

political system and its representatives. In Denmark this has reached a record low not seen since the 1980s.¹ These developments are not, of course, solely attributable to a heightened crisis rhetoric, but they have been pushed to extremes by it – because as well as closing borders, it has also shut down the space for thinking and trust. On the other hand, the use of hyperbolic language has contributed to a sharper focus on the power and disempowerment of language in a time of political crisis – one of the main tracks in the exhibition *Varulv!* ('Werewolf!').

Rather than addressing individual crises or ideological positions, *Varulv!* unfolds as a poetical social satire probing the nature of crisis. As a framework for the exhibition, the writer Kasper Nørgaard Thomsen has written a reinterpretation of Sergej Prokofiev's musical fairy tale *Peter & the Wolf* (1936), which draws an allegorical portrait of the current feeling of crisis and the dynamics between language and action. Whilst in the original version Peter overcomes danger through courage and ingenuity, here he has to capitulate to a delegation of 'hunters, percussion idiots, and minions' with their calls to arms and exhortations to preventative measures spreading panic in the peace of the forest glade – because what if the wolf comes! But as the mythical creature of the werewolf, which has given the text and exhibition their title, suggests, the threat is already present, lurking between the lines as an incarnation of the fear of the irrational and unknown – in ourselves, in the world, and in the blind spots of language.

In the essay collection *Welcome to the Desert of the Real!*, the philosopher Slavoj Žižek describes how the Western world, in the midst of all its prosperity, is haunted by nightmarish visions of disaster that seem to be self-fulfilling prophecies. To sustain their ideals of freedom, progress and pluralism, liberal democracies need phantasmagoria that camouflage the fact that the very lack of liberty they are trying to combat is the inextricable alter ego of the ideology of freedom. As he writes: "[T]oday, all the main terms we use to designate the present conflict – 'war on terrorism', 'democracy and freedom', 'human rights', and so on – are false terms, mystifying our percep-

tion of the situation instead of allowing us to think it. In this precise sense, our 'freedoms' themselves serve to mask and sustain our deeper unfreedom."² In Nørgaard Thomsen's text, as well as in public debate, crisis introduces a mental and legal state of emergency that legitimises undemocratic points of view and initiatives in the holy name of democracy. And thus silenced by incontrovertible fronts, Peter builds barricades. His 'ingenious trap' is long forgotten.

Against the background of the text, the exhibition is choreographed as a spatial narrative in three acts paraphrasing the dramaturgy of crisis from idyll and prosperity, through seduction and cacophony, to resignation and disempowerment – followed by an epilogue. With this structure *Varulv!* takes the form of a 'therapeutic' agenda. Because if, in the words of the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, we 'traverse the fantasy' of crisis, we might just be able to find a way out of the apparent dead end we have reached and generate a space for pro-active rather than re-active ways of thinking about and debating the society we live in. As an extension of this, the participating artists take different perspectives on the crisis mentality of today to investigate some of the central dynamics and paradoxes characterising it. The majority of the works have been made especially for the exhibition or been chosen by the artists themselves, making them active participants in the development of its narrative structure. Within this framework, different points of reflection and artistic statements are presented, establishing links across the works and exhibitions spaces, just as the broad range of media – from drawing, painting and sculpture, to sound, video and installation – introduce a range of sensibilities that appeal not only to an intellectual, but also a sensuous, aesthetic experience and processing of the themes brought into play.

As a response to the black-and-white representations of public debate, the works operate in an ambiguous realm of humour, absurdity and critique. Without neglecting the issues at stake, they offer a vent for the nervous energy of crisis, shifting focus from its immediate forms to its underlying structures and psychology. Several of the works thus address the

