,"<sup>511</sup> but the ancient myth of Galileo's primary 'casualty,' Io, who in 1610 was discovered orbiting the planet Jupiter, thereby inspiring the Copernican and Scientific Revolutions and, ultimately, delivering us to what Reynolds would call 'technocratic' modernity, i.e., the present.

Inspired by Claude Lévi-Strauss' structuralist 'mythologies' that understands any myth as the sum total of all its different isomorphic variations—of which none can be said to be more true or archaic than others—I went on to explore how shifting versions of the Io-myth would reflect historical developments in the Mediterranean region. Tracing the mythic continuum of Io into the present and across the modern West, I simultaneously extended Lévi-Strauss' mythologies beyond himself; beyond the past, and out of the archive.

Understanding lunar Io's orbit around Jupiter as an analogy of traumatic subjectivity—consisting in the victim's looping reexperiencing of the traumatic event—I started searching for strategies to liberate Io from her patriarchal assailant by engaging with the visionary capacities harboured in frightened dissociation. As Turner and van Gennep have shown, the paradox and shock characterising true liminality teach the frightened that "they did not know what they thought they knew," and that "[b]eneath the surface structure of custom was a deep structure, whose rules they had to learn, through paradox and shock."<sup>512</sup> This may in turn enable them to perceive of worlds that are based on unknown logical principles, according

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<sup>508</sup> Philippe Pignarre & Isabelle Stengers: "Learning Fright" in *op.cit.*, p. 65, and Catherine Grandsard and Tobie Nathan: *Op.cit.*, p. 16

<sup>509</sup> Victor Turner: *Op.cit.* (1974), p. 73

<sup>510</sup> Peter C. Reynolds: "Introduction" in *op.cit.*, p xi

<sup>511</sup> Peter C. Reynolds: "The Lone Galileo: Iconic Deep Structure and the Scientific Enterprise" in *ibid.*, pp. 99-128

<sup>512</sup> Victor Turner: *Op.cit.* (1974), p. 73

to Grandsard/Nathan.<sup>513</sup> Yet, bringing this visionary capacity to fruition in the form of societal change that match the radicality of the vision however requires a ritual agency that surpass the liminality of the subjected, the victim, the initiand. It requires a collective reincorporation, and it requires what I label 'authorised and authorising liminality:' A position from which liminally ambiguous insights might be understood as transformative potential, rather than disabling pathology—not unlike the liminality of the 'shaman,'<sup>514</sup> who, having seen, is responsible for, and authorised to, "do something about it."<sup>515</sup>

Elizabeth Povinelli has rightly stated that "it is impossible to write a history of the biopolitical that starts and ends in European history, even when Western Europe is the frame of reference."<sup>516</sup> But at the II World Ayahuasca Conference it became equally clear how it is also almost impossible to write a history of the biopolitical that extends between Western and Indigenous realms, since modern nation state biopolitics signify in almost opposite ways to white Brazilians and Amazonian Natives. What to the former group remains a liminoid question of 'optation'<sup>517</sup> is an obligating question of life and death to latter. As the young leader of the Huni Kuin tribe, Mapu Huni Kuî, asserted on the second day of the conference: "To talk about the medicine is to talk about the life and livelihood of Indigenous peoples"<sup>518</sup>—the two cannot be separated.

While I had decided to attend the conference in the hope of learning from Amazonian shamanic communities how to process my death encounter in a way that would make its inherent fright an agent of transformation rather than trauma, I came back with a completely different set of insights: Rather than learning how to cope with the e/affects of fright, or to heal myself through what Rafael Costa understands 'processes of obscure auto-observation,'<sup>519</sup> I returned with strategies of mediating hostility to establish a relation of negotiation rather than submission to 'that which obliges,'<sup>520</sup> strategies firmly anchored in an Amazonian mythological view on identity as nested in ambiguity rather than homogenisation. This sensitised me to the notion that—in addition to a reincorporating collective, and an

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<sup>513</sup> Catherine Grandsard and Tobie Nathan: Op.cit., p. 18

<sup>514</sup> For the word 'shaman' as shorthand term, see note 446

<sup>515</sup> Peter Gow: "Hallucination" in op.cit., p. 149

<sup>516</sup> Elizabeth A. Povinelli: "The Three Figures of Geontologies" in *Geontologies: a requiem to late liberalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), p. 3

<sup>517</sup> Victor Turner: Op.cit. (1974), p. 74

<sup>518</sup> Glenn Shepard, Moacir Biondo e Mapu: Op.cit., 00:43:00

<sup>519</sup> Rafael Barroso Mendonça Costa: Op.cit. (2016)

<sup>520</sup> Philippe Pignarre & Isabelle Stengers: Op.cit., pp. 62-67

authorising/authorised view on liminality—transformation through liminal fright also requires a view on individuality as inherently ambiguous, and of self-awareness as more than a human feature.

I therefore dedicate this third and final chapter to attempt narrating forth similar capacities ‘at home.’ Not to appropriate culturally specific knowledges or expressions from Amazonian Indigenous communities, but, on the contrary, to learn how to reactive my—our—own ambiguities of identity: Those that were mythologically, practically, and politically, marginalised to craft the Danish nation state, but whose existence and stories now beg our recognition and re-remembrance.

By addressing a ‘we’ that defies national demarcations, I hope to contribute to preparing the ground for making liminality a transformative potentiality rather than disabling pathology in the cultural context by which I am obliged, and for which I am (co-)responsible: The contemporary West.

## *Copernicus in the Amazon*<sup>521</sup>

When in 1610 identifying Io's orbit as revolving around Jupiter rather than the Earth, Galileo Galileo substantiated Copernicus' heliocentric worldview and set the Copernican Revolution into motion. Thereby, Earth and geocentric practices were effectively expelled as the centre of the human Universe and replaced by the Sun as the onwards locus of orientation and gravitation for European thought and action. As I have previously shown, this shift carried a line of ominous consequences in its wake, particularly for women, for the natural environment, and for various minoritarian cultures in- and outside of Europe. So much so that it led Peter C. Reynolds to ponder whether "the geocentric system of reference rejected by Galileo is in fact the intellectual perspective most relevant to an ecologically balanced society[?]"<sup>522</sup>

Disregarding the heavy karma, however, anthropologist Els Lagrou reiterates the calls of anthropologist Pierre Clastres,<sup>523</sup> philosopher Gilles Deleuze and psychoanalyst Félix Guattari<sup>524</sup> to spark a 'Copernican revolution' in the metropolitan political thinking that posits Native American societies as wanting or lacking, because they do not comply with European nation state logics.<sup>525</sup> Thus invoking Copernicus<sup>526</sup>—not in Europe, but in the Amazon—Lagrou calls for a radical reversal of power and agency, orientation and gravitation, towards Native communities from metropolitan centres, to the end of countering the widespread destruction that characterizes the Anthropocene era.

Here, I catch myself thinking that what is needed is possibly rather a Copernican devolution to undo the 1610-revolution's shift in focus away from local and Earth-based modes of orientation, than yet another distancing and alienating revolution propelling human perspective further into space. Because, certainly, as Silvia Federici has shown, what was overridden in the era following the Copernican revolution was precisely such minoritarian cultures that Lagrou wishes to centre with her call. Yet, taking her call to mean nothing but a substantial change in 'suns,' that is; in our cultures' sources of illumination— 'Enlightenment,' as it were—I think I get the point: That in order to undo the damage we have inherited as late

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<sup>521</sup> Els Lagrou: Op.cit. (2018), pp. 133-167

<sup>522</sup> Peter C. Reynolds: Op.cit., p. xiv

<sup>523</sup> Pierre Clastres: *Society against the State* (New York: Urizen Books Inc., 1977) (1974)

<sup>524</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari: *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987) (1980)

<sup>525</sup> Els Lagrou: Op.cit. (2018), p. 137

<sup>526</sup> Els Lagrou: "Copernicus in the Amazon," [lecture] *Franz Boas Seminar* (New York: Department of Anthropology, Columbia University, May 9, 2016), <https://anthropology.columbia.edu/events/els-lagrou-copernicus-amazon> (accessed September 9, 2022)

moderns, and which we are actively perpetuating in the present, we need a complete and universal upending of the epistemic structures that have facilitated this damage. One akin to the Copernican revolution; in force, if not in scope.

According to Lagrou, drawing on Elizabeth Povinelli, this means redirecting modern orientation and gravitation towards the ‘otherwise’:<sup>527</sup> That and those who have been resignified by modernity as poor and in need of commodities and assistance, while in reality they hold the practical and relational forms of knowledge to show “lines of flight out of the vicious circle of blind developmentalism.”<sup>528</sup> To Lagrou, Povinelli’s idea of ‘the otherwise’ resembles Amerindian definitions of otherness, where ‘self’ and ‘other’ are intrinsically intertwined and traversed by processes of “other-self-becoming or becoming-otherwise”<sup>529</sup>—not merely at the level of awareness, but through the myriads of different modes of encounter, including “predatory events” and “failed cannibalizations.”<sup>530</sup> For example, among the Pirahã, she writes, “[n]ew human bodies”—i.e., foetuses—“are conceived by a fright caused in a woman by an unsuccessful predatory act.”<sup>531</sup> In a similar way, new Pirahã image-beings or spirits, ‘abaisi,’ are born when a human body suffers an accident and releases a double as a result.<sup>532</sup> Both pregnancy and traumatic accidents are thus emphasised by Lagrou as related to, and as actively inter-relating, processes of predation and spirituality.

The Pirahã abaisi are, according to Lagrou, ontologically reminiscent of the Huni Kuin ‘soul’ or ‘spirit doubles’ called ‘yuxin,’ which humans and animals can either have or be. In the latter meaning, yuxin denotes beings or perceptual phenomena that are marked by an ambiguity deriving from their capacity to transform: The yuxin are always encountered at dusk, when the victim is alone, and they announce their presence by mimicking animal sounds. The hunter thus thinks he is following his prey, when in fact he is becoming prey of a powerful spirit-being—a master of the transformation of form. However, this is only confirmed afterwards by its effects in the victim, who feels weak, faints or falls ill, barely managing to return home.

