

Jere Aalto

Jere Aalto: I have strived for the deconstruction of my photographic background in various ways - even been driven by some fictive positions, being someone else, replying to someone else's refrain - for the last few years. Still, we could say that my photographic background carries an emphasis on a 'sociological fiction' that strives to locate some form of distinction from within the role of the documentarist. This demand for a difference has largely been a projection of a single fictional character, who is part of a remote trope or a narrative. And in a way this character becomes its own error.

Annika von Hausswolff: I like this term 'Sociological Fiction', and I am somehow interpreting it to be quite contemporary. Lately I have also come across terms such as 'Experimental Documentary' that the PhD candidate Kerstin Hamilton is currently exploring at Akademin Valand. Is your method of problematizing the position of the photographer a personal or more general way of updating the genre of photography?

JA: I see a lot of potential in these re-established terms, as they seem to derive from many simultaneous sources. What is the origin? Yet, the position for writing or making 'Sociological Fiction' can already be found in Jean Baudrillard's thinking, but also in the constant deconstruction of one's own creative position. This constant re-evaluation of one's previous works, sense of belonging, and production might be the starting point for the 'experimental' in this case. I've always tried to create something through which I can no longer identify myself in the past. Yes, I form a complex out of being a photographer.

AvH: So how is this identity play related to your imagery?

JA: It has a direct, yet playful relation to the pictorial motifs I have recently become fixated with: depictions of stages, arenas, entrances etc. Locations that were either built or created out of cut-outs from the original photographic event. I depict that someone is happily lost, and try to make it visible in a photographic way.

AvH: Baudrillard stated that signs and symbols function as the 'real' in today's society and we could draw a link to your photography here as your images are self-referential, almost existing in another universe with little or no connection to the outside. Is this something you would agree with or am I rambling?

JA: I agree, there is always some volume of inaccessibility in my works, either in the form of an impossibility for translation of the signs, or that my works are meant to be layers cut out of my own evolving microcosm of inaccessible semiotics. It is still intriguing today to consider that there is no origin for the image, nothing behind it.

AvH: And while being happily lost, do you feel that photography as a medium is the ultimate way of expressing these ideas of non-hierarchical, de-centralized space? Have you ever tried any other means of expression?

JA: Being happily lost, embracing it, failing and getting somewhere you were not expecting to. Photography is probably not the ultimate way, yet as a medium it is the most silent one - it offers the capacity for the viewer to get happily lost too. I have tried creating electro-acoustic sound walls and other sonic art. I enjoy the blind aspect of expression in sound works, of creating a de-centralized space. Sound artists often refer to this kind of creation of a space out of nothing.

AvH: Your desire to be independent from direct references to the real is an unusual position when working with the photographic medium. Perhaps the true burden of photography is its expected connection to physical reality. By transgressing that authoritarian demand there is a new freedom at hand. I happen to know your fascination or interest in the Dada movement, could you describe what importance Dadaism has for your work?

JA: I see this speculated position more as a difference, in my case it's not on banal grounds. The collective demand for the deconstruction of the 'real' effect of photography will always remain dominant. We have to choose between the role of a trickster or of an iconoclast. Yes, I have romanticised the 'pure freedom' of language that Dadaism was proliferating, and failing with. The Dadaists always ended up answering the question: Was it just for laughs or...? [...] My own, late, interest in Dada is in the fact that their typographical experimentations and sound art developed my interest in the arbitrary process of translating the visual into

a new language or to combinations of signs that don't culminate in instant answers.

AvH: You mention the trickster, a mythological figure that I have paid some attention to in the past. The tale of the trickster stems from Native American mythology, but there are analogies to contemporary artistic practice. By avoiding law and order there is a temporary notion of freedom created for the artist, but also the viewer. Then again, our society has largely become a consumer's paradise. Are you sometimes concerned that the audience is not investing enough when approaching your art?

JA: Regarding what the trickster creates out of one's autonomous projections, this creation is always linked to a certain positivism, whether it stems from humour or deconstruction. That's why I mentioned earlier the distinction between a trickster and an iconoclast. Here, the iconoclast is on another 'end'. I don't have that much experience of this audience, or their reflections. By making exhibitions I offer the playfulness, be it in a rigorous or a loose sense.

AvH: On what level does this playfulness operate? Is it in the collective space that you as an artist share with the works and the audience or is it embedded in the motives themselves?

JA: This might sound a bit bland but the playfulness we are framing here is loaded with serendipity at both ends of production. Out there in the field where it is playfulness through ignorance in a Baudrillardian¹ way, and in the exhibition where the serendipity is an invitation to transcribe meanings out of the layers that I have cut from the original image. Does this make sense? I would like to say: hopefully not. It is also very interesting to say that I am not interested in the photographic act. It 'throws me'.