exclusionary mechanisms, rhetorical effects and populist manipulations of the media (Christian Vind, Iris Smeds, Mikkel Ploug), whereas others deal with the social dynamics and mental stress caused by the language of crisis in the individual as well as the collective consciousness (Lise Harlev, Henrik Plenge Jakobsen, Marie Kølbæk Iversen, Francisco Montoya Cázarez). At a more overriding level, this is connected to issues of Western society's democratic and ideological crisis, where the secure drowsiness of the welfare state has resulted in a lack of engagement in anything beyond the private sphere (Aurora Sander), because the wolf has long since been tamed by the supremacy of civilisation (Jasper Sebastian Stürup). At the same time, a creeping awareness that our traditional way of thinking may not be capable of providing solutions to world issues is making itself felt. At the end of the exhibition's humorous yet critical tale of crisis, enlightenment's towering cathedrals and faith in progress have been replaced by the dark defences of the bunker (Ann Louise Overgaard Andersen) and unfeasible, dead-end cartographies (Johannes Sivertsen) – but as spelt out in flashing neon, there is no need to panic (Peter Land) ... yet ... because if language can narrow our horizons, it has to be capable of resuscitating vision and intricacy. As both election results and experts make apparent, the sense of crisis has generated a deep longing for new political visions and values that can provide a path for the development of society that does not break with basic democratic principles.

Even though the exhibition has a critical aim, there is no intention of harnessing art to a political agenda or demanding a concrete answer or solution. Yet art, in addition to generating a deeper understanding of complex issues and sharpening critical perspectives, can – like visionary politics – contribute to changing our concepts of the conceivable. The last part or epilogue of the exhibition therefore explores the ground for new forms of language, narrative and action. With a general focus on renegotiation, the works here revolve around linguistic, cultural and ideological experiments and hybrids (Cia Rinne, Konvoj, Iris Smeds, Francisco Montoya Cázarez), widening the horizon for further discussion. This is brought

into the realm of public debate in a series of events where communication experts, journalists, politicians and philosophers are invited to discuss the extent of the democratic crisis, the limitations and potential of strategic communication, and how we can bring vision back to the core of the political conversation as a foundation for the society of the future. As the writer and journalist Antoine De Saint-Exupéry said, our task is not to foresee the future, but to enable it.

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Translation: Jane Rowley

1. Peter G. H. Madsen, 'Et folkestyre i krise?', 2011. [<http://www.djoeffbladet.dk/nyheder/2011/9/et-folkestyre-i-krise.aspx>]
2. Slavoj Žižek: *Welcome to the Desert of the Real!*, 2002. Verso, London/New York, p. 2.

Werewolf!

By Kasper Nørgaard Thomsen

1

With nearly abandoned hope of finding what I sought, I encountered a place so untouched by the world's horrors that I could not believe my vision. Invoking my astonished eyes, I asked: "Is this sight you convey cast in reason, are my senses intact? Or has Maya once more obscured the divide between my soul and the rest of this world?" And an exhausted monk collapses like a young child, the child kneads at overwrought eyes, inwards towards the impossible ocular truth, nothing topples, nothing succumbs, the physical reality is indisputable.

A physical reality light as a feather! And I witness the flight of the lively bird towards the portly duck and, verily as this life, the bird taunts the corpulent duck for its inability to fly to great heights. Yet the duck replies mildly: "But who are you, bird, who cannot swim in the pond swift as a duck?" The arrival of a bemused cat interrupts the conversation. The cat dandles its coat, squinting towards the sun and outstretched with conviction that it hears the murmur of a glorious peace. Behind the pond, the animal's private squabbles, stands a demure house with living room and two adjoining rooms, strangely dormant as if devotion has taken root. The windows stand open: a breeze races unhindered through the house, guided only by whim, as if invited by the house itself.

A boy emerges from the house, opens the gate to the clearing, looks out on the pond and entrusts his ears to the unremitting chit-chat of the animals. He stretches his arms to the sky – a defensive sky, perhaps sleepy like him, spared by churlish gods and nearly empty as a deserted hall, gone are the storm and roar of war!

2

There are places borne by rainbows, there is soil blessed by rest, like an arc of exception, rising above the morass; hospitable climates, equal parts sun and wind, like the arrival of a certain meteorological perfection. Distant is the desert, the indomitable camps, the arid vegetation, the bound brides and the brutal jungle with its manic growth. And distant is the Arctic world, the black knolls and the bewildered polar bear whose quest for food grows ever more futile.