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<sup>527</sup> Elizabeth Povinelli. Interview by Juliana Fausto for *Colóquio Internacional Os Mil Nomes de Gaia: do Antropoceno à Idade da Terra*, September 15 – September 19, 2014. (Rio de Janeiro: Fundação Casa de Rui Barbosa, September 16, 2014) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YyBLwYfIkE> (accessed December 1, 2022) 00:14:16 – 00:14:30

<sup>528</sup> Els Lagrou: Op.cit. (2018), p. 134

<sup>529</sup> Ibid. (2018), p. 136

<sup>530</sup> Ibid. (2018)

<sup>531</sup> Ibid. (2018)

<sup>532</sup> Ibid. (2018)



“In the worst case scenario, he does not return at all, and slowly starts to adopt the point of view, affects and physicality of the yuxin being who captured him,” Lagrou writes.<sup>533</sup>

Huni Kuin shamanism, then, according to Lagrou, consists in seeking out these yuxins to counteract their negative effects on what is understood as the ‘eye-souls’ of human-embodied beings. To this end, the Huni Kuin use ‘perspectival’ plant medicines such as *ayawaska*, which change a human’s perceptual world and allows them to adopt the point of view of other beings. The yuxin, however, do not need these perception shifters, since they are the ones who control the forms to be seen by humans.<sup>534</sup> And Yube, the anaconda, is the master of all yuxin and the owner of the *ayawaska* brew, which is considered by the Huni Kuin to be his blood.

People generally consume *ayawaska* to see, according to Lagrou.<sup>535</sup> And, to counter the attacks of the powerful spirit-beings during a ritual, a shamanic singer sings equally powerful ‘song lines’ that become lines of vision to be followed by the eye-souls of those who are in trouble. “As shamans sing along with powerful beings,” Peter Gow writes, returning us to the Yine,<sup>536</sup> they “attain the subject position of those beings, and hence acquire their powers. They sing in order to see as the powerful beings see, and, having seen, to do something about it”<sup>537</sup> (accentuation mine). In other words, the figure and the agency of the shaman links liminality with a responsibility to act.

According to Peter Gow, the songs sung by Yine shamans during *ayawaska* rituals are products of their vision—‘*kayigawlu*’—which is caused by the powerful being, ‘*kayiglu*,’ who is the ‘one who causes visions to be seen.’ “But if powerful beings generate visions,” asks Gow, “what do they, in turn, look like?” To attempt answering his own question, he writes: “My sense here is that they do not have an intrinsic visual form, but rather an aural form. They are composed of their knowledge, and are songs.”<sup>538</sup> As the shaman sings along with the powerful beings, he is simultaneously joining in with this “multiplicity of ‘other selves’”<sup>539</sup> and comes to

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<sup>533</sup> Ibid. (2018), p. 147

<sup>534</sup> Ibid. (2018)

<sup>535</sup> Ibid. (2018)

<sup>536</sup> As previously explained, the Yine is an Amazonian tribe closely related to the Apurinã, whose language likewise derives from the Southern Arawakan linguistic family. Arawakan is lexically similar to Pano—the language spoken by people of the Huni Kuin and Yawanawá tribes. Although I am aware that the particularities of ritual practices will shift between tribes, there are also ‘shamanic’ continuities [cf. note 446] to be explored, such as the use and understanding of song as a way to approximate the subject position of powerful spirit beings.

<sup>537</sup> Peter Gow: “Hallucination” in *op.cit.*, p. 149

<sup>538</sup> Ibid., p. 148

<sup>539</sup> Ibid., p. 149

function as a ‘switch-point’ between the experiential domains of the powerful beings and those of humans.<sup>540</sup>

Importantly, however, the powerful beings, the shaman, and the patient, never transcendently assimilate. Rather, “the shaman’s identification shifts back and forth between powerful beings as kin and the patient as kin.”<sup>541</sup> And this is how the shaman, with the words of Rafael Costa, can be described as “an ‘event’ in constant motion even if physically they do not move out of the spot.”<sup>542</sup> As they imitate the powerful beings through song, they lose the immediate evidence of their everyday humanity by emanating “the potent songs of others and in the process [becoming] those others.”<sup>543</sup>

Returning to the Huni Kuin, Lagrou provides the following song extract to show how the eye-soul of a human being is covered in the clothes<sup>544</sup> of the powerful spirit-being Yube:

unu hawe tixurã ai e	at what distance? ai e
min yube tadirã ai e	you with Yube’s clothing ai e
Yube tadi keneya ai e	Yube’s clothing with design ai e
mia dai txinibu ai e	he covered you completely ai e
Yube tadi pekakin e	Yube’s clothing, take it off and
	let it fall onto the ground e
pae peka xunamen e	the strength has been taken off e
pae xabatanimen ai e	the strength is already clearing up ai e <sup>545</sup>

To see Yube, the anaconda spirit, as well as the other powerful beings, it is however necessary to first be seen by them. It is not enough to ingest the ayawaska brew as an ‘index of Yube’s agency’<sup>546</sup> inside your body, since Yube can decide not to look at you, not to show himself to you, or to show only ‘lies’ or nothing at all:<sup>547</sup> “[T]o see Yube and his transformational world, you need to see through his eyes,”<sup>548</sup> writes Lagrou, and this requires a process of anaconda-becoming by allowing oneself to be consumed by Yube. And while to be devoured by Yube is

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<sup>540</sup> Ibid.

<sup>541</sup> Ibid.

<sup>542</sup> Rafael Barroso Mendonça Costa: Op. cit. (2016)

<sup>543</sup> Peter Gow: “Hallucination” in op.cit., p. 148

<sup>544</sup> This echoes Peter Gow’s explanation of Yine ritual with toé—the ‘dark ayawaska’—which, according to Gow, is mythically linked to stripping oneself of one’s clothes, i.e. one’s humanity. See: Peter Gow: “Hallucination” in *ibid.*, p. 137

<sup>545</sup> Els Lagrou: Op.cit. (2018), p. 148

<sup>546</sup> Ibid. (2018), p. 149

<sup>547</sup> Ibid. (2018)

<sup>548</sup> Ibid. (2018)

terribly frightful, it is also something that is intensely longed for among the Huni Kuin, since this is understood as the precondition for obtaining his visionary capacities. Lagrou writes:

To sing with the power of the vine in your voice you have to engage in a process of other-becoming, animal-becoming and molecular-becoming that only song can make and unmake. The song evokes the process of being swallowed by Yube in his monstrous, frightening form (...) To be reborn as Yube one has to be swallowed by Yube. Only those who have thus been devoured and regurgitated by Yube can become one with him, taking on the power to cause visions through song. Henceforth, when he sings, it is the voice of Yube, of all beings of the forest, that sings through him[.]<sup>549</sup>

By ingesting the perspectival ayawaska-brew, the intoxicated person is simultaneously ingested by it and thus sees the world covered in the skin of the vine, i.e., the anaconda. In this way, writes Lagrou, that which has been swallowed by a predator will swallow its predator in turn: “That which has been encompassed will encompass, and back again.”<sup>550</sup> Therein lies its key transformational potentiality, reminiscent of Povinelli’s ‘otherwise,’ according to Lagrou, namely the capacity to enable minorities to act within majorities<sup>551</sup> and return the predatory logics of their oppression to the end of facilitating a substantial shift in orientation, gravitation, and illumination—in ways of seeing, singing, and conceiving—of humanity in the modern world.<sup>552</sup>

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<sup>549</sup> Ibid. (2018)

<sup>550</sup> Ibid. (2018), p. 154

<sup>551</sup> Elizabeth Povinelli: Op.cit.: 00:13:50 – 00:14:30

<sup>552</sup> Els Lagrou: Op.cit. (2018), p. 136

## *Histories of Predation*

With “Copernicus in the Amazon,” Els Lagrou returns us to the first chapter of the dissertation and to the disconcerting fact that Indigenous cultures that do not comply with European nation state logics are systematically understood as wanting or lacking,<sup>553</sup> and that this often becomes an argument for their disciplining and marginalisation, co-optation and annihilation.

Understanding the pastoralist heath farmers and Kjeltrings along the lines of Povinelli’s ‘otherwise’ quoted by Lagrou, i.e., peoples who hold the “practical – but above all relational – knowledge of living otherwise,”<sup>554</sup> their co-optation and assimilation into the Danish nation has likely stripped us of important knowledge to respond to the manifold contemporary crises from the point of view of a radically different social organisation; one that understood itself as a movable entity posited in the continuum between self and other. But this may not signify only in apocalyptic terms. Since, as Lagrou explains, taking the notion of ‘relationality’ to the next level, that which has been swallowed by a predator will swallow its predator in turn. “That which has been encompassed will encompass, and back again.”<sup>555</sup>

In the present, it is the nation state (rather than the ‘otherwise’ Kjeltrings) that appears ‘wanting or lacking’ with its narrow focus on securing its own territory of governance, and consequential failure to consider impacts of practices and industries that extend across national borders.<sup>556</sup> With my thesis exhibition, *Rovhistorier | Histories of Predation*, I thus aspire to go beyond the confines of the nation state, and beyond the immediacy of the present, and I do this by approximating the historical gaze of the extremely long-lived gurry shark<sup>557</sup>—the ‘havkal’ or ‘håkjerringa’<sup>558</sup>—as the outset for a three-channel video installation based on confocal microscopic video recordings made inside the shark’s eyes. Through carbon-14 dating

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<sup>553</sup> Els Lagrou: *Ibid.* (2018), p. 137

<sup>554</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134

<sup>555</sup> Els Lagrou: *Op.cit.* (2018), p. 154

<sup>556</sup> A local Scandinavian example is the case of Agersø Sund, which during the last 25 years has seen its marine environments deteriorate due to the continued discharge of chemical waste from the Norwegian oil industry. Because the Norwegian Environmental Authorities have consistently maintained that Norway is unable to process its own oil waste—but that this is a temporary situation—the UN’s Basel Convention has permitted the country’s year-long export of environmental waste to Denmark. Even if the convention should in fact hinder such outsourcing, and even if the deterioration of Danish waters will in time bleed into neighbouring basins, including Norway’s. See: Mathias Mencke and Rikke Bolander: “Dansk farvand er skraldespand for den norske olieindustri” on *Zetland*, October 22, 2022, <https://www.zetland.dk/historie/sOXAQRD7-meWEJmG1-0bc13> (accessed November 28, 2022)

<sup>557</sup> In scientific literature, the gurry shark is commonly named ‘Greenland shark.’ However, it traverses the whole of the North Atlantic, and is a commonly found fish in Skagerrak too. If it were to be given a name that indicates the scope of its distribution, marine biologist Julius Nielsen would call it ‘North Atlantic deep-sea shark.’ For my work, I have used the traditional names ‘gurry shark’ in English, and ‘havkal’ in Danish, to expand its potential significations. See: Julius Nielsen and Marie Kølbaek Iversen: “Merman. Greenland shark. North Atlantic Deep-Sea Shark” in Marie Kølbaek Iversen and Nanna Friis (ed.): *Rovhistorier* (Copenhagen: O – Overgaden, 2022), p. 16

<sup>558</sup> The shark’s traditional names in Danish and Norwegian meaning ‘merman’ and ‘mermaid’—or ‘mer-woman’—respectively.

