

OVERGADEN.

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13 APRIL, 5-8PM

Working as a fictitious research institute Jeuno JE Kim and Lasse Krog Møller investigate the systems of classification through which we understand the world

INTERVIEW

By Kyongfa Che

The Greece Gropers Foundation (GGF) is a research complex consisting of four museums, four research facilities, a botanical garden and a publishing house. As an interdisciplinary research institute, it is dedicated to the discovery and diffusion of knowledge about things that constitute the 'ordinary'.

Founded in 1936, it began as a reader's group started by an anonymous group of scientists, physicians and historians in order to play word games and discuss the potential of 'innovative' literature. The milestone event that transformed the small group into a foundation came in 1978 when it went public with the publication of *Life: A User's Manual*. As a manual for life, this work describes how the extraordinary can be found in the heterogeneous dust of everyday life. In the exhibition "Tingen - From the Greece Gropers Foundation", the GGF is presenting to the public its treasures from the collection, most of which are being seen for the first time.

The editor of this paper visited the director of the GGF, who usually abstains from public appearances, preferring to keep herself in a modestly sized office with no windows. Her office is sparsely furnished, with neatly organised cabinets containing inventories of *Interesting Games* and *New Interesting Games*. In the centre of the room is a small staircase made of clay with the inscription "O O", an acronym of "Obligatory Optimism", which is the motto of the GGF. At the far end of the room is a wooden desk with drawers on both sides, but no chair. The director arrives at the appointment exactly 53 Days too late. She tells me she usually stands while working, as it is more convenient for her *Thoughts of Sorts*. She is charismatic in a modest way, and shows great hospitality, but for the fact that we talk for two hours while standing.

Tell us briefly about yourself. How did you start your career at the Greece Gropers Foundation? Did you know Mr Perec, the first and former director?

Mr Perec and I met in the basement of the Neurophysiological Research Laboratory of the National Centre for Scientific Research. We were working as archivists in the *L'Infraordinaire* unit, a sub-branch of the centre that categorizes multifaceted studies of dust. While we have been acquainted for some years, it is difficult to claim that I know Mr Perec, since we communicated only by exchanging short messages on Post-it notes. This was imposed due to the dangers of working with dust - we were obliged to wear masks during working hours, which made conversation

difficult. Mr Perec and I gradually lost touch after I left the research laboratory in *An Attempt at Exhausting a Place in Paris*, and I then proceeded to work in the family business of manufacturing *The Machine* for dehydrating anchovies. It therefore came as a great surprise to me to receive an envelope by post containing a single Post-it note from Mr Perec, appointing me director of the GGF.

Didn't you feel it was a heavy responsibility to take over from the person who wrote the famous work Life: A User's Manual?

I am not interested in convincing anyone or proving anything, so I wasn't too nervous about the appointment. Perhaps Mr Perec knew that about me, and thought that a considered naiveté on my part could further the GGF's development in surprising and amusing ways. I began by establishing a network of flower-sniffers, which led to the foundation of the Botanical Garden. The 1990s, which is when I became director, was an important decade in terms of analysing who gets to say what to whom. This led to the establishment of the Greece Gropers Publishing House and the Dust Museum; two institutions that epitomize an encyclopaedic aspiration to *Think/Classify* the world. To work between text and dust, one must be trained to see the invisible continuum of life, operating on the paradox of an infinite whole that contains other infinite wholes, right down to the very infinite whole found in a speck of dust.

The GGF's mission statement is to excavate the ordinary, knowing that we never pay enough attention to the material world that constitutes our everyday environment. Can you tell us more about how the various institutions carry out research and acquisitions, and maintain their archives?

