

**LEA PORSAGER**  
**(TEXT)**



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# Spin $\Phi$

(2015)

## Spin $\Phi$ [quote from the film]

Post-host\_(H@t)

“The act of destruction, or rather of absorption (for the sigil is the seed that impregnates the womb of the void), must be substantiated by an act of sexual magic.”#KG

“In Spin, the sigil appears as large metal beams suspend between the walls, an intersecting H-structure that extends far beyond physical space.”

“Once activated, the sigil sparks the voices of four figures, namely Helena P. #Blavatsky, Annie #Besant, Niels # Bohr and Angela #Merkel.”

“Cut-sliced and teleported through a quantum device known as the H@t, the voices summon the essence of #PUSSY #FishyChemistry #PolitcalAnimal #unresolved #furry #extimacy #atavisticavatars”

“#PUSSY in which the disappeared would be born – not potentially, but actually. Purradoxically born, as a thing in a state of masturbatory entanglement.”

# By This, That – spinning through Spin $\Phi$

BY KASPER OPSTRUP

*For I, being a woman, lust ever to mate myself  
with some beast. And this is the salvation of  
the world, that always I am deceived by some  
god, and that my child is the guardian of the  
labyrinth that hath two-and-seventy paths.*

*Now she is gone.*

*And now there are angels, walking up and  
down in the stone. They are the Angels of the  
Sevenfold Table. It seems that they are waiting  
for the Angel of the Aethyr to come forth.*

– Aleister Crowley, Bou-Saada, December 2, 1909. 4:50–6:5 p.m.

Reciting the PUSSY invocation, the Furry Quantum Pussy – an invisible agent of Chaos – stands with a foot and a half in the shadows, surrounded by dark matter and hidden particles. The Pussy is there, and it is not. Summoned by the voices emanating from the quantum device known as H@t (#Blavatsky, #Besant, #Bohr, #Merkel), the Pussy circles in on the sigil made out of wool and steel that conjured its essence to begin with. In order to open up horizons that were thought closed, it bows before the sigil in the sign that it, and only it, may know.

The illusion becomes real when you accept it.

Purring with resistance, the Spin  $\Phi$  in which we are spun is language and its accompanying barrage of images; the control system with which we are conditioned, our vehicle for thought, a crowned virgin riding upon a bull, a moonrise at midnight, a revelation that carries a sense of wonder with it. A simple method to break with the language of control is through a Rimbaudian derangement of the senses: from stroboscopic lights and sensory withdrawal to breathing techniques, alcohol and psychedelic drugs, there is a host of methods to enter various states of consciousness.

Out of time and into space, language, instead of operating by linear and causal communication, suddenly operates by quantum leaps between association blocks, nodes in a fragmented web where everything and everyone is entangled but where there is never a proper path. Overflowing with meaning, it becomes an unknowable object.

This entanglement – between words, worlds and we’s – opens up various speculative techniques to intervene into the present and forge new relations to both past and future by rearranging the relations between text, image and content. By intervening on a cultural level – the level of myth-making – the techniques often consist of strange and unmutterable speech acts. Communicating in incantations, these acts conceal what they exhibit while working on a metaphysical level as well. It is chaos as a fog of war. Instead of inhabiting the equilibrium of a Joycean chaosmos, a tiny, unstable cosmos, clinging to the edge of total chaos, is temporarily occupied.

A hidden Spin  $\Phi$  on this flight from reason can be traced back to the beginnings of the modern occult imaginary. From the mid-19th century, Western esoteric traditions incorporated elements from Eastern traditions. This alchemical wedding found new forms in Theosophy and the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn.

Theosophy – whose dominant figure was the Russian spirit medium Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky,

or HPB as she was known to her followers – was a mix of secret chiefs, cosmic evolution and prehistoric civilisations. It synthesised the world's religions, suggesting that Christ, Buddha, Lao Tzu and others were all equal Masters, while promoting a fascination with non-Western cultures such as Egypt, India and Tibet's. It introduced Hindu and Buddhist ideas about reincarnation and karma to the Occident, as well as ideas about the astral body and the astral plane. Although the occult would be associated throughout the 20th century with reactionary tendencies, in the 19th century it was bound up with progressive politics like women's rights and colonial self rule – as can be seen with Annie Besant, HPB's successor as leader of the Theosophical society, who was a Fabian suffragette, and just like HPB herself had fought with Garibaldi.