of its eye lens nuclei, recent marine biological research from the University of Copenhagen<sup>559</sup> has shown that the shark may live to become as old as 272 to 512 years, which opens up a perspective of ‘eye witnessing’ that far exceeds the human life span. As such, the life of a single shark living today may span the Age of Discovery with seafaring Europeans exploring, ‘discovering,’ and colonising different regions across the globe from the 15<sup>th</sup> century onwards. From its location in the deep, it might have witnessed the ominous initiation of the Euro-American Atlantic slave trade in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, which through the inter-continental Triangular Trade and Middle Passage saw the systematised enslavement and trafficking of millions of peoples from Africa to the Americas and Europe, resulting in what Paul Gilroy has labelled the ‘Black Atlantic.’<sup>560</sup>

Moving North, the shark possibly saw the expansion of the European whaling fleet in the 16<sup>th</sup> century with, among others, Basque, English, French, Norwegian, Dutch, and Danish, vessels operating across the entire North Atlantic, from Newfoundland to Spitsbergen, from Iceland to the Bay of Biscay. It may have witnessed the 1536-unification of Scania, Denmark, Norway, Iceland, the Faroe Isles, and Greenland, under the Danish King Christian the 3<sup>rd</sup>'s conglomerate state. Or seen the 1615 Icelandic massacre of Basque whalers in Ísafjarðardjúp and Þingeyri to protect the livelihood of local inhabitants. It would have swum through the Napoleonic Wars 1803-1815, hardly noticing the Danish loss of Norway to Sweden with the Treaty of Kiel in 1814, which led way to Danish Constitutional Act of 1848 and the introduction of nation state democracy in Denmark.

Did it notice the Danish 1864-loss of Schleswig-Holstein to Germany? The subsequent Danification and rapid cultivation of the West Jutlandic heathlands? Or the Icelandic independence from Danish rule in 1944, as well as the intensified modernisation and Danification efforts in Greenland after the G50 Commission and the country's 1953-incorporation as a county in the Danish realm?

Certainly, the shark would have noticed the increase in fishing activity targeted against itself and its kin, 1862 onwards, with a peak between 1890-1938, where up to 44,000 gurry sharks were killed annually to supply Europe's booming industries and illuminated cities

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<sup>559</sup> Julius Nielsen: “The Greenland shark (*Somniosus microcephalus*). Diet, tracking and radiocarbon age estimates reveal the world's oldest vertebrate” [PhD thesis] (Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen, 2017)

<sup>560</sup> Paul Gilroy: *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London & New York: Verso Books, 1993)

with machine and lamp oil<sup>561</sup>—a central product in the Royal Greenlandic Trading Company<sup>562</sup> (a Danish state enterprise charged with administering trade and settlements in Greenland). Arriving at the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, it would have seen this targeted fishing cease as quickly as it had begun, when European demand for shark liver oil ended with the invention of synthetic oils.<sup>563</sup> Delivered to the electrified present, the shark persists across the North Atlantic, where it is known to be an opportunistic predator and scavenger, making it a common and unpopular bycatch in the commercial fishing industry, often attempting to steal the catch<sup>564</sup> but getting caught in the nets instead, where both crushes—and is crushed by—the catch.

As a result, it now finds itself to be the subject of increased marine biological scrutiny to determine whether it is at risk of becoming endangered from over-fishing as bycatch. And this was how I got my hands on the two pairs of gurry shark eyes that I have used for *Rovhistorier | Histories of Predation: At the Greenland Institute of Natural Resources (GINR)*<sup>565</sup> they conduct research into the shark to monitor and protect the species,<sup>566</sup> and in 2020 I reached out to Julius Nielsen, who was the researcher that in 2017 documented its extreme longevity.<sup>567</sup> Nielsen was working at GINR at the time, specialising in the gurry shark, and he provided me with a pair of eyes from a research specimen that had been caught during the GINR 2020-summer survey, and later, in 2021, with a pair from a commercial bycatch. Based on these two pairs of eyes—and with the help of Jonathan Brewer, associate professor in bio-imaging at the Danish Molecular Biomedical Imaging Center Nikon Centre of Excellence (DaMBIC) at the University of Southern Denmark (SDU), and post.doc. Line Lauritsen (DaMBIC)—I have made microscopic video recordings within the eyes of the shark for the video installation *Rovhistorier | Histories of Predation*.

Experimenting with different microscopic techniques, I decided on confocal microscopy for the thesis exhibition at O – Overgaden. Also known as ‘confocal laser scanning microscopy (CLSM),’ it uses an optical imaging technique that increases resolution and

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<sup>561</sup> Julius Nielsen: Op.cit., pp. 15-16

<sup>562</sup> Camilla Bøgeskov: “Det danske fiskeri af grønlandshajen” [MA thesis] (Aalborg: Aalborg University, 2021), p. 1

<sup>563</sup> Julius Nielsen: Op.cit., p. 16

<sup>564</sup> Julius Nielsen and Marie Kølbæk Iversen: Op.cit., p. 10

<sup>565</sup> The Greenland Institute of Natural Resources conducts research into Arctic ecosystems by monitoring the living resources and the environment in Greenland. On this basis the institute functions as advisory body to the Government of Greenland and other authorities on sustainable exploitation of living resources and on safeguarding the environment and ensuring biodiversity. See: “The institute: Welcome to The Greenland Institute of Natural Resources” on *Pinnngortitaleriffik—Greenland Institute of Natural Resources*, <https://natur.gl/about-us/naturinstitutet/?lang=en> (accessed November 30, 2022)

<sup>566</sup> The shark is a common bycatch in the commercial fishery across the North Atlantic in countries such as, e.g., Greenland, Iceland, the Faroe Isle, Norway, and Canada. See: Julius Nielsen and Marie Kølbæk Iversen: Op.cit., pp. 10-11

<sup>567</sup> Julius Nielsen: Op.cit.

contrast in the image by means of a spatial pinhole that block out-of-focus light during image formation. This generates an image in increased resolution, but at the cost of decreased signal intensity necessitating long exposures. The gain, however, are radiant video sequences in extreme detail that slowly change, as the microscope's plane of focus moves down through the sample.

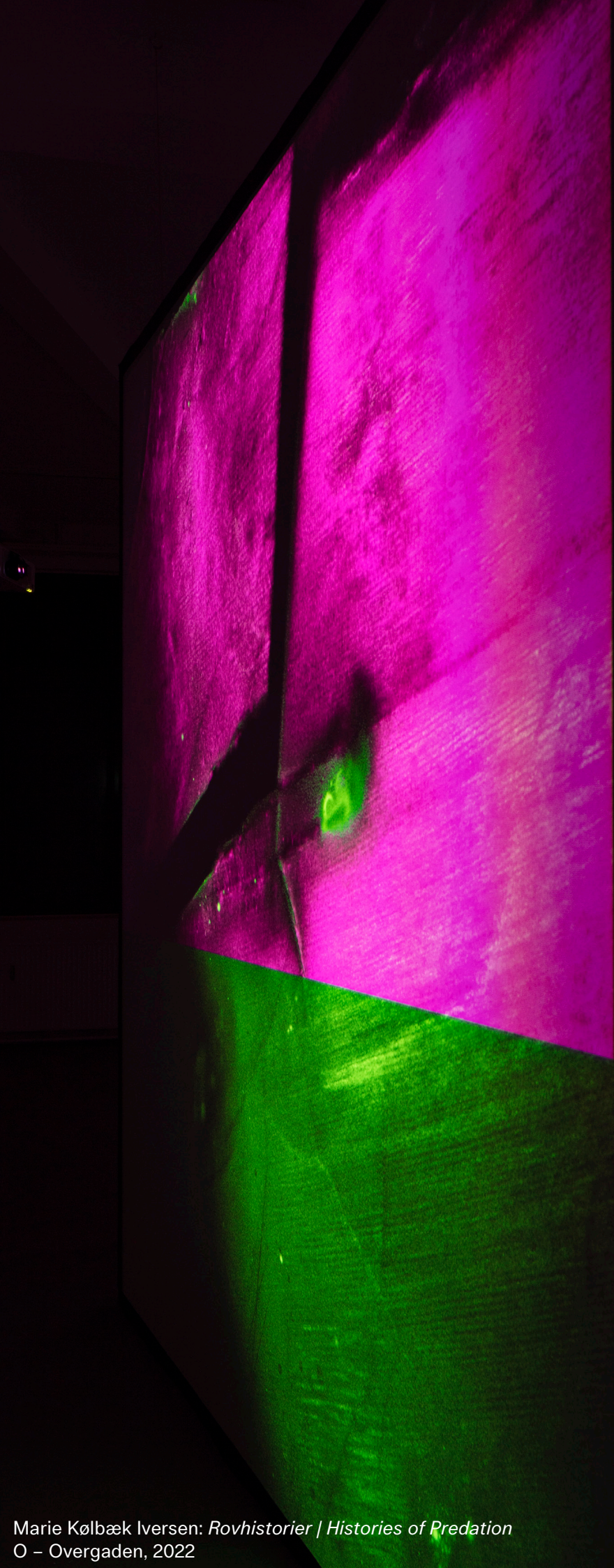
The end result to be seen in my thesis exhibition, *Rovhistorier | Histories of Predation*, was a three-channel 32-minute-long video installation displaying brightly coloured and meditative images in shades of pink and green: Microscopic recordings of fluorescent and reflective light exuded from the many fibres of biological glass that have been formed in the eye lenses of the shark over the course of its long life. In the installation, slowly alternating image sequences show how structures in the lens become visible, as it starts to dissolve, and we move further into the eye. Here, mysterious shapes and something resembling celestial bodies or landscape formations arise, transform, and disappear.

In their apparently abstract—but, in reality, ultra-concrete—representations of the shark's eyes, and with their slow tempo, the images morph in and out of each other to take us on an imaginary time-travel through the 'historical' gaze of the predator. Thereby the installation invites us to perceive of the world from a radically different perspective than the human, to the degree that we are willing to invest our fantasy and imaginative capacities to the experiential depths it attests to.

