

The Weather in Fred Sandback

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This exhibition has started slowly with us thinking about Andrea Fraser's text *Why Fred Sandback's work makes me cry*.

We took this title sentence/remark as the main message of her essay, even when it was only the title; we replaced Andrea Fraser's *me* with our *us*, added a question mark and questioned our sentiments. So why are we affected or deeply touched by a work that is so minimal, and thus so im-personal, not hinting at an author but relational between the spectator and the artist, and so non-textual? In our reflection the answer was: because one, as a spectator, is so touched or liberated by an own possibility to see. One is affected/delighted or wondered by one's senses, comparable to the sentiment expressed in the image of the deaf person who, thanks to electronic means, hears something for the first time—pure delight.

Andrea Fraser links her emotions to the psychoanalytical moment of object loss (and the remembrance of object loss)—a notion we again took literally (and also with a vivid image of the empty spaces of Fred Sandback's exhibitions—devoid of objects, merely citing them). We didn't go deeper into the significance of object loss as the Freudian term of excessive desperation of feeling lost, because the main object that links one to the world is not there, but rather explored the simple meaning of object loss—the world has lost its objects, a world with no things. Seeing the object not as the signified, and not as target, but in the definition of objects as material parts of the world, produced to be in the world as objects (the German word for 'thing', *Gegenstand*, literally means 'which stands against us').

And we followed the Italian philosopher Emanuele Coccia's thoughts in *Il bene nelle cose, The good of the things*—A world without things is a world without morals, without ethics.

Emanuele Coccia argues that things, goods, come with ethics, with a moral about what is good (!) or bad. Their advertisement shows us how the world should be handled, how it should be used, providing us with an ethics of everyday life.

This can be seen, following Coccia, as a positive move, since it re-grounds ethics to materialism, decisions made on tangible grounds, replacing non-materialistic, idealistic sources of morals and ethics (religion, a higher meaning). These ethics and morals that come with things in the end show us that we live in a deeply secular society.

So we wished the exhibition to be a space without things—thus with no ethics, with no morals; in the definition of ethics as the way the world is handled, or of morals as the way the world is thought. A space devoid of these rules and guides.

Fred Sandback says (in an interview) that his work is about real space (even when he is only doing his works in interior spaces), calling it 'pedestrian space' because it comes on the foot level (is not exhibited or mediatized). We later learned from Michèle Graf and Selina Grueter that the word 'pedestrian' also means 'dull' (but this hints again to a moral of things, and the good in the good, the car).

So our thinking turned to the real (as in real space). If we follow Lacan's definition of the real as the part of our perception that is independent from our endeavours to grasp the real, it would be something resisting symbolisation, and consequently not-verbalisable, hence not-remember-able; and Freud said on the topic of the not-remember-able that it has to be repeated, and will be repeated (i.e. is haunting us, because we can not grasp it, symbolise it by words or images, verbalise it). Which also means the real is fleeting, since we immediately try to symbolise whatever appears, whatever we sense. The real is a resistor to this effort. It is beyond sense and nonsense, while being solely linked to the senses.

Basically we come here to the effects of Fred Sandback's work again. It can be seen as the connection to the real in an illusionistic space—even when he says rightfully that what he creates is not illusionistic in itself. It triggers our possibilities to be illusionistic but remains calm vis-a-vis the effort.

So, how to make an exhibition out of this.

We are interested in work that is somehow beyond space as a spatial category. It does not place itself into space, instead moving somehow parallel. Maybe this can be called hauntology, a research on ghostly spaces, where we get in touch with the real without having the possibility to speak about them—haunting as in returning, and as in necessarily performed again, and again, and again.

These ghostly spaces can be seen in the haunting parallelism of real space in its supervised counterpart, doubling, mirroring, within the surveillance camera. We saw it in Julia Scher's absolutely hilarious attempt to fill it up again with people (this non-space). We saw it in a hint towards a space, like in *Pedestrian*, the performance by Selina Grueter and Michèle Graf, where a space is only created by movements meant to communicate as well as to assign. It is about customs (regulations regarding the space between people).