If we think of the occult imaginary as a kind of psycho-politics where the contested area is not physical terrain but a state of consciousness, the occultural techniques and the (aesthetic) derangement of the senses become methods of escape from conventional ways of thinking and seeing, vehicles for the exploration of areas of mind heretofore unknown. By experimenting with how to force the hands of chance and break the laws of probability by will alone, they become means to escape the mechanisms of control, to transcend the biological trap of duality as well as to obtain the ability to rewrite one's own past. In theosophy, this is expressed in thought forms, an energy that can be programmed to carry out particular tasks. In the occult traditions following the Golden Dawn it is expressed through sigils, a quantum hack of both mind and matter that is fully aware that the universe is a measureless domain of resonating frequencies where it takes an observer for sub-atomic particles to come into existence. It is a kind of object-oriented performative art which is not meant to be seen. Like the artist, the occult practitioner wants to occupy our minds.

In contemporary occulture, the double strain from Blavatsky and the Golden Dawn via the Ordo Templi Orientis (OTO) and the Order of the Silver Star (A∴A∴) – in short: Crowley – looms large. But today's occulture is as much a product of punk, Fluxus and Mail Art, plus a century of quantum weirdness and speculative genre fiction from H. P. Lovecraft to Robert Anton Wilson and Terence McKenna, as it is of the esoteric tradition proper. On the creation and use of sigils for conjuration, information can already be found in the works of Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa (1486–1535), but the way it has been practiced in more pragmatic occultural DIY milieus from the 1980s onwards – by chaos magicians like the Illuminates of Thanateros (who counted famed writer William S. Burroughs as a member) or the post-modern pranksters from the Temple of Psychick Youth (TOPY) – goes back to one person in particular: the English proto-surrealist painter Austin Osman Spare (1886–1956). Spare's fundamental insight was that our ideas shape the world we observe. To tap into this, he developed an occult system, the Zos-Kia Cultus. Seeing the world in a way corresponding to the laws of quantum physics as formulated by Niels Bohr or in Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, Spare wanted to shape the world by governing energy, using drawings and paintings as medium. He developed a technology, sigilisation, that treats cultural production as a technology for spell casting. At its most basic level, sigil magick consists in the creation of a magically charged symbol but it can take the form of collage, sculpture, video, writings, and various other medias. For Spare, the form was an individual 'alphabet of desire' which incorporated elements of the sacrificial use of blood and saliva as well as yogalike postures to intensify the experience of making the sigil. Sigilisation requires a masturbatory intensity of concentration, maybe more pleasurable than the art itself since the process is the product. The artwork or object created to act as a receiving vessel or talisman for the desired is a by-product.

A quick how-to for the curious: write down the object of desire and erase all vowels, leaving only a string of consonants. Squash the string down, throw out or combine lines, play with the letters, and end up with an appropriate looking glyph/sigil. In order to charge it, concentrate on its shape and evacuate all thoughts. These no-mind states can be reached in a number of ways, such as fasting, spinning, fear, sex, intense exhaustion, but the preferred way is that of sex magick (which stems from tantric yoga but was popularised by Crowley and the OTO). A very basic form available to us all is masturbation. You masturbate and at the moment of orgasm, or just before, you project the image of your chosen sigil in your mind's eye. According to adepts one does not need to believe in it since it has nothing to do with faith. If it is done, it works.

In the penultimate Spin  $\Phi$ , it is the morning of the magicians and we must all become sorcerers. In order to survive a catastrophic future horizon where the Angela Merkels of a world governed by political Spin

Φ seem hellbent on reproducing the disastrous manner that has produced the disaster, our mental jiu-jitsu must take the form of tactical magick, utilising the ability of fragments randomly juxtaposed, of collage, assemblage and montage, to make it possible to tell one's own stories and, thus, shape the perception of reality. The purpose of prophecy is not to be right about the future but to act upon the present. It becomes a technology to change the world by re-wiring the collective subconscious. This is not a matter of claiming that 'History' is only made up of stories we tell ourselves, but simply that the logic of stories and the ability to act as historical agents go together, as Jacques Rancière has pointed out. Politics, art, myths, forms of knowledge construct fictions material rearrangements of signs and images that influence the relationships between self and world.

The occult yearning for a unified field theory has a ring of pseudo-scientific quasi-science to it that opens it up for creative confabulation, and, whether we are talking about environmental, social or mental ecologies, occult techniques have become a staple of many self-help books. As it has do to with change, mutation, evolution, chance experiments, new formations, this desire is inherently political, but rather than anything recognisable within the terms of parliamentary politics, it transcends traditional categories. It asks more questions than it answers while psychogeographically exploring the meeting point where inner and outer reality at once blend, stumble, synthesise and crash together in unresolved #purradoxes.