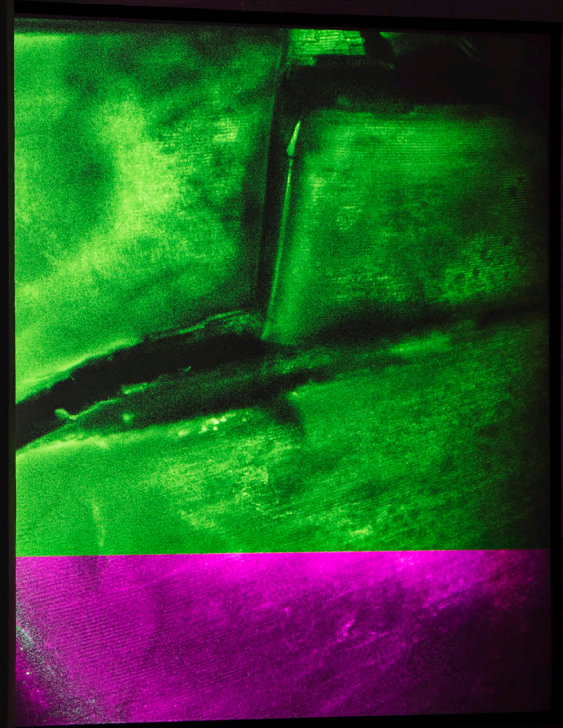
As such, *Rovhistorier | Histories of Predation*, provides my audiences (and myself) with a deep-time 'imaginary optical device' through which to consider the contingent networks of trade, art, academia, and science, that enabled the artwork's production—while simultaneously constituting its thematic field of tension—as well as the mytho-historical developments that have unfolded across the North Atlantic regions and delivered us to the present. Tracing the shark's transit zones, the work may be approached from any location across these regions: Different people with different heritages will see different things when engaging with the deep-time perspective it offers. I, however, engage with it from the outset of my East Atlantic home region in West Jutland to address the site-specific 'mythologics' that have rendered me a Dane, and which—undisturbed—will continue their operations to ensure Denmark's shock-bolstered, homogenised, and homogenising, cultural continuity into the future.

To challenge or complicate this latter fact, I have devised the *Donnimaar*-project to sing forth overridden ambiguities of identity that persist in this specific geographical context; addressing and empowering another 'we' than the 'we' that sees itself demarcated through Danish (and Danifying) national mythology.















## *The Eyes of Science*

We become something new, a new kind of “we” perhaps, aligned somehow with that predator who regards us as a predator and not, fortunately, dead meat” (italicisation Eduardo Kohn’s).<sup>568</sup>

Els Lagrou uses the term ‘relational knowledge’ to account for the radical other-becoming mythologised by the Huni Kuin as the process of being devoured by Yube—the anaconda—and seeing the world from his predatory perspective. According to Peter Gow, Yine shamanry operates in a similar fashion and consists in the shaman temporarily identifying with powerful beings that would normally regard humans as game animals—dead meat—but who during the ritual are convinced by the shaman of their temporarily shared identity as peers.

By thus aligning with powerful beings, it is the task of the curing shaman to identify the source of disease in their patient, which is understood as little arrows that have been blown by an adversarial sorcerer into the body of the sick. Here they turn into small worms that eat the patient from within on behalf of the sorcerer—ontologically reminiscent of the white juri juri demon woman accounted for by Kohn, but on a different scale and level of relatability.

Locating these gnawing little worms, the shaman proceeds to sucking them out, whereby the predatory hierarchy instilled by the sorcerous shaman is inverted “by reasserting the patient as ‘human,’ rather than ‘game animal,’ and denying the humanity of the sorcerer, who is thereby defined as non-human, an ‘eater of human flesh,’”<sup>569</sup> as Gow describes it. Among the Yine, it is considered much easier to become a sorcerer than a curing shaman, because the latter has “had to overcome his lethal urge to identify fully with the powerful beings, and so to see other humans as game animals. He has gone on to see, simultaneously, both with powerful beings and his patients as humans.”<sup>570</sup>

It is this capacity, which I—for want of a better term—have labelled ‘ambiguous identity,’ and which I propose experimentally lifting into a contemporary Western context in order to repurpose the insights we may have harvested by actively seeing from the perspective of our ‘predators’: Not jaguars, not anacondas, nor five-metres-long gurry sharks, but those unintelligible, yet nonetheless very real and very powerful entities that prey on ‘human- and

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<sup>568</sup> Eduardo Kohn: “Introduction” in *op.cit.*, p. 2

<sup>569</sup> Peter Gow: “Hallucination” in *op.cit.*, p. 149

<sup>570</sup> Peter Gow: “Hallucination” in *op.cit.*, p. 150

other-embodied beings<sup>571</sup> through an ominous synthesis of colonialism, nationalism, and capitalism, and with whom it is evidently absolutely lethal for anyone to fully identify.

I propose ‘ambiguous identity’ as the capacity to simultaneously identify as human and with the perspective of such powerful beings in order to acquaint oneself with their perspective and orientation in the world. But then, having learnt how they navigate, to subvert this identification and turn one’s acquired knowledge against those powerful beings in order to defend oneself and one’s peers, moving out of their deadening reach and gaze. This, to the end of replacing the logics of predator-prey—or perpetrator-victim—with a relation of negotiation,<sup>572</sup> as somehow ‘aligned with that predator’ who may come to regard us as predators too, rather than dead meat.<sup>573</sup> Seeing the world through its eyes, to become strategically aligned in strength and intensity, but not in orientation nor motivation.

In the same way as I propose to think of ourselves as ambiguous beings, I propose extending this ambiguity of identity to others, and to be open to negotiate even with powerful ominous ‘system-embodied beings,’<sup>574</sup> and with people who appear to have identified fully with—or whom we take to represent—such beings to the level of becoming their ‘minions.’ Thinking ‘minionised’ peoples as ‘dirty labourers’—and crediting them with the potential ability of nurturing simultaneous identifications with the powerful beings they represent, as well as with humans—such people will have the most valuable intel regarding the operations of the former. Granted, extending the possibility of an ambiguity of identity to those who immediately present as ‘the enemy’ holds great danger. But it also holds great—necessary?—potential, since they know non-life at its very core, and thus, potentially, how to subvert it. Just think of Daniel Hale, who was strong enough to shift his own identification. Others may need a bit of help. But it requires that we are willing to attempt appealing to their humanity—to that which ‘they continue to feel’<sup>575</sup>—rather than denouncing them face-value. It requires that we attempt to win them over.

As I am writing this, I am having second thoughts. I think of my friends in Brazil and of the country’s long history of exploitation and despotism: Do I really mean what I just wrote? Is there not an upper—or lower—limit for whom we should be willing to extend the

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<sup>571</sup> Cf. Lagrou’s notion of ‘human-embodied beings.’ See: Els Lagrou: *Op.cit.* (2018), p. 147

<sup>572</sup> Philippe Pignarre & Isabelle Stengers: “Learning Fright” in *op.cit.*, pp. 62-67

<sup>573</sup> Eduardo Kohn: “Introduction” in *op.cit.*, p. 2

<sup>574</sup> Vs. Lagrou’s notion of ‘human-embodied beings.’ See: Els Lagrou: *Op.cit.* (2018), p. 147

<sup>575</sup> Philippe Pignarre & Isabelle Stengers: “Minions” in *op.cit.*, pp. 33-34

ambiguity of identity towards? Do some powers disqualify by default, and if so: What do we do with them? Approaching the question from the opposite direction, it appears to me to be dependent on how one reads the landscape; how each of us understands our own location and agency in the struggle. Lee Edelman criticises the hope of the child as the perpetuation of ‘sameness’ into the future,<sup>576</sup> but as a woman who has lived through pregnancy and birth, I think that childbearing and -rearing might equally signify perpetual difference by allowing oneself to contain and host otherness. Maybe this can serve as a concrete axis across which the ambiguity of identity can be extended: That the children of wrath may be more or other than angry? And the children of monsters...?

These reflections keep leading me back to the hunch that to remain human ourselves, we have to keep appealing to the humanity of our adversaries—which is, importantly, not the same as condoning them or submitting ourselves to them. Quite the contrary: We can appeal to their humanity, engaging with them, and thereby getting to know them. This will enable us to develop our ‘predatory literacy’ as well as strategies to ward ourselves against them without denouncing them, since denouncing—as Pignarre/Stengers argue<sup>577</sup>—only serves to make them stronger, being an important part of their germination.

Thus, to extend to adversaries the ambiguity of identity means hoping for the best, while preparing for the worst. Acknowledging their strength and potency as a way of acknowledging the seriousness of our struggle. The preciousness of our stakes. Engaging with them may over time enable us to invert their predatory logics, or—if they cannot be won for the ‘human’ cause—to pacify the predators they are, rather than feeding them. As Haru Kuntanawa stated at the AYA2016, we must learn how to open up to our surroundings instead of focusing on ourselves; “how to adapt to other concepts and go beyond ethnic groups. We are humanity, we are all from here. The planet is only one planet.”<sup>578</sup>

Returning these reflections to the realm of the artwork, to the ambiguities of my own agency, and to the circumstances and contexts of the work’s production, I think of what I learnt that October-night in the Amazon: That modern Western science is neither good nor bad, but that its agency depends on the ways it is used, and to which ends. In this way it resembles the work of the shaman, which may signify as a sorcerous or curing measure, depending on the strength of individual shamans to challenge and resist the alluring forces

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<sup>576</sup> ‘Sameness’ understood as ‘unchangeability,’ See: Lee Edelman: Op.cit.

<sup>577</sup> Philippe Pignarre & Isabelle Stengers: “Minions” in op.cit., pp. 33-34

<sup>578</sup> Haru Kuntanawa: Op.cit. 00:03:57-00:20:51

of the powerful beings with which they engage. In this way, both deliver us beyond the ‘the structured tension between utopia and dystopia,’—quoting Lou Cornum—and invites us to inhabit the present.<sup>579</sup>

This returns me to Claude Lévi-Strauss one last time. Concluding his study of myth in *Structural Anthropology*, he compares—opaquely—the myth’s operations to that of “a crystal in the realm of physical matter. (...) Myth is an intermediary entity between a statistical aggregate of molecules and the molecular structure itself.”<sup>580</sup> Like the crystalline and diffracting video of the shark’s eye lenses—hosting simultaneously all and none of the histories we project onto it—myth is both the same thing as the language that fleshes it out, and something more: “There is a good reason why myth cannot simply be treated as language if its specific problems are to be solved; myth *is* language: to be known, myth has to be told,”<sup>581</sup> Lévi-Strauss asserts (italicisation his). Acting as intermediary, myth interweaves the continuous with the particular, the out-of-time with historical reality, thereby reconciling opposites into productive ambiguities of identity on all levels, from individual subjects to societies at large.

Thus, extracting from the eyes of the shark refined microscopic imagery through the cutting edge ‘Eyes of Science,’<sup>582</sup> it is my exercise as ambiguous go-between and active mythic thinker—in language and beyond—to gather as much knowledge as possible from the high-powered perspective of modern science, and to apply this in a way that affirms rather than negates the continued life and futurity of my human- and other-embodied kin.