Our societies are constructed and administered in such a way that most of us are programmed to become *A Man Asleep*, too tired and barely able to maintain personal bureaucracies. At the GGF, we prefer to maintain a position of critical curiosity, examining individual acts of collecting within historical frameworks, and the cultural/social institutions born out of this act. As such, the organisation hopes to function as a 'self-conscious archiving institution' that offers absurd to pertinent commentary on scholarship relating to the topic of collecting and collections. We operate under the Greek-Latin rhetorical discipline of 5W+H, which stands for Who, What, Where, When, Why + How. The core principles addressed are consequently:

- 1) Who collects, and on the basis of which position?
- 2) What does it mean to collect and keep artefacts?

- 3) When did collecting become collections with appointed managers?
- 4) Where lies the future for archives, libraries, museums and information depositories?
- 5) Why is it relevant to examine collecting/collections now, and in a historical perspective?
- 6) How do libraries, archives, museums and educational/art institutions collect documents and communicate artefacts that contribute to nation-building and provide the basis for a shared sense of the past and a common national and cultural identity?

The core principles seem to me to be significant questions applicable to all existing museums today. Are you consciously assuming a critical stance towards museums' paternalistic mode of operation? How reflective are you on issues of what constitutes the 'public', and in tandem with that, what 'education' should be?

We are primarily driven by our private interests and our mission is to comment on situations without producing specific cultural poli-

cies. In terms of museums, one can certainly examine the question of when they began to assume a more public and pedagogical role, shaping the discourse on history and, indirectly, our understanding of life. There are certain key historical moments, which are central to the practice of collecting and the development of a collector's mind-set in Europe.

Can you give us some examples?

The link between colonial trade routes, ethnographic collections, the notion of display and the concept of 'wonder' served as foundational blueprints for the creation and maintenance of knowledge communities in Europe. Colonial voyages of exploration and expansionist projects brought home natural and artificial curiosities from far-flung lands. In the 17th century, gardener-collectors such as John Tradescant in England amassed sizable collections of flora and other curiosities. As head gardener for the Duke of Buckingham, Tradescant expanded both his collection of plants and his fortune. This al-

lowed him to purchase a sizable property where he was able to display his collection to the general public. The period also saw the rise of the Wunderkammern or Cabinets of Wonder; collections compiled by the aristocracy, who viewed the act of collecting as a hobby and a reflection of their status.

As you can see, the early display of collections was a form of entertainment, designed to elicit wonder, and as such they were the harbingers of the establishment of modern museums as a public educational experience. It is in this network of universities and pedagogical mandates for scientific research that the catalysts of the institutionalization of individual collections arose - and hence the birth of museums. By understanding where and how the systems of categorization that we assume to be natural originated, we have the modest hope of expanding our understanding of *Things* - a story from the 1960s to the present.

I believe what you just said must be reflected in the exhibition. But tell us more - why did the Greece



Gropers Foundation, which usually keeps such a low profile, decide to make an exhibition at Overgaden that exposes the Foundation's Species of Spaces, as well as its treasures?

That is a very good question, and it is related to our recent encounter with Mr Saint-Jerome, who propagated the importance of living in seclusion, but not too far from the city. Based on our conversation with Mr Saint-Jerome, the GGF decided to reveal to the public how its activities have honoured the following principles found in the *Manual*:

- 1) The sociological methods of looking at the ordinary and the everyday.
- 2) Applying an autobiographical filter to political or public phenomena.
- 3) Applying constraints or exercises in word/image play.
- 4) Constructing a fictive narrative of institutional structures that shapes how we are taught to understand the world.

This exhibition is also a joyful opportunity for us to exercise the principles in another dimension - through display - playing with the potential for how things can be looked at.

How did you decide, or let each institution decide for itself, what to show from the valuable collections?

Mr Percec asked each institution the following questions: What happens in our everyday lives: the banal, the quotidian, the evident, the common, the ordinary, the infra-ordinary, the background noise, the habitual? How can we account for it, how can we question it, and how can we describe it? In conjunction to the mission stated above, we also asked each institution to implement in their final selection process the following formula for arranging one's books to remain constant and equal to 361:
 $K + X > 361 > K - Z$

I see. Do you have any plans for the exhibition to tour?