But at the same time the exhibition is also simple. We think that albeit the efforts to privatise and rob, there is still so much space, and one has to hint to it. The unspeakable space of the real, uncanny because we cannot verbalise it when we encounter it, as when we have found words for it it is gone, is the main meeting place for artists. (It is basically everywhere, the whole world, but alas so difficult to encounter once symbolisation and again the imaginary, seen as a sort of *Über-Ich* or morals, steps into place; this shady fleeting space of encounters with the real is where art dwells.)

Insert Rationale: Object loss:

Basically the object is the thing (symbolised outside the entity) necessary for self-constitution because it reacts, and helps us to self-constitute.

Her object—the thing that stands against us.

Whatever got lost.

I think there is something interesting in the specific video work of Julia Scher, or even more so in the whole work, to make something visible, something that is not there; namely surveillance, and there to condition people, and to subject them to behave under the conditions of consumption and capitalism.

Something that is not obvious to everyone is described.

What we see is a change in behavioural patterns and moments of identification with symbolic things and ethics. This is a state of change. Society changes, which means the relation to things is discussed anew.

de-identification

data anonymity

The lost object is not the reason for mourning and feeling abandoned, but maybe a step into a dis-identification with the promises that we connect to things. It is maybe connected to a Berlin-specific feeling that there was not much to be gained by contributing to the public sphere of the city, and that it itself had, in the meantime, worked on its realisation in things—buildings, streets, holiday houses and government buildings, i. e. representational spaces—that had been created seemingly unadvised by the actual usage of the city.

CHAPTER 2, GEORGE MACIUNAS

Negociando la colectividad, negando la subjetividad. George Machinas, el travestismo y los debates fluxus sobre el cuerpo

Dealing with collectivism, Rejecting Subjectivity. George Maciunas, transvestism and the body debate in Fluxus.

George Maciunas, not only the father of Soho, but also as Billie Maciunas has told us:

Madame George
alas:

Madame Bolduc

Madame Edna Gallmo Cooke

Madame George

Madame Humtata

Madame Mayhem

Madame Mercury & Dj Whatt

Madame Monsieur

Madame Moustache

Madame Rita

Madame Tussaud's Dance Or

Madame Wu

The Weather in Fred Sandback

There is nobody at the window in the painting of the house, by the way.

I have now concluded that what I believed to be a person is a shadow.

If it is not a shadow, it is perhaps a curtain.

As a matter of fact it could actually be nothing more than an attempt to imply depths, within the room.

Although in a manner of speaking all that is really in the window is burnt sienna pigment. And some yellow ochre.

In fact there is no window either, in that same manner of speaking, but only shape.

So that any few speculations I may have made about the person at the window would therefore now appear to be rendered meaningless, obviously.

Unless of course I subsequently become convinced that there is somebody at the window all over again.

I have put that badly.

—Wittgenstein's Mistress (54-55)

These past few weeks I was dwelling on the question about how it so happened that an exhibition centred around the possibility of a community and togetherness quickly turned into an exploration of the feeling, implications and possibilities of object loss [def./exp.]. Was I too naïve, too careless suggesting that certain art histories and practices, in this case in Vilnius and in Berlin, could teach us something about ways of organising, resisting, persevering, depending, caring? After all, if I learned anything at all while living inside the Vilnius 'art scene' these past ten years, it was that it performs as a scene as long as we appreciate how interconnected and interdependent these few hundred of us working within it are. And yet, despite it all, even if this community is the premise of our existence as artists, curators, educators, writers and everything in between, it is impossible to put one's finger on it. There is no *body* to point at, as if it were a dream leaving behind a fleeting presence so faint that its absence remains its only residue. So what is it that still makes us believe in such a thing as an 'art community', what could be the connecting tissue?

The idea for an exhibition revolving about (a possible) community popped into my head during a conversation with Jonas, a former gallerist who ran his primarily conceptual-art oriented operation in Vilnius and in Brussels sometime at the beginning of the millennium. At one point we were discussing the Lithuanian art-scene's milieu in the 90s and the things that made people do the things that they did, to make the kind of art that they made back then—the performances, the protests, the actions and installations—in the absence of any infrastructure, exposure, market or other things that we are not in any abundance today either. "It was the feeling that anything was possible," he said, "it connected people and drove them forward, even if this meant they would be misunderstood, excluded even. It did not matter to them as the world was changing anyway, and they were participating in this change".