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<sup>579</sup> Lou Cornum: Op.cit., pp. 31-32

<sup>580</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss: Op.cit. (1958), p. 229

<sup>581</sup> Ibid., p. 209

<sup>582</sup> As it was tellingly spelled out across the Nikon mousepad next to one of the computers at DaMBIC.

### *Love forces the Lady so*

Lévi-Strauss finds the reconciling function of myth to be reflected in the figure of the trickster as a go-between; the mythic incarnation of the ‘ambiguity of identity,’ which I have attempted to outline through this third chapter, as a liminal capacity and an agent of futurity. He writes: “[T]he trickster is a mediator. (...) Since his mediating function occupies a position halfway between two polar terms, he must retain something of that duality—namely an ambiguous and equivocal character.”<sup>583</sup> A character, which Lévi-Strauss finds to be mythologically linked to scavengers (i.e., carrion-eating animals) such as ravens and coyotes—or, might I add, gurry sharks—since they mediate the continuum between life and death, between harvesting and hunting. The former symbolised, according to Lévi-Strauss, by herbivorous animals and agriculture; the latter by active carnivorous predators and war.

In short: Scavengers ‘harvest’ the meat of already dead animals and thereby mend opposing worlds without engaging in war or predation themselves. Submerging this structure into the ocean, as it were, the gurry shark represents the mediation of yet another ontological gap—that between land and sea—which amplifies the ambiguity of its character. Even if immediately far from posing a threat to terrestrially living humans, its traditional Nordic names—havkal/håkjerringa, i.e., mermaid/merman—extends its agency into the human world. Primarily, of course, to the worlds of those humans who live from and by the sea, as well as those who rely on it for transportation and mobility. But the sea and the land are also connected through the flow of water travelling between the sky, the sea, the shore, and the springs underground, and so might the beings residing there be. In this way, merpeople can be seen as mythologisations of networks and interconnections between what is human and what is not (only). Manifesting in lakes and rivers, creeks, and bogs. Like Anna Livia/Liffey: “[T]he eternal death and resurrection of Anna Livia (the river into the sea and then back to the young cloud and the spring and the tiny stream...), is a dream time, a mythic time, a cyclic time, an eonic time, the breakdown of linear time, the time of ‘Yes,’”<sup>584</sup> as Dora Garcia writes.

Merpeople—and by association the gurry shark—become representatives of those natural environments that are immediately uninhabitable to living human beings (underwater, underground), and this adds to their ambiguity: As merpeople they represent the human

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<sup>583</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss: Op.cit. (1958), p. 226

<sup>584</sup> Dora Garcia: Op.cit., p. 40



fantasy of ‘what if...’ (what if humans could reach beyond the confines of our terrestrially conditioned bodies, grow gills and fins?) and thus both as a kind of aspiration and promise. But as water dwellers they also represent the crude reality of human biology, and so of our vulnerability against forces of nature. In this latter modality, merpeople—like elvers—possibly also represent the spirits of the physically as well as the culturally ‘dead,’ who, from their subjugated position in the water- and the netherworlds, continue to haunt the living. Not through active predation, but opportunistically: If they smell weakness, they will ‘harvest.’

At least, such is the nature of the merman that is the havkal, the shark.

Reflected to human and societal levels, the intermediary position represented by scavenging animals, is often shrouded in cultural unintelligibility and taboo, even if in reality it serves—as Lévi-Strauss shows—an important reconciling purpose between life and death. But maybe precisely for this reason? Because it sees life to its conclusion, and introduces death into the realm of life—spelling out the human condition as one marked by simultaneous ‘natality’ and ‘mortality’<sup>585</sup>—it comes to represent ambiguity, and an unwelcome reminder of our subjection to death?

At any rate, it was particularly the Kjeltrings’ association with the knacker profession (which far from all Kjeltrings however engaged in)—to skin, remove, and dispose of self-dead animals—that produced them as their own isolated class of untouchables. In fact, ‘honourable’ Danes might fall from the plane of society and render themselves ‘Kjeltrings’ simply by participating in such work.<sup>586</sup> Engaging in ambiguous practices that reconciled the distance between the two made you ‘unhonourable,’ untouchable, dirty. A trickster? This is confirmed by the vast majority of ethnographic and ethnological literature pertaining to the nomadic Kjeltrings, but also, as we learnt in the first chapter, to birthing women and their ‘jordemødre’— ‘soil-, earth- and ground-mothers’—the latter operating as both midwives and undertakers.

However, not only does the structural view on myth, according to Lévi-Strauss, enable us to account for the ambiguous character of the trickster as a reflection of myth’s capacity to reconcile ontological oppositions between life and death: “[W]e can also understand another property of mythical figures the world over, namely that the same [character] is endowed with contradictory attributes—for instance, he may be *good* and *bad* at

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<sup>585</sup> “If the Greeks defined man as ‘mortals,’ men are now defined by their natality, as the ‘natals’.” See: Hannah Arendt: “The History of the Will” [lecture] (New York: New School for Social Research, 1971), page number not provided

<sup>586</sup> H. P. Hansen: “Rakkere og natmændsfolks embeder og bestilling” in op.cit. (1959), p. 31

the same time”<sup>587</sup> (italicisation his), or change from good in one version of a myth to bad in the next.

Thus, leaving myth in its time-less continuous modality and moving down along the mythic continuum towards its historical/particular opposite, we return to Lirren Kjæsten/Liden Kirsten/Little Kirsten, who we last encountered sleeping by the Danish King’s side. Since, she has awoken and given birth to Peder/Pæjjer, now a grown man.

**Hustru og Mands Moder**<sup>588</sup>  
(Standard Danish, 1873)

**Hustru og æ Man’ hans Mue’r**<sup>589</sup>  
(Ørre Jutlandic, 2022)

**Wife and her Husband’s Mother**<sup>590</sup>  
(English, 2022)

Hr. Peder han rejste sig op under Ø  
han fæst’ stalt Ellen, den vænne Mø.  
—*Den Elskov tvinger den Frow’ saa saare.*—

Hr. Pæjjer han rææst sæ op ånner Øø’  
han fææst stalt Ellen, den wææene Mø.  
—*Æ Elskov tvinger æ Frow’ så såår’.*—

Mr. Peder went traveling under the Island<sup>591</sup>  
he married proud Ellen, that beautiful Maid.  
—*Love forces the Lady so—*

Han fæsted hend’ og ført’ hend’ hjem  
han gav hans kjær’ Moder hend’ i Gjem.

Han fææst hiin å før hin hjem’  
han ga hans kjæær Mue’r hin i Gjæmm.

He married her and brought her home  
he placed her under his Mother’s Command.

Den første Nat, de tilsammen sov,  
da blev stalt Ellen med de Tvillænger tow.

Den føst Næt, de tesamen da såw’,  
da bløw’ stalt Ellen mæ di Twælner tow’.

The first Night they slept together,  
proud Ellen conceived of two Twins.

Stalt Ellen hun svøber hendes Hoved i Skind,  
og saa ganger hun for hendes Svigermo’r ind.

Stalt Ellen hon swøwer hinne Huer i Skjin’,  
å så ganger hon for hinne Swii’ermuer dærin’.

Proud Ellen covers her Head in Hide,<sup>592</sup>  
and goes to see her Mother-in-law.

“Og hør, Liden Kirsten, kjær’ Svigermo’r min!  
hvor længe gaar en Kvinde med Barn sin?”

“Å høør, lirren Kjæsten, kjæær Swii’ermuer te mæ!  
hu længg går en Kwin’ mæ æ Bårn te sæ?”

“Tell me, Little Kirsten, my dear Mother-in-law:  
how long must a Woman carry her Child?”

<sup>587</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss: “Magic and Religion” in op.cit. (1958), p. 227

<sup>588</sup> Evald Tang Kristensen: “Hustru og Mands Moder,” synthesising version 35A, 35B, 35E, 35G, 35H, 35K in op.cit. (1876), pp. 112-123

<sup>589</sup> Reinterpretation from the Standard Danish into Ørre Jutlandic dialect by linguist Michael Ejstrup for Marie Kølbæk Iversen: *Donnimaar. O Tilli* [music album] (Copenhagen: MoBC Records, forth-coming). To hear and watch performance of the song, refer to attached folder: 1\_thesis/Donnimaar/O Tilli/Donnimaar\_O\_Tilli-Hustru\_og\_ac\_Man\_hans\_Muer.mp4

<sup>590</sup> English translation by Marie Kølbæk Iversen, 2022.

<sup>591</sup> I take this to mean ‘across the waters’.

<sup>592</sup> In Scandinavian tradition, ‘to cover one’s head in a hide’ is an epic formula signaling adversity, lying, or a dangerous situation. See: Lene Halskov Hansen: “Optakt: Ballader” in op.cit., p. 39

<p>“I fyrretyve Uger gik Marie med Krist, og saadan gjør alle vor Dann'kwonner vist.</p>	<p>“I fòrtyw’ Uer gik Marie mæ Kræst, å såårn gjør alle wor Dann'kwonner vist.</p>	<p>“For forty Weeks, Marie was carrying Christ, and so do all our Danish Wives.</p>
<p>I fyrretyve Uger gik jeg med min, i otte Aar skal du gaa med din.”<sup>593</sup></p>	<p>I fòrtyw’ Uer gik a mæ mii’n, i åt’ Oo’r ska do go ’mæ dii’n.”</p>	<p>For forty Weeks, I was carrying mine, for eight Years, you’ll be carrying thine.”</p>
<p>De fyrretyve Uger var gangen forbi da begyndte stalt Ellen at sørge og kvi’.<sup>594</sup></p>	<p>Di fòrtyw’ Uer war gân fåbi(k) da bórjer stált Ellen å søørw å kwii.</p>	<p>When those forty Weeks had passed, proud Ellen started mourning and crying.</p>
<p>De fulgte hend’ ud, og de fulgte hende ind, og alt saa randt Taare paa hvidesten Kind.<sup>595</sup></p>	<p>Di fuller hin u(h), å di fuller hin in’, å all så rænn æ Tåå’r o hinne hwii Kin’:</p>	<p>They followed her out, and they followed her in, all the while Tears ran down her white Cheek.</p>
<p>[“Jeg vidst’ ikke and’t, jeg var en Kvind’ i min Hand:] Jeg kunn sno en Strikk’ af hviden Sand.</p>	<p>“A vist æ’ ant, æn te a war Kwin’ i mi Håån: A ku sno en Stræ’k a hwii en Såån.</p>	<p>“I knew nothing else than that I was a Woman in my Hand; That I could spin a Thread of the whitest Sand.</p>
<p>Jeg vidst’ ikke and’t, jeg var Kvind’ i mit Sind: Jeg kunn vri’ og vend’ al Verden omkring.</p>	<p>A vist æ’ ant, æn te a war Kwin’ i mi Sen’: A ku wrii å vænn al Verden åmkræng’.</p>	<p>I knew nothing else than that I was a Woman in my Mind; That I could twist and turn the whole World around.</p>
<p>Jeg vidst’ ikke and’t, jeg var Kvind’ i min’ Ord: Jeg kunn tage Sol og Maan’ og lægg’ dem paa Jord.<sup>596</sup></p>	<p>A vist æ’ ant, æn te a war Kwin’ i mi Ue’r: A ku ta æ Sue’l å æ Måån å læw’em o æ Jue’r.</p>	<p>I knew nothing else than that I was a Woman in my Word: Could take the Sun and the Moon and place them on the Earth.</p>
<p>Jeg vidst’ ikke and’t, end den hele Jord var forjor, foruden den Sted, som min Kiste staar.</p>	<p>A vist æ’ ant, æn te æ hiel Juer war fågjoo’r, fåuræn den Stæj’, dæ mi Kist da stoo’r.</p>	<p>I knew nothing else than the entire World is cursed, except for the Place where my Coffin stands.”</p>
<p>Den Kiste den er udaf flyvende Røn:</p>	<p>Den Kist den (gjoo’r) æ u(h) a flywen Røn’:</p>	<p>“That Coffin is made from flying Rowan,</p>