AvH: I have never come across anti-artistic (Baudrillard quote) as an expression before and I actually read it as antichrist. Focusing on my error, this rhetoric figure - the false prophet - is a very powerful one even outside of a religious context. The fallen angel as a trickster, as an artist. My associations then drift toward portraits depicting René Magritte painting his conceptual images all dressed up as a fashionista. Some kind of trickster. I think Magritte was all about questioning the process of cause and effect? Do you think Magritte is a relevant reference to your work?

JA: Magritte was mainly keen on the limits of the photographic and vision. In many portraits of him we see him making reproductions from actual photographs. Thus, what we see is an abyss within the imaginary itself. For me this has always meant that the artist could not achieve causality (which you pointed out) on the direct symbolic level of the work. As in my work too, Magritte aimed to import elements from our vernacular every day in their alterity - in order to depict the vision that a photographic image is shading. The only difference is that I don't manage to master this approach. And there is not much of the symbolic causality in my work. There is once again - playfulness - yet a very mute, silent one.

AvH: I agree that the lack of causality is evident more in your images' relation to 'reality' than within the image itself. Magritte is quoted to have said, 'I've got nothing to express! I simply search for images and I invent, I invent...only the image counts, the inexplicable and mysterious image (...)' To me this is very encouraging, the thought of the image as the only thing that counts. And the rest, everything else, is merely material to feed the image. I would like to address your exam exhibition, *Stages after Seri*. A series of images and thoughts that was completed after a lengthy stay of yours in Japan. Did you lose yourself in this, relating to Scandinavia, remote place?

JA: The mental source of the images, I consider what that consists of. Quite often the source is an urge to get lost in the far away. With *Stages after Seri* I had made some observations before I descended onto Japanese vernacular. For this was a retreat in order to give way to vernacular tropes that were explicit i.e. *Japanese Times* articles setting crypto-states of one's body rhythms against sleeping, working life and the notion of everydayness in the Japanese economic ethos. To seek these tropes with a photographic sensitivity, as representations of the other, felt inaccessible. A certain romanticism was embedded in my search for one singular trope that would signal the mechanical

characteristics of the impersonal and vernacular standpoint. In this sense, I did not lose myself to Japan but to its catalogue image, its visual repertoire. The sense of remoteness operated like an abyss to a pure vision and thus also as an entrance to a new page in my artistry. And yes, I like the attitude of expressing nothing directly, just finding the best combination matters.

AvH: One of the images in *Stages after Seri* (which by the way is a very cinematic title) depicts a space where only two physical elements are present; a net of some sort that is dominating the image space and a rectangular spotlight in the upper right corner. The third element is darkness. It is almost impossible to navigate within the frame of the image or to understand what kind of space this is. Thus, I imagine it to be the view of a deep-sea creature which is being cornered by some researcher with expensive equipment and funding from the state. My brain may be excused for wanting to create a narrative. What is your own relationship to the notion of narrative, do you try to avoid readings such as the above?

JA: I don't try to avoid narrative guidelines when I consider the later reading of my works. This inherent reaction to seek out the narrative lies at the centre of our perception and survival instinct. It is to recognise the teleology in stationary subjects. I used to be fascinated by this reflection upon the photograph's passive duration, a setting in which photographic imagery is associated with the cinematic *still* image. If something in that image you referred to (*assured*, 2017) is being encircled or literally captured beneath this sinister net (that the darkness is holding still), then it is the interrogated position of my own practice and errors that I enjoyed making when I depicted the Japanese *Seri*. There was a text piece in my exam exhibition in which I describe the craftsmen's (The Shadow Crafters) position beneath the Japanese Kabuki theatre stage. These operators were professional manipulators and tricksters who did not see the results of their manoeuvres. They only saw the reflecting light that sloped into their eyes when they opened the *Seri*-hatch; the vertical lift. In the work *assured* (2017), the upright corner spotlight(s) give way to this theoretical 'limelight' that I was possessed with. One can see through this mesh/net, but it is still above you.

AvH: Someone has said that artworks operate like stray dogs once they are made public. In a sense then, the artist's responsibility towards the artwork is dissolved or inverted onto the viewer in the end. Do you have a favourite artwork or an image you keep returning to?

JA: Stray dogs. In 2008, at Kuta Lombok in Indonesia, me and a friend got surrounded by a pack of stray dogs in the middle of nowhere on a pitch-black night. That sound! I wonder how it would feel if your works would do the same. Suddenly overruling you. What would that sound like? Your works giving direct feedback in onomatopoeias. These are the kind of images I return to. And sometimes to Thomas Feuerstein's work in general. They create hybrid life forms. Biological tricksters.

¹ "to render the artistic enterprise as a form of illusion: not in the sense of trickery, but in the sense of bringing something into play, of creating a scene, a space, a game, and a rule of play. Ultimately, it is about inventing ways of making things appear and about surrounding them with a void, thus annihilating the whole process of cause and effect, because this process is decidedly anti-artistic. Illusion tries to uncover the linkages between forms, at the place where they come into connection on their own" cited in Baudrillard, Jean. *Revenge of the Crystal: Selected Writings on the Modern Object and its Destiny*, 1968-1983, (London: Pluto Press, 1999), p.27