The idea of a community held together by the possibility of change reminds me of an aphorism found in one of Lichtenberg's notebooks that I really like. It reads like this:

A philosopher on the island of Zezu once asked: if a man could transform himself into an ox, would it be considered suicide, and would the ox be culpable?

I am wondering whether the change was instant or gradual; and whether after its transformation, the ox retained any reminiscence of its former existence as a man. And if it did, did it still, even if vaguely, identify itself as one, or perhaps it identified itself as an ox-which-once-had-also-been-a-man? And if it did, how did it or he or she or they inhabit the world of an ox, having formerly been a man? Did this world appear to it as a world of a man which had been lost and was now empty, or a world of an ox that was provided with an abundant, infinite ox-like horizon? Perhaps, after all, the ox could not care less

of its former life as a man, as it was too engaged in the responsibilities, worries and hopes that being an ox entails? *To transform oneself into an ox is not yet suicide*, Lichtenberg concludes, and I somewhat agree. Even if the ox turned out to be completely ignorant of its former life as a man, there was still some remainder left, even if only negatively, even if this remainder was absence, loss as in object loss.

It becomes clearer now, I think. If the community in art is a community based on change, and change, however conceived, is always also a loss (e.g. of the self), then, it seems, the community of art is, well, a community based on the loss of communion. It is a community that is rooted in dreams of togetherness, a togetherness that may or may not have existed in the past, or a togetherness that might still exist sometime in the future, but never a togetherness that *is* present... Today Jonas no longer runs a gallery based in Vilnius or in Brussels. Jonas ran away from the art-world, he ran from 'art' towards the 'world'. As a matter of fact, Jonas made running his profession and is arguably very good at what he does.

And so here we are once again left to dwell on art as something that is always already lost, although no one can say what *was*, in fact, lost. The same old uroboros, the same old snakelet eating its tail, never consuming it fully. Its hunger, its satiety, I feel it all too!¹ And I believe it is felt by others as well. Kate, the narrator of the epigraph from David Marskon's novel which I recklessly copy-pasted at the top of the page even before starting to write this text, definitely felt it deeply when living at the Louvre, burning paintings to warm herself. Having been left alone in her world, the last person on earth, wandering alone from the emptiness of one town to that of another, she had pictures and her distorted memories to keep her company. These memories were not much different from the pictures burned, both of which she browsed, continuously rearranged and curated just to quickly forget and let go of afterwards. Kate was not naïve, finally transforming the promise of communion held by these images to an actual, soothing warmth. She bid farewell to the dream and accepted the world, disjointed and empty, as a fact. She broke the uroboros, she cut the little snake. After all, pictures can keep one's company only for so long...

I often feel distracted these days, and the more distracted I am the better I understand Kate. Maybe it is because distraction is also a form of object loss, where not one thought can be truly taken hold of to be truly thought. Thoughts exist very much like the weather—as mushy, indistinguishable, all at once, as a backdrop, as a mood. But I also feel that today distraction is the *modus operandi* of art, too. We browse and curate, arrange and rearrange, remember and forget and then forget to remember again. The stories we produce, the problems that we tackle are stories and problems of the moment, brief glimpses of the perpetual, eternal life of the snakelet. We are Kate, if only just a little bit, speaking, writing, communicating, even if we are detached from our addressees with our hopes of connection, if the latter are present at all, present in a sphere of *as if*.

As much as we are Kate, however, we are also Fred. Fred Sandback was looming at the margins of this text all along. Much the same way he now looms within this exhibition, as a spectre, as an absence-*felt*. Much the same way how his sculptures and lines, traversing empty spaces, allow our vision, our imagination to make up objects that are not, in fact, present. They are absent, and this is the very reason why we can see them, see them so vividly that we can no longer unsee them. Andrea Fraser was right to cry at the sight of them, as it truly is a tragic sight, one that speaks of *another failure to restore a ruined world through the wholeness of form*. We, a community based on change, a community based on the loss of communion, are tied to the tail of the snakelet. We will not let go of the illusion of a possible communion as we need something to dream about. And so, to transform oneself into an ox is not yet suicide, as suicide would mean that dreams would cease along with us. They would cease to exist in the forms we would still be able to recognise, they would cease in terms of the objects we dream about. The ox would not dream of its former life as a man.

And even so, here I am writing in plural once again, even if it is only me who's writing. Ah, you poor, lustful, seductive object! If I can't have you, how do I lose you in full?