<sup>593</sup> Evald Tang Kristensen: “Hustru og Mands Moder,” 35E, verses 1-7, in op.cit. (1876), pp. 116-117

<sup>594</sup> Evald Tang Kristensen: “Hustru og Mands Moder,” 35A, verse 6, in ibid. (1876), p. 113

<sup>595</sup> Evald Tang Kristensen: “Hustru og Mands Moder,” 35F, verse 9, in ibid. (1876), p. 119

<sup>596</sup> Evald Tang Kristensen: “Hustru og Mands Moder,” 35H, verses 3-5, in ibid. (1876), pp. 121-122

slet ingen forgjøre den kan udi Løn. <sup>597</sup>	slæt ingen fågjøør den ka uui Løn.	no one can secretly curse it.
Men kan det ikke anderledes med mig bliv' saa fører I mig til, som jeg var, da jeg var Pig!"	Men ka'et æ' annelieres mæ mæ blyww så fører I mæ te dæær, som a war, nær a war Pii!"	But can it not be any different for me, then take me to where I was when I was a Girl."
Der blev Foler af Engen hjemhent, og saa blev der for Guldkarmen spændt. <sup>598</sup>	Dæær bløw Fooler a æ Æng da hint hjæm', å så bløw dæ få æ Gull'kaa'rm da spææn'.	Then Foals were brought Home from the Meadows, and they were fastened to the golden Coach.
Der de nu kom opaa Højelands Bro, den gode Guldkarm den brast udi to. <sup>599</sup>	Da di no kam op o æ Hywwlan' si Brow', den guer Gullkaa'rm, den brast uu(h)' i tow'.	But as they passed over the Highland Bridge that good golden Coach broke into two. <sup>600</sup>
"Hukken syndefuld Kvinde maa jeg vist vær', mens min gode Guldkarm kan mig intet bær!"	"Hukken sønful' Kwin' må a vist væær, mens mi guer Gull'kaa'rm ka mæ æ' bæær!"	"What a sinful Woman I must be, when my good golden Coach cannot carry me.
Men kan jeg ikke anderledes komm' til vor Gaard, saa vil jeg gange hjem paa min bare Fod."	Men ka a æ' anneliers komm te wå Goo'r, så vel a ganng hjem på mi baar Fue'r."	But is there no other way for me to get to our Farm, I will walk on my bare Feet."
Og der hun kom til Borggaardsled, ud' stod hendes kjær' Fader og hvilte sig ved.	Og da hon kam te æ Båå'rw si Leh, uu(h)e stuk hinne kjæær Fåå'r å hwiilt sæ dæve(h).	And as she reached the Farm's Fence, her Father was resting thereby.
"Velkommen, velkommen, kjær' Datter, hjem til mig! hvordan har du levet i Bederland saa læng?"	"Wallkom'en, wallkom'en, kjæær Dæ'ter, hjæm' te mæ! hwårn håår du løø'we i Bierlan' så lænng?"	"Welcome, welcome, dear Daughter, home to me! how have you been living in the Land of Praying <sup>601</sup> for so long?"
"I tør ikke ved at spørge til mig, og I skal se en stor Ynk opaa mig."	"I tør æ' veh å spøøre te mæ, å I ska se en stue'r ønk op o mæ."	"You dare not ask about me, for you'll see a great Misery upon me."

<sup>597</sup> Evald Tang Kristensen: "Hustru og Mands Moder," 35K, verses 4-5, in *ibid.* (1876), p. 123

<sup>598</sup> Evald Tang Kristensen: "Hustru og Mands Moder," 35A, verses 7-8, in *ibid.* (1876), p. 113

<sup>599</sup> Evald Tang Kristensen: "Hustru og Mands Moder," 35B, verses 4-5, in *ibid.* (1876), p. 123

<sup>600</sup> Or '...fell apart.' In Jutlandic it is difficult to hear the difference between 'itu' ('to fall apart') and 'i to' ('into two'). Tang Kristensen has recorded it as the latter.

<sup>601</sup> This can mean different things: Either 'Land of Praying,' 'Land of Beets,' 'Land of Temporary Rest,' or 'Land of Castrated Rams,' 'beder' being both the present active tense of the verb 'at bede' ('to pray,' 'to beg,' or 'to ask politely') or the older Norse verb 'at bede' meaning to take a break during travel. Or it may be the plural form of either 'beetroot' or 'castrated ram.' All may make sense: To people in West Jutland, the 'Danes' would represent Christianity, i.e., those who pray, but who might also—condescendingly—be regarded as 'castrated' or 'tamed' in a symbolic sense by the Jutes. At the same time, going to Denmark could also be seen as an intermittent phase—a rest or temporary break—or maybe they simply ate many beetroots in the more fertile Eastern regions of 'Denmark'? See: "beder" on *Sproget.dk*, Dansk Sprognævn, <https://sproget.dk/lookup?SearchableText=beder> (accessed December 3, 2022)

De lod djer Gaard med sort Silke omhæng', og fulde [stalten Ellen] <sup>602</sup> ad Stjennestowen ind. <sup>603</sup>	De lo djær Goo'r mæ swåt Sel'k åmmhænnng, å fuller stål't Ellen a æ Stjænnestow dærin'.	They covered their Farm in black Silk, and brought proud Ellen into the Stone Hall.
De lagde [stalt Ellen] <sup>604</sup> paa Kapperne blaa, og strax fødte hun der to Børn saa smaa. <sup>605</sup>	De låår stål't Ellen o æ Kap'er så bloo', å straks føjj hon dæær tow' Børn så smoo'.	They laid her down on blue Capes, and immediately she birthed two little Children.
Det var stor Ynk, langt større Kvid': De to Børn de blev skaaren ud af Moderens Sid'.	Det war stor Øn'k, lånt støør Kwii: De tow' Bøø'rn bløw skåår uu(h) a æ Mue'r hinne sii.	It was a great Misery, far larger a Sorrow: The two Children were cut from the Mother's side.
Den første stod op og kæmte sit Haar: "For vist er jeg nu i mit ottende Aar."	Den føst stuk op å kjæmme hinne Hoo'r: "For vist æ a no i mi å'ten Oo'r."	The first stood up, combing her Hair: "For sure, I am now in my eighth Year."
Den anden stod op og var roselig rød: "For vist skal jeg hævn' min kjær Moder hendes Død." — <i>Den Elskov twinger den Frow' saa saare.</i> — <sup>606</sup>	Den annæn stuk op å war roosli røø'r': "For vist ska a hæwn' mi kjæær Mue'r hinne Døø'r." — <i>Æ Elskov twinger æ Frow' så sår'.</i> —	The other arose and was red as a rose, "For sure, I will avenge my dear Mother's Death." — <i>Love forces the Lady so—</i>

In Johanne's version of the *Shield Maiden*, recounted in the first chapter, we learnt that Little Kirsten conceded to marrying the Danish King, after he had offered her a golden crown and the 'queen's name.' A choice that was strongly condemned in the other version of the song, where Little Kirsten demonstratively refuses the king's gold however red, and states that she is much more concerned about her brother's death.

With the myth of the juri juri demons,<sup>607</sup> Eduardo Kohn presents mythological familial relations as proxies for cultural, political, social, and societal, actors, and myth's narrative as indicative of the historical struggles pertaining to these relations. Both the *Shield*

<sup>602</sup> In version 31A, the female protagonist is called Mettelil rather than stalt Ellen. See: Evald Tang Kristensen: "Hustru og Mands Moder," 35A in op.cit. (1876), pp. 112-113

<sup>603</sup> Evald Tang Kristensen: "Hustru og Mands Moder," 35A, verses 10-15, in ibid. (1876), p. 113

<sup>604</sup> In version 31B, the female protagonist is called Tidelil rather than stalt Ellen. See: Evald Tang Kristensen: "Hustru og Mands Moder," 35A in ibid. (1876), pp. 112-113

<sup>605</sup> Evald Tang Kristensen: "Hustru og Mands Moder," 35B, verse 11, in ibid. (1876), p. 113

<sup>606</sup> Evald Tang Kristensen: "Hustru og Mands Moder," 35A, verses 16-18, in ibid. (1876), p. 113

<sup>607</sup> Eduardo Kohn: "Soul Blindness" in op.cit., pp. 127-128

*Maiden and Wife and her Husband's Mother* clearly spell out such historical and political reflections: The first literally posits the Danish King as adversary. The second has the previously so dissident Little Kirsten shift to identifying with the before-mentioned Dannekoner—the ‘Danish Wives’—who were, more or less formally, enlisted by the Danish authorities to assist midwives in controlling and streamlining women’s reproductive capacities from the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards. Very dirty labourers indeed, with real human people, and real human lives, at (the) stake.