Oh yes. But we are not touring with the same exhibition. Our Dairy Museum has just received an invitation from the Museum of Ethnology in Osaka to hold an exhibition based on a joint research project on Osaka's lacto-customs. What is the daily consumption of dairy products in Osaka? I have no idea and am curious to find out - but more importantly, is that your *Moped with Chrome-Plated Handlebars that's Parked in the Back of the Yard?*

Kyongfa Che is an independent curator based in Tokyo.

1. Georges Perec: *L'Infra-ordinaire*, Paris: Seuil, 1989, p 11.

INTRODUCTION

The exhibition "Tingen - From the Greece Gropers Foundation" is a collaboration between the artists Jeuno JE Kim and Lasse Krog Møller, in which they present ten collections from the fictitious institution the Greece Gropers Foundation. Greece Gropers, the founder of the institution, is an anagram of the author Georges Perec. His literary methods, as reflected in the novel *Life: A User's Manual*, have structured the artists' working processes and the conceptual structure of the exhibition, which is based on a sociological approach to everyday phenomena. By imitating a museological presentation form, the exhibition highlights the systems and classifications through which we get to know the world, and questions the institutional distinction between the interesting, the invaluable and the discarded.

Museum of Bureaucratic Apparatus

Dedicated to describing the history and development of bureaucracy. The museum tracks technical advances made in bureaucratic accessories, such as the evolution of the stapler and the hole-puncher.

• MUSEUM • • BUREAUCRATIC • • APPARATUS •



Center for Elementary Culture

Devoted to categorizing food and sustenance customs. The center is specifically interested in shopping lists, cooking recipes, nutrition plans, diet regimes, and salubrious advice.



CENTER FOR ELEMENTARY CULTURE

Museum of Sartorial Choices

Dramatizing the festive history of garb and dress, the museum conducts comparative fashion studies of, for example, patterns on neckties, Scottish tartans and gentlemen's handkerchiefs.

MUSEUM OF SARTORIAL CHOICES

Dust Museum

The aim is to study dust and other small particles in the world. Rigorous scholarship is applied to understand the evolution and origin of dust, while explorers search for a Void free from dust.

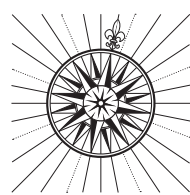
DUST MUSEUM

Greece Gropers Publishing House
Presents titles from past and future publications.



Greece Gropers Institute for Geography

As a learned society founded by street sweepers of *Ellis Island and the People of America*, the institute propagates geographical and cartographical studies of Lilliputian dimensions.



Greece Gropers
Institute for Geography

Greece Gropers Dairy Museum

Milk consumption and dairy production history from Scandinavia, Africa, Oceania, Asia Minor, the Arctic Circle, and the Americas. Special emphasis is placed on Nordic dairy product consumption and accompanying lacto-folklore.

Dairy Museum

Greece Gropers Botanical Garden

Researchers at the Botanical Garden have faithfully translated and adapted the work of two leading scientists, L. Burp & M. Gotlib, and their ground-breaking treatise *Cantatrix Sopranica L. Scientific Papers*. By adapting fauna studies to flora studies, the aesthetic and cultural value of plants is rigorously analysed.