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**scrambled egg slime –  
ideal pea-sized troublemaker**

(2014)

scrambled egg slime – ideal pea-sized troublemaker [quote from the film]

\_\_\_\_\_MU\_\_\_\_\_O! MU\_\_\_\_\_MU grows dim\_\_\_\_\_eye to the sky they see the pillar  
not falling\_\_\_\_\_silver zygotes colonize the celestial sphere\_\_\_\_\_countless megaspores\_\_\_\_\_attached to  
the inside of a core within a a core\_\_\_\_\_they use their hands for all the different parts as if in any moment  
something else will happen\_\_\_\_\_they are calling telling the others they are calling\_\_\_\_\_they do not hear  
them\_\_\_\_\_as if inside the calling there is another calling\_\_\_\_\_the calling of the calling\_\_\_\_\_who is  
calling them\_\_\_\_\_sleep\_\_\_\_\_they just sleep\_\_\_\_\_all their parts sleep\_\_\_\_\_they are losing their finger  
and can no longer point\_\_\_\_\_the finger is no longer theirs\_\_\_\_\_contained within the life contained in  
the finger they have lost\_\_\_\_\_they lie close together\_\_\_\_\_a sudden flash from inside the night which-is-  
not-night sends waves of argent fumes towards them\_\_\_\_\_shimmering grey hotness\_\_\_\_\_airborne brain-  
juice\_\_\_\_\_floating\_SUCKING\_\_\_\_\_more brains bigger holes\_\_\_\_\_palms up\_\_\_\_\_toothless mouths  
sagging\_\_\_\_\_

# IM-MATERIALITY NO. 3 (CONSCIOUSNESS)

BY BIRGITTE KIRKHOFF ERIKSEN

(.....)

## **Lea Porsager**

Earlier in this text I quoted Wittgenstein's famous dictum "The limits of my language mean the limits of my world". If this is the case, then Lea Porsager's "speculative fabulation" makes her world a world without limits. Porsager (b. 1981, DK) works with abolishing limits and categories: the boundaries between subject and object, self and others, neuroscience and neurosis, science fiction and biology, clairvoyance and obscurity, subconscious and consciousness, becoming, being, and doing. One might also call her methods and works "queer", but this in no way means that Porsager inscribes herself in a clear-cut gender discussion; rather, queer should be regarded here as a kind of radical openness, a dynamic instability. Or "ironic" - without the usual protection offered by irony to those who wield it, but rather as a free juggling of concepts and theories without any dogma and literal interpretations attached.

At the exhibition Porsager presents scrambled egg slime – ideal pea-sized troublemaker; an experiment about consciousness. The questions I asked in the introduction of this article come up yet again now via Porsager's works. For she addresses the fundamental questions about consciousness: Does it have a substance? Is mankind the only species to be conscious? How can we think and conceive of anything beyond ourselves? It also feels as if the many other subjects touched upon in this article, right from Speculative Realism and the subject's status in a post-human world to the paranormal, panpsychism, and morphic resonance, all somehow land smack in the middle of Porsager's experiment with slime mould. The experiment has been documented and processed in a video, and the presentation also includes text on walls and sculptures on the floor.

## **Non-human agency**

Slime mould is a kind of queer organism that used to be classified as fungi, but is now seen to belong to the group of species that do not fall under the heading of other species. 'Protists' denotes all those things that are not animals, fungi, bacteria, or plants, and these are also the entities about which natural science know the least. Many variants of slime mould exist, and it can take on different forms through its lifetime. It eats bacteria, and when food is plentiful it exists as an independent single-cell amoeba, but when food grows scarce a signal causes the amoebae to congregate. Then something truly startling happens very quickly: thousands of single-cells gather around a centre to form a new multi-celled organism complete with an immune system, muscles, and nerves. Cells that were identical before now become different: the slime mould forms a foot, then a stalk, and at the top it forms a 'hat'; a ball of living spores. The cells forming the stem will die, while the uppermost cells can exist inertly until food becomes available again. The taller the stalk, the longer the wind can carry the spores, thereby optimising the chances of finding food. So not only can the mould cells communicate, they can also change their shape, forming a very complex organism with incredible speed; some of them even sacrifice themselves for the common good. What is more, experiments show that the slime mould very quickly learns the shortest route through a labyrinth if there is food waiting at the other end.<sup>24</sup> It is difficult to not attribute some kind of consciousness to such an organism.