Yet it is always as such (the world has convinced me): beyond breath as such, breath as the corridor of evil, breath is the children's terror-stricken night; the lonely night, teeming with nightmare, the eternal, dark forest incessant in breath, where the wolf thrives best as it prowls through the clearing. But the wolf now prowls away in disgrace, as a clown! Red nose swollen and feeble, human hands and human force have slain its savagery, its very nature controlled by the superior race.

3

I must have fallen asleep! Naturally, I dreamt dreadful scenes, every danger imaginable, as true as sleep evades the constraints of simultaneity; my dark skin turns pale, this moderate climate, like an albino banished to the desert, but awake once more I understand: this section must be devoted to the house by the pond, not my lifelong anguish. A rousing voice sweeps through the clearing: "Peter, Peter! Where have you gone, have you left the house again, have you opened the gate anew?" The voice is old, the voice is sharp, as if seeking to deny the distribution of power through time. Something is amiss. Might this parabolical territory cause the boy to disregard the *dépêche*? And does he not sit as children do best, speaking with the animals, the Internationale of youth? Yet the boy is engulfed by turmoil – a delegation of hunters and percussion idiots, joined by an industry of minions, appears in the clearing. Just then the French horn, this archetypical Habsburgian instrument, this Indo-European curse, trumpets; and Peter, who was conceived for strings! Soon after, more fanfare,

abhorrent forms, chromed instruments whose cacophony of boom and bang confounds everything that has lived in the clearing.

But Peter – this hardy boy! – beckons the approaching crowd: “We are well here, we live securely here; should the sneak (wolf) enter these parts, I and the other animals have devised a brilliant trap! Do you want to see how it works?” The commander promptly yanks the boy into the garden again, scares off the cat, scares off the duck, and the bird takes flight. The time has come for a talk with grandfather – on the way of the world, the stern world, the world’s general and vulnerable nations, and on the marauding wolf, whose very return was made possible by heedlessness. Daydream eludes humanity in the eternal vulnerability: the wolf has already devoured both kid and Cid.

And this alarm spree I have seen so many times before infiltrates grandfather’s central nervous system – the headquarters of all life, all limbs – like a ray striking out at an unwitting butterfly, and grandfather begins to shake Peter so that the entourage *again* fails to hear of Peter’s proud and ingenious trap.

Alas. The words are wasted.

Peace with nature, the grand Internationale, greater attunement is required.

But Peter is encircled. All stand in wait, all afraid: the words uttered glorify action alone, words of self-preservation and panic. The clamour is primitive, the clamour is enormous.

4

Only epileptics, those disjoined from reality, imagine groves beyond the rat race! That the sister rainbow permits such thoughts. The marbled sheets of exception. Humanity, which learns from its errors, humanity, which finds a form of rest, accumulation doctrines, merciless exploitation, tolerant societies in solidarity with other tolerant societies.

But the epileptic – a confused human! – imagine that one can effectuate rest; rest throughout the country, rest for the mother tongue:

like a dancing interlude, like an unhindered breeze, yet the industrious knows: terse is the grind of words, the all-encompassing drive shaped by ends, esteem for productive linguistics. In the infinite vocabulary, beyond direct activity, a donkey is bound to perish.

Alas, there is no interlude. But what a commotion, what a stream of coordinated and overheated principles; precise admonitions, precise contingencies, warnings everywhere, hence the fear and the breath, hence the epileptic body ever at work. All in the world is kidnapped as such, and action – the singularity – slides unimpeded towards its consummation: death.

The fuss grows ever more infernal. The French horn bellows for spasmodic rising, as if the Tartars have set their sights on the summit, reserve troops at the ready should the percussion fall silent. Deserted lies the overpowered clarinet. In hell! This march of doll-like garrisons, cowards, minions and sodomites, running, running towards a feminine climax, which therefore *must* come. And the trousered troll (the commander) emerges, the unfree rainbow’s androgynous fool asserts, reiterates: the wolf is coming, the wolf has come to the land of many ponds.