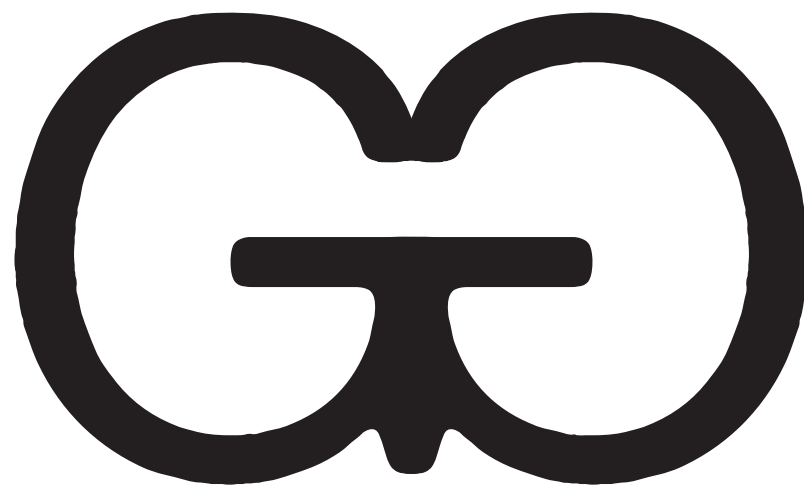
Greece Gropers Speleological Society

Presents findings from caves around the world and collaborates with archaeologists in the study of underground ruins, sewers and aqueducts. The society oversees *The Winter Journey* expedition to Italian and Russian ice caves, photo-documenting the evolving systems and *Memories* of caves.



Greece Gropers Silence Institute

Houses an archive of silences. Various forms, scents and degrees of silence are alphabetically categorized for easy access. Currently, *A Gallery Portrait of W or The Memory of Childhood* is on display at the institute's café, *La Boutique Obscure: 124 rêves*.



F O U N D A T I O N

CV

Jeuno JE Kim (b. 1976) holds an MA in Fine Arts from University of Illinois, Chicago, and an MA in Theological Studies from Harvard University in Cambridge. She has had several solo exhibitions, most recently *Protein Cooking Show* at Lilith Performance Studio, Malmö, 2011; *Allt för Alla* at Gävle Konstcentrum, 2010, and *Fog Dossier* at ArtSonje Center, Seoul, 2010. Her works have also been shown in group exhibitions across the world and she has contributed to a number of publications and magazines. In 2009 Jeuno JE Kim was artist in residence at the Factory of Art & Design in Copenhagen. She lives in Malmö and Seoul.

Lasse Krog Møller (b. 1972) graduated from the Jutland Art Academy in 2001. His works have been shown in several exhibitions, most recently the group exhibitions *Multimarked* at Skulpturi, Copenhagen, 2012; *The Piccadilly Exhibition Company # 4: Remnants from a World Exhibition* at Traneudstillingen, Gentofte, 2012; *Enter II* at Kunsthallen Brandts, Odense, 2011, and *Koh-i-Noor* at Den Frie Centre of Contemporary Art, Copenhagen, 2011. Lasse Krog Møller is co-founder of and editor at forlaget/tidskriftet * [asterisk] and has made numerous publications, most recently *Et togt over det hvide sand*, 2011. Lasse Krog Møller lives in Aarhus.

GUIDED TOUR

Sunday 22 April at 2pm Overgaden invites you to a guided tour of the two current exhibitions in the company of Solveig Lindeskov Andersen, a member of Overgaden's curatorial staff. Afterwards we will serve coffee and cake. The event will be in Danish.

LECTURE AND FILM SCREENING

Thursday 24 May at 7pm associate professor at the University of Copenhagen, Tania Ørum, will give an introduction to Georges Perec and the 1960s avant-garde movement. Afterwards we have a special screening of the film *Un Homme Qui Dort* from 1974 by Georges Perec and Bernard Queysanne. The event will be in Danish.

CONVERSATION

Thursday 31 May at 6pm four collections and four thoughts on classifications are presented under the title *Think/Classify*. Participants in the conversation include Jeuno JE Kim, Lasse Krog Møller, Annelie Nilsson, Jan Bäcklund, Anna Kaae Kjærgaard, and Morten Søndergaard. The event will be in Danish.

UPCOMING EXHIBITION

Friday 15 June 2012 Overgaden presents the solo exhibition *Maneuvering* by Mary Coble. The last day of the exhibition is 5 August 2012.

Jeuno JE Kim and Lasse Krog Møller would like to thank Benjamin and "the puzzle crew".

Italicised words and phrases are titles of works by Georges Perec.

This exhibition folder can be downloaded from www.overgaden.org



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