From the continuous to the particular—the timeless to the historical—another axis intersects with this first one, cutting from the social to the subjective, from the political to the private life of the female protagonist. In *Wife and her Husband's Mother* her name changes across the different version that I have synthesised into ‘my’ version. I call her Stålt Ellen/Proud Ellen throughout the song—since this is the name assigned to her in the version of the song that I begin with—but her other names include Mettelil, Tidelil, and Ingerlil.<sup>608</sup> You could also call her Marie. Understanding ‘Danish’ as something one ‘does’ rather than something one ‘is,’ her many transformations indicate to me that her position is one of interchangeability, and that her fate is shared by many young women of non-, quasi-, or peripheral Danish descent, who were (are) married into the Danish ‘family.’ Some—like Proud Ellen—are cursed or ‘culturally killed.’ Others—like Little Kirsten—‘fall asleep’ and turn against their own kin and allies in dirty, demonic, and ‘minionised’<sup>609</sup> ways, making them structurally similar to Kohn’s white juri juri woman, with whom they also share their transgressive features and the fate of marrying cross-culturally—even if their motivations for doing so are inverted: While Little Kirsten is tempted by material goods, the white juri juri woman marries the young man from Ávila to save her life. None of them marry from love or true affection, which may explain why they turn to become adversaries—bad karma—to their descendants: Little Kirsten is blocking the futurity of Proud Ellen, her younger non- or not-quite-Danish peer, by condemning her to eight years of labour. And the juri juri woman is eating the brains of her own children to the effect of eliminating in them their cultural memory of a world ‘otherwise.’

Of course these two myths, reflecting disparate processes of cultural disowning, differ: While the juri juri myth ends with the man being killed by his wife, inspiring Kohn’s apocalypticism, *Wife and her Husband's Mother* subverts the disheartening narrative:

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<sup>608</sup> Notice the diminutive ending ‘-lil.’

<sup>609</sup> Philippe Pignarre & Isabelle Stengers: “Minions” in op.cit., pp. 31-35

Because the protagonist is female and, in addition, pregnant (the cause of her affliction being protracted labour) the song expresses a hope or wish that, despite her death, the culture she represents may extend into the future by way of her children. Not unchanged, or as metaphor of sameness, but as the embodiments of their mother's ambiguous position as 'radical' go-between, mending the space between life and death, past and future, from her dying-birthing location in the present:<sup>610</sup>

The first stood up, combing her Hair,  
"For sure, I am now in my eighth Year."  
The other arose and was red as a rose,  
"For sure, I will avenge my dear Mother's Death."<sup>611</sup>

It is eight years ago I gave birth to my son. Death was in that room; someone died, possibly me.  
But with my son another arose.

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<sup>610</sup> Firmly rooted, and wanting to change it all from the roots and up. See: "The Roots of Radical," op.cit.

<sup>611</sup> Evald Tang Kristensen: "Hustru og Mands Moder," 35A, verses 16-18, in op.cit. (1876), p. 113 (my translation from the Danish)





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## Colophon

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Neo-Worlds: Transformative Agency through Fright, Rite and Myth

PhD-Dissertation

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## APPENDIX A

Ailton Krenak's speech at the National Constituent Assembly, Brasília, September 4, 1987.

My translation, based on the Portuguese transcript:<sup>612</sup>

Mister President, Deputies of the House. On behalf of the Indigenous populations, I was trusted with the responsibility of defending a proposal here at the National Constituent Assembly. I had initially decided not to speak to you, but instead use the time dedicated to me and to the defense of the proposal to make a cultural manifestation of indignation—which is also an expression of grief—against the insistent aggressions suffered indirectly by Indigenous peoples through the false polemic surrounding the fundamental rights of Indigenous peoples, which—even if not initially directed specifically against this particular group—will nevertheless seriously affect our rights.

We did not arrive in this house just now. Ever since the work of setting up the National Constituent Assembly was initiated, we have had the honour of being invited to participate in the work of the Subcommittee of Black Peoples, Indigenous Peoples, Disabled People, and Minorities. This Subcommittee has had the competence to deal with the Indigenous question and was later also trusted with the opportunity to participate in the work of setting up the Social Order Commission.

Throughout this period, the seriousness with which we undertook our task, and our reciprocal exchanges with many of the deputies, has fostered what is possibly the most elaborated text related to the question of Indigenous peoples' rights ever produced in this country.

The ambition of this text has been to identify the most essential factors to secure the livelihood of Indigenous peoples. And many of the people who were involved in the discussions here in the Constituent Assembly became involved to the point of lifting the work concerning Indigenous rights beyond the confines of the walls of this House, as when we visited the Caiapó land, in Gorotire. Listening to them, we got an impression of what the people in that village felt—what they want for themselves—and of the anxieties that we, Indigenous peoples, feel in relation to our sense of future; towards the sense of having a perspective.

To ensure that Indigenous peoples recognize the original rights they hold to the land they inhabit, pay close attention to what I say: We are not claiming any part of anything that does not legitimately belong to us, and which is not already under the feet of Indigenous people, or in our habitat, in areas that have culturally, historically, and traditionally, belonged to us. To safeguard this—and to ensure that Indigenous populations are recognized in the ways in which they express their culture and traditions—are fundamental conditions for the establishment of harmonious relations between Indigenous people and the nation state, which—in the place of permanent and incessant threat—may ultimately provide a true perspective of a future life for indigenous people.

The initial works resulting in the first draft being made, involves shedding light on the stupidity and pitch-dark obscurity that has characterized the historical relations between the state and the needs of Indigenous peoples. It made progress in the sense of advancing the perspective of a future for the indigenous people. And, in this moment, I insist; I had initially opted to simply be present and perform this manifestation of grief and loss: The loss of a parent, of solidarity, of a friend, and more than anything, the loss of the respect which was constituted by our work here; the respect we have for this

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<sup>612</sup> Ailton Krenak: Op.cit. (1987) (my translation from the Portuguese)

House and which may be identified with the people who are sensitive to the issues here at stake.

We would like to express our indignation with the attacks that we continue to suffer and to make this house aware that we are still your interlocutors, and that you should not confuse an eventual campaign and possible aggression against Indigenous peoples with a polemic that has been constructed without us.

Your Excellencies, you know that Indigenous people are very far from exerting any influence on the direction you are charting for the destiny of Brazil. On the contrary, we are perhaps the most fragile part of this process of conflicting interests which has revealed itself as extremely brutal, extremely disrespectful, extremely unethical.

I hope I do not offend the protocol of the house with my manifestation. But I believe that you as deputies cannot be acquitted any longer, or be allowed to remain oblivious to the ongoing aggression which is driven by economic power, by greed, and by ignorance of what it means to be an Indigenous people. Indigenous peoples have their own way of thinking, their own way of living. These are fundamental conditions for our existence and for the manifestation of our tradition, our life and culture, which has never posed any risk to any of the animals living at the peripheries of the Indigenous territories, let alone other human beings.

I do not believe that any of you could ever point towards any acts or attitudes of the Indigenous people of Brazil that has endangered the life or the patrimony of another person, or of any group of people in this country. Even so, today we find ourselves as the target of an aggression that seeks to attack our faith at its core along with our trust that dignity still exists; that it is still possible to build a society that knows how to respect the weakest; that knows how to respect people who do not have the money to maintain an incessant smear campaign; that knows how to respect a people who have always lived without any riches. A people who live in thatched houses and sleep on mats on the floor do not deserve to be pointed out as an enemy of the interests of Brazil, of the interests of the nation, or as a people that pose a risk to any prospects of development.

Indigenous peoples have moistened every hectare of Brazil's eight million square kilometers with blood. You are the witnesses of this fact. I thank the presidency and the deputies of this house, and I hope I have not offended the feelings of its honorable members with my words.

Ailton Krenak, Brasília, September 4, 1987



## APPENDIX A

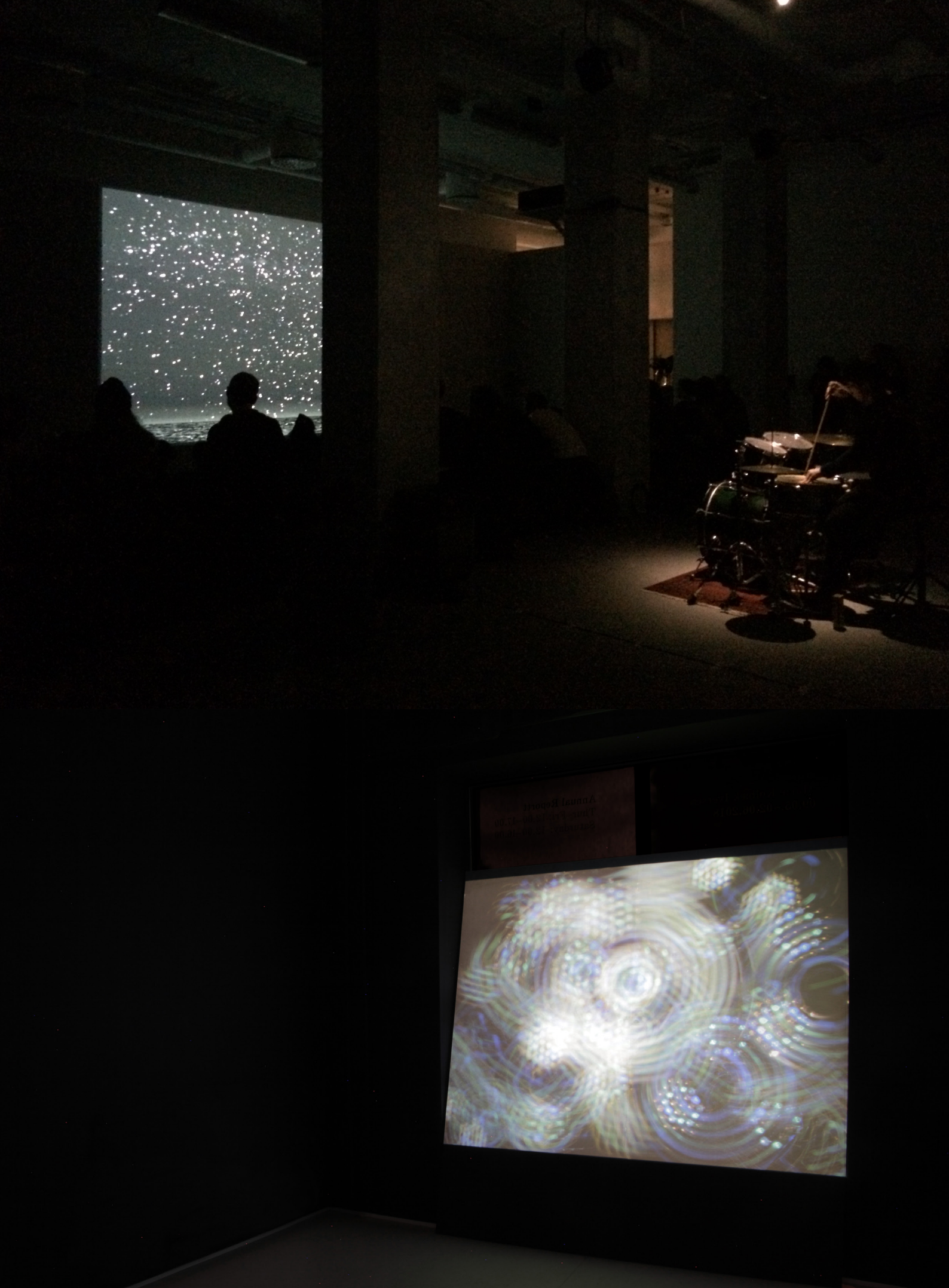
Additional artworks and exhibitions created during my PhD fellowship period:

*Star Messenger*, single-channel video installation, which was shown at PS/Y and LUX (2017, London), Kunsthall Oslo (2018, Oslo), and Annual Reportt (2018, Copenhagen) to the accompaniment of Diana Policarpo and Gaia Fugazza.