Ignited by the refrain, things accelerate. I am on the verge of crying, but I must concentrate on recounting as much as I can. I can see grandfather hitch restlessly, hammer restlessly, saw restlessly; he tugs the sleepy curtains onboard, reminiscent of a trawler, of a defilement. The haste implies: You curtains, you breeze, whoever among you is the true sinner, *THE EPILEPTIC!* I feel the urge to shout: “The barricade confines the children’s play, the children’s freedom, spirit and creativity, pulse, hand, mind, the butterfly’s artichokes!” But who dares shout into the surf? Yet! The enclosed space, all barriers, they lead to Siegfried’s megalomania.

It may appear quite incomprehensible, but not for the cat. With a stiff tail it crawls, banished, up into the tree. With stiff feathers, the duck sits shaking. Where has the bird flown? Away! Away from the curfew, the total aphasia of the nightingale. Away from lederhosen,

the army's perverse promenade. Where men are lakes, where men are errand boys, suits as well as hags. But you, who is passive, but you, who is active, pray tell: what is happening here?

5

A house may take abundant forms. Bunker, bridal suite, children's nest, or a trinity-based (Christian) axis – and an infinite room enriched by a racing breeze. In the latter room, no matter how infinite, I imagine that oxygen comes and goes like an assertion of immortal well-being. Whereas the Christian occupation of the room, the rigor mortis of the cross, stifles the bulging sea of oxygen.

I caught a glimpse of Peter prior to the occupation. He glided from room to room as if breaking down the walls, overcoming the ceiling. As if the absence of walls, the absence of restrictions, was astronomic. The tale often circles around the boy sitting on the roof. Nothing psychotic here, just a friend of the universe. Now the boy stumbles from room to room, he resembles a phantom, but this phantom is perplexed and hamstrung: it no longer floats through the walls. What was once house and spacious wings is now a bunker structure. Or a fortress. And the living room is the epicentre, the hub of defence, the deadly cockpit. Here sits the emboldened grandfather. Incessantly he interrogates the boy, incessantly he chides: "Have you closed all the windows, checked the arsenal of canned food, for *nobody* knows when it will begin."

6

There is a place in the brain. A parabolical place. Twists and turns, somersaults and clearings, outlying districts for children, where the wolf thrives, free of the superhuman occupation of the hemisphere. And I have endured the affliction, and I have called upon these districts, these districts have answered my plea: "Here, on the outskirts, no one will bite you." In light of this morbid state of alert, who can believe that the acrobat juggles freely? He too is afraid, afraid like Peter. Now I see the

boy training ceaselessly – anything physiological psychological – as the sun may indeed burn out at any moment. Let me emphasise once more: there are no transitions, there are no barriers here: the phrase is readiness, the hand is a salute, the body is spirit regulated by invading phraseology. If I were a braver man, I would approach the guard, if my skin were alabaster, roar: "This remote *oblast* has not seen the day of the wolf in more than a hundred years!" They would pore over me, a black monk, a devalued idler, and throw me out the door like rabies-stricken vermin. Yet the ultimate impotence has a welcome joy, and in this jus I don a wolf mask, intrude on Peter, confront him: "Behold my boy, it is but me! The wolf is extinct!"

7

But the boy stares at the alien monk, squinting. Unsure of what to believe, this xenophobic activity, the stranger who offers his hand? Ideally – there is a messenger, there is a boy, and what happens then? The cramped room, the paranoid centre is freed again, like a higher power wishing to intervene in humanity's dead end.

But Peter's skull, his intellect, is blocked. A motorway of necessity, the angel unwelcome. And the boy shuts down, and the room reconstitutes, shrinks faster than expected, and next he storms into the living room and on to the first chamber, where he turns around, makes the trip again, across the arsenal of defence supplies and flares, hops over the cot in the headquarters at the centre, as if something is missing, as if the chain of command remains uncertain.

I tell Peter that the conflict is over. I tell the boy that I predict a good harvest with plenty of wheat and rapeseed and maize. To no avail. I tell him that the crucified room and the trinity's stranglehold has been overcome by the charitable triumph of prosperity. *And* the total war, two fronts, three fronts, murderous triangulations: the projectiles dart above, through the air, ploughing the sea. Yet the boy recognises nothing beyond battle.