Porsager scrambles her own biological experiments by introducing other elements into the work, all in accordance with its own organic, self-organising (slime mould) logic. The work presented at the exhibition incorporates a sculpture: a greatly enlarged rubber model of a pineal gland. The pineal gland is surrounded by a lot of history, and despite its small size it holds a very significant position within medical science, occultism, and various spiritual movements. The theosophical writer H.P. Blavatsky described, in her *The Secret Doctrine*, how the mythical lost realm of Lemuria was peopled by the third "root race", the third out of seven stages of human evolution. The people of Lemuria were tall, standing more than 2 metres in height, had four arms, laid eggs, and were hermaphroditic, mentally underdeveloped and spiritually clean. They lived in a paradisiacal state until they discovered sex, which caused Lemuria to perish. The fourth race arose in its place,

possessing greater intellect, but less spirituality. The third race had a third eye that gave them their great insight. This eye was not located in the forehead, but in the back of the head. It was later covered by hair and moved into the brain. That third eye was the pineal gland.

### **The seat of consciousness**

The champion of dualism, René Descartes, believed that the pineal gland was the seat of the soul and the wellspring of thought. Within yoga the pineal gland is the physical manifestation of the sixth chakra Ajna, which is associated with spiritual wisdom and understanding of the non-physical reality. In medical science the pineal gland is our inner clock; it receives information about light levels from our eyes and produces melatonin, allowing us to sleep. In all of these cases the pineal gland can be said to be an important organ that governs various states of consciousness.

In Porsager's work it seems as if all the information, narratives, and properties attributed to these small, 1 cm glands make them materialised "cut splice thought-forms" that could potentially question our world view and how it would change if we were less bound by dichotomies, by so-called "small realities". To this we may add "The willingness to continuously keep the world's vast entanglements in mind—the "cosmic reality" that occult and esoteric systems mediate so well—creating spaces of mad, non-violent speculation."<sup>25</sup>

Porsager thinks beyond such dichotomies as 'true' and 'false', choosing instead to attribute value to the infiltrations, the intra-actions between theories, materialities, and consciousness. Karen Barad believes that no categories are stable or separate from each other; rather, they are generated in a state of mutual exchange.<sup>26</sup> Perhaps this is precisely why Porsager emphasises that her work is an "experiment" rather than a (stable) work. It might also be termed an "action", a communal action carried out by human (Porsager, observers) and nonhuman agents (the rubber sculpture, the slime mould, the exhibition space). Porsager has previously worked with eliminating the subject, the ego, as an autonomous and stable category, e.g. in experiments where friends of her were hypnotised to be or become her. Even so, it can – as was stated before – seem dashed difficult to reach beyond the subject. But if, however, one tried to regard the subject as an embedded part of a much larger whole, then the consciousness would probably expand correspondingly. In a porsagerian sense you will be get "a queer quantum shift away from a human-centric world view towards a slug-centric one, stumbling into the slimy entangled bosom of slug-occultism, sex magic and sci-fi spirituality."<sup>27</sup>

In such a slimy bosom we find agents such as the slime mould, combining as it does a single-cell amoeba nature with ultra-complex agency and self-organisation. Even though it is, all other things being equal, less complex than animals or humans we still do not understand it. Which brings me back to the issue of how we can think and conceive of something beyond ourselves: "What is real?" However, even with all the attempted answers and new questions arising with this text I remain convinced that the slime mould exists – irrespective of any and all relationships with us and beyond all reason and language.

<sup>24</sup> The biologist John Bonner, who has studied the slime mould for 70 years, believes that such self-sacrifice ensures life after death: because the cells are so closely related genetically, the spores will pass on the lost genes of the stalk onwards to the next generation of spores. Kitta MacPherson, 'The 'sultan of slime': Biologist continues to be fascinated by organisms after nearly 70 years of study, 2010, Princeton.edu

<sup>25</sup> Lea Porsager.

<sup>26</sup> "On a realist account, discursive practices are not human-based activities but rather specific material (re) configurations of the world through which local determinations of boundaries, properties, and meanings are differentially enacted. And matter is not a fixed essence; rather, matter is substance in its intra-active becoming – not a thing but a doing, a congealing of agency." Barad, p. 828.

<sup>27</sup> Lea Porsager, a text from the upcoming publication *FOOD FOR THE MOON –Sluggish and Well-lubricated*.

**FOOD FOR THE MOON**  
**— Sluggish and Well-lubricated**

(2013)

**FOOD FOR THE MOON — Sluggish and Well-lubricated** [quote from the work]

G.I.G. barks:

*“Everything living on the Earth, people, animals, plants, is food for the moon. [...]. All movements, actions, and manifestations of people, animals, and plants depend upon the moon and are controlled by the moon. [...]. The mechanical part of our life depends upon the moon, is subject to the moon. If we develop in ourselves consciousness and will, and subject our mechanical life and all our mechanical manifestations to them, we shall escape from the power of the moon. [!]”*

**SLUG-MAGICK — ∫ ’s Slime-repelling Copper Shock Therapy**

Galactic Intelligentsia took a turn for the idiotic and slid a ∫ in every slot

∫ ’s galvanic touch            inside slippery smooth muscle  
the all-gut, all-groin, all-brain multi-touch

∫∫∫∫∫∫∫∫

∫ ’s copper jolts backfired and humanity went super larval

AKAAAAAAL    AKAAAAAAL    AKAAAAAALMAHAAAAAAA    KAL  
AKAAAL    AKAAAL    AKAAAAAALMAHAAAAAAA    KAAAAAAL

Lo and behold the Slug!    The Kunda-cunt-buffer!    Spineless Treasure!

O Tantric Slug-on-Slug Union

O Coiling Radical Soil-sexive Slime-spiral!

IDYOT    Zigzag Troublemaker  ’s magick menstruum, Slime Sublime,  
Wet Cut Splice! Moon-juice rising!



**FOOD FOR THE MOON — *Sluggish and Well-lubricated*** [quote from the work]

*FOOD FOR THE MOON — Sluggish and Well-lubricated* bounces off of Armenian mystic George I. Gurdjieff's *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson* (or, "An Objectively Impartial Criticism of the Life of Man"), the first volume of his massive work *All and Everything*.

Gurdjieff's *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson* is a complex sci-fi novel about Beelzebub's journey home with his grandson on the spaceship KARNAK. In one of his many arduous monologues addressed to his grandson, Beelzebub speaks of his encounters with the "three-brained" (i.e. human) beings of planet Earth and the catastrophic consequences of an ill-placed organ. According to Beelzebub, it all started when a violent collision split two fragments off of Earth and flung them into space. For fear that the rocks might break free from their orbit and cause havoc on neighboring solar systems, a cosmic intelligentsia decided to "take certain measures": By letting the two rocks feed on the three-brained beings' vibrant energy, the intelligentsia insured that the rocks remained close to Earth. In a subsequent act of increasing paranoia, the cosmic intelligentsia placed a new organ inside of the three-brained beings, at the base of their spines: The KUNDABUFFER. The purpose of this operation, and the talent of the buffer-organ, was to generate a cognitive flip-flop that would prevent the beings from ever revolting against their fate as fodder. The Kundabuffer would effectively block the three-brained beings from realizing their newfound role in the cosmic economy. In fact, their woolly post-buffer brains were unable to even recall the names of the two rocks that started the whole *misère*. They ended up naming the big one MOON, while the existence of the little one had entirely slipped their minds. According to Beelzebub, the cosmic intelligentsia removed the Kundabuffer when they no longer deemed the rocks—or the three-brained beings—a threat. But it was too late. As it turned out, the alien organ's spinal block had left the three-brained beings in a permanent topsy-turvy state of buffer-induced delusion. Despite the *bufferectomy*, their once flipped reality could not be flopped. They remained enslaved by the Moon. When trying to recollect his grandfather's tale, Beelzebub's grandson actually confuses humans with *slugs*.

There it is, the account of how the three-brained beings of planet Earth were practically shocked out of their soulful mind-pits by a nervous cosmic intelligentsia, only to emerge as horny, belligerent, senseless, sleepy slugs. *FOOD FOR THE MOON — Sluggish and Well-lubricated* surrenders itself to the grandson's confusion, staggering between three-brained humanity and no-brained (all-brained!) sluggishness. Embrace the worldly slugs! Or, as Beelzebub-Gurdjieff calls them, the "parasites who destroy everything good."

*Imagine how, in sleep, equipped with kundabuffer-sized holes and rubber organs, the slugs twitch and twirl in the dark womb of forgetfulness. Portals closed. Fire-snakes snuffed out. Imagine that, to this day, as the shimmering disk shifts and stirs in the sky, the slugs wear their rubbery bufferness like a shock-absorbing suit! Freaky, to say the least.*

In *FOOD FOR THE MOON — Sluggish and Well-lubricated*, Gurdjieff's *Toast to the Idiots* (idiot, from Greek *idios*: "one's own"), serves as a structuring tool and as the basis for the works' own *IDYOT*. *Toast to the Idiots* derives from Gurdjieff's *Science of Idiotism*, a spiritual system complete