*Birth of Muspelina*, artist book, which was shown at Annual Reportt (2018, Copenhagen) and published as a paperback in 2022 in collaboration between Ebeltoft Kunsthall, Annual Reportt, and Antipyrine. The printed book also forms part of the analogue appendix C.

*New Spirits*, woodruff-snaps, which was first 'shown,' i.e., served at Annual Reportt (2018, Copenhagen). Since it has become a central part of my *Donnimaar*-performances.

*Portents*, duo-channel video installation shown in Marie Kølback Iversen's solo exhibition, *NÅR*, at Gether Contemporary (2021, Copenhagen).



Marie Kølback Iversen: *Star Messenger*  
Kunsthall Oslo (above) and Annual Reportt (below), 2018





Marie Kølback Iversen: *New Spirits* and *Birth of Muspelina*  
Annual Reportt (below), 2018



The exhibition *Birth of Muspelina* brings together three new works by Danish artist Marie Kølbaek Iversen: a unique artist's book, *Birth of Muspelina*, the concoction *New Spirits* and the composite film work *Star Messenger*. All three works explore liminal states of destruction and becoming to suggest a collapse of scientific vision with the spiritual/mythological visionary.

The exhibition is part of Marie Kølbaek Iversen's artistic research project "Neo-worlds: The Transformative Potentialities of Fright" at the Oslo National Academy of the Arts and Aarhus University.

#### STAR MESSENGER

Work-in-progress; HD single-channel animated video loop; 11'53"

Expanding the artist's research exploring the transformative potentialities of fright encountered through traumatic and shamanist processes, *Star Messenger* proposes a softening of the historical Western divide between the rational and the irrational, the material and the magical.

In 1610 Galileo Galilei published his accounts of discovering four of Jupiter's moons. He titled the publication *Siderius Nuncius*—'star messenger'—thus naming the book after Io, the innermost of the moons. Over the course of two months Io had visually—slowly, but consistently—conveyed her message to him: That she is orbiting Jupiter. That the Earth is not the centre of the Universe.

Marie Kølbaek Iversen attributes the English translation of the title of Galilei's opus magnum to her dreamy video work *Star Messenger*, whereby she questions what we know and how we know it, and suggests a collapse of scientific vision with the spiritual/mythological visionary: Both draw on sightings obtained through extraordinary set-ups that may challenge habitual world-views.

#### NEW SPIRITS

Woodruff snaps

In Scandinavian magic tradition the herb woodruff is attributed with the power of opening the gates between worlds, particularly in relation to Walpurgis Night, the evening before May 1st.

#### BIRTH OF MUSPELINA

Work-in-progress; unique artist's book; artist's writing and found imagery.

*Birth of Muspelina* interweaves various historical and contemporary literary and scientific sources into a first person narrative of transgression and transformation.

Please feel free to request a reading from the staff.

#### MARIE KØLBÆK IVERSEN

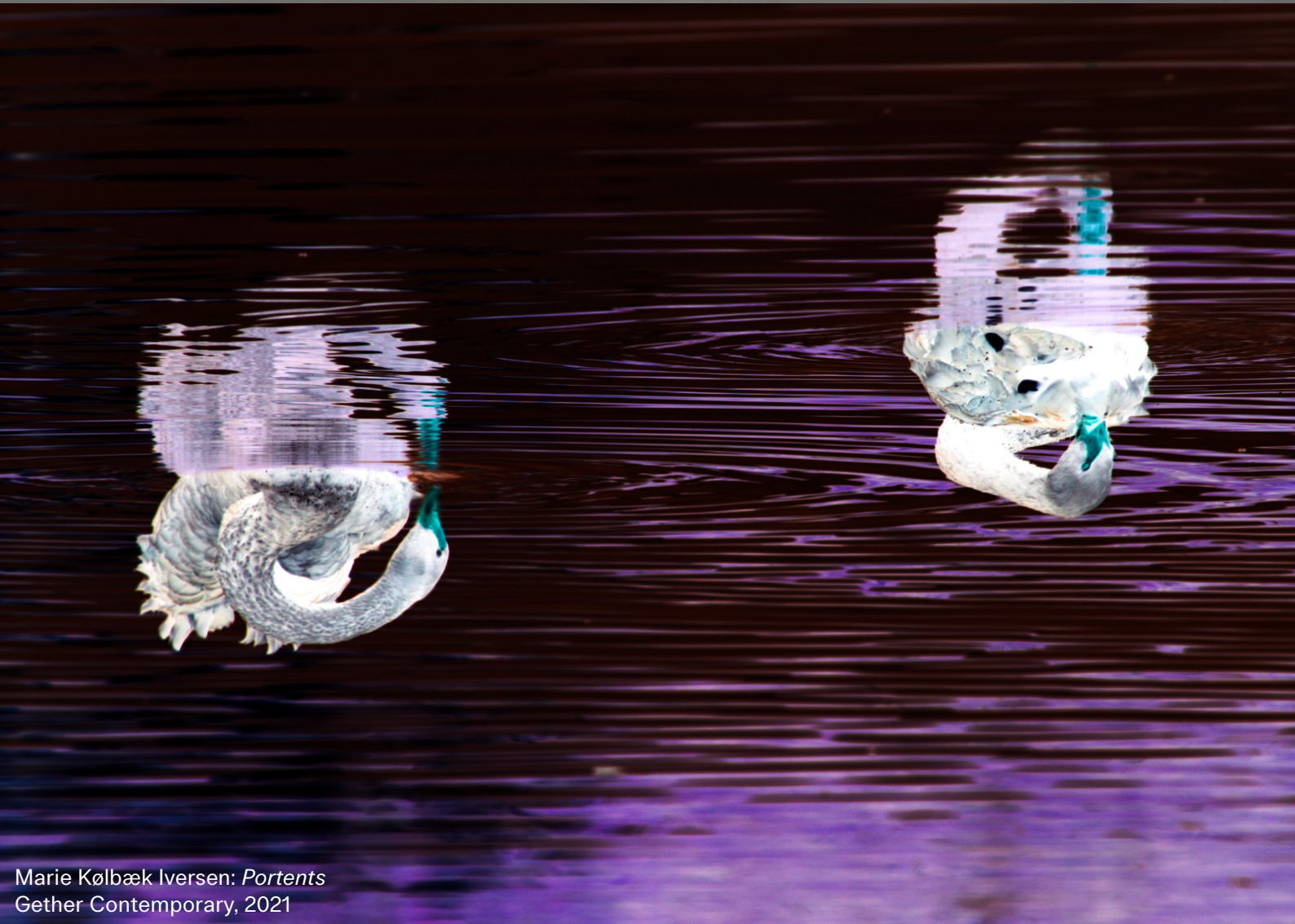
Marie Kølbaek Iversen (\*1981, Herning, DK). Visual Artist MFA from the Department of Time-Based Media at Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, Copenhagen, Denmark, 2008. Artistic research fellow at the Academy of Fine Art at the Oslo National Academy of the Arts, and the Department of Anthropology at the University of Aarhus with the project "Neo-worlds: the Other-directed potentialities of Fright" as of October 2017. Recent projects and exhibitions include: *Soon Enough*, Tensta Konsthall, Stockholm, Sweden, 2018; *Water from the Waist Down*, Kunsthall Oslo, Oslo, Norway, 2018; *Star Messenger*, PS/Y + LUX, London, GB, 2017, "Io/I" and *Matrilineal Collapse*, PARMER, New York, USA, 2017; *Surfacing Earth*, Röda Sten, Göteborg, Sweden, 2016; *The Eight Climate (What Does Art Do?)*, The 11th Gwangju Biennial, Gwangju, South Korea, 2016; *Spin and the Wolf*, Overgaden, Copenhagen, Denmark, 2016; *Transformer* (solo), Brandts, Odense, Denmark, 2015; *Mirror Therapy* (solo), Fotografisk Center, Copenhagen, Denmark, 2015; *Biennale de l'image en mouvement*, Centre d'Art Contemporain, Geneva, Switzerland, and MONA, Hobart, Australia, 2014-15; *Consciousness*, ARTEFACT '14, STUK Kunstencentrum, Leuven, Belgium, 2014; *Dexter Bang Sinister*, Kunsthall Charlottenborg, Copenhagen, Denmark, 2012; *Execution into decapital* (solo), IMO, Copenhagen, Denmark, 2012.

The exhibition is realised with the kind support of the Danish Arts Foundation.



Marie Kølbaek Iversen: *Portents*  
Gether Contemporary, 2021





Marie Kølback Iversen: *Portents*  
Gether Contemporary, 2021

## NÅR

When all women are widows  
When all men are dead  
When house and farm are deserted  
When we see white ravens  
When we see black swans  
When we see feathers sinking  
When we see stones floating  
When we see oceans burning  
When we see the end of the world

With the black swan as a starting point, the exhibition *NÅR* (the Danish word for 'when') focuses on apocalypse as transhistorical motif. In the book *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable* from 2007, the mathematical philosopher and probability theorist Nassim Nicholas Taleb explains how history has never been predictable, but is instead consistently driven forward by what Taleb with the ancient Roman poet Juvenal refers to as 'black swans': positive or negative events that are considered highly improbable before they occur, but which are nonetheless realized with far-reaching consequences in turn. The COVID-19 crisis is a classic black swan.

Similarly, an old Danish folk song employs the black swan as a portent of apocalypse. The young man, Svend of Rosengård, must go into exile after having killed his brother. When his mother asks when he will return home, Svend answers: *When all women are widows / When all men are dead / When house and farm are deserted / When we see white ravens / When we see black swans / When we see feathers sinking / When we see stones floating / When we see oceans burning / When we see the end of the world.*

Referencing Taleb's theory as well as the song about Svend of Rosengård, the video work *Portents* is based on footage of white swans in the Danish lake Damhussøen and black swans in Parque Ibirapuera in São Paulo. The respective shots appear negative—the white swans black, the black swans white—while the background assumes a psychedelic character.

As for the arrival at the end of the world, the question is not if, but when.