Like all else on Earth, fleeing is complicated, differentiated. I embark on panicked flight, with all haste, but the delegation's runners get hold of me. As is well known, the Hapsburgian machine has a tradition of capturing and breaking in wild dogs from Dalmatia; these beasts bark at me, the instruments boil over, the instruments seethe, as if trying to escape their labyrinth in favour of a more powerful orgasm. I am strung up head-down in a tree. And see the world on the other end, accompanied by kettledrums and tambourines and resounding cymbals. The blaring music, the Dalmatian jaws, its teeth, the self-igniting froth, hoards of hunters, abettors and tarts, and this: my illusion of this place crashes down.

I begin to slip in and out of consciousness. Yonder, beyond the reach of terror, a wonderful place where humanity contemplates the wolf and vice versa, all suckling on the teat of creation. But as soon as I open my mouth to drink, I spot Peter, shuttling back and forth between the rooms of the fortress. Now he bends corporeally over a soured lecture, now – already! – out here, he begins to cleave frantically, every muscle intent on spurning gravity.

Inspired by Sergei Prokofiev's Peter & the Wolf (1936). Peter & the Wolf was originally a musical fable commissioned by the Children's Central Theatre in Moscow to cultivate the musical tastes of the Soviet Union's youngest schoolchildren. The play was to be performed at the May Day parade. Since then, countless other versions have seen the light of day.

Kasper Nørgaard Thomsen is educated from Forfatterskolen in 2001 and has published the novels Baljen (2001), Malonecity 1 & 2 (2006), Idioteque (2008) and Termostatens Nat (2011).

Translation: Michael Lee Burgess

EVENTS

Thursday 4 April 6pm

Reading // *Of Werewolves and Dualisms*

The author Kasper Nørgaard Thomsen will perform the short story *Werewolf!*, which has been a point of departure for the exhibition. Hereafter follows a performative reading of a new text entitled *Dualoges* by the author Cia Rinne.

Thursday 21 April 6.30pm

Concert and lecture // *The Hidden Composition*

For the exhibition, the composer and jazz guitarist Mikkel Ploug has created a new work where the melody of speaking from a number of prominent politicians are translated into music. On this night, he will perform the work live and give an insight into his work with translating speeches to instruments.

Thursday 28 April 6-7.30pm

Debate // *Language as Strategy*

Overgaden sets the scene for a debate about the political language and asks how we can understand the value of and the need for strategic linguistic tools in political craftsmanship today?

Participants: Christian Kock, Jens Jonatan Steen, Astrid Haug and Katrine Hertz Mortensen. Moderator: Gertrud Thisted Højlund

Wednesday 4 May 5-7.30pm

Lecture & dinner // *The Potential of Tranquility*

Overgaden invites to a lecture by expert in silence, Bastian Overgaard, which questions the power of language and turns our gaze inward towards the potential of silence. After the lecture, there will be a wordless communal dinner facilitated by Bastian Overgaard.

Thursday 12 May 5pm

POLEMIC // *How Can Art Get Airtime?*

We live in a time where it has never been easier to express yourself in the public arena – social media, 24-hour news coverage and an increased focus on framing and spin have changed past hierarchies of who holds the power in the media. A panel of art and cultural debaters will discuss why art is so invisible in the public debate, and what it will take for art to get airtime. The debate will be in Danish.

Wednesday 25 May 6pm

Debate // *Death of the Political Narratives(?)*

In a time where political ideologies have been declared dead, and political speech is slandered for being meaningless, Overgaden sets the scene for a critical debate about visions in Danish politics.

Participants: Jørn Loftager, Olav Hesseldahl, Christine Cordsen and others. Moderator: Kristian Weise

UPCOMING EXHIBITIONS

Friday 17 June 2016 Overgaden presents the solo exhibition *Milk & Honey* by Deniz Eroglu and *SummerSounds*, consisting of three shorter exhibitions dedicated to the intersection of music, sound and visual art. Both run through 14 August 2016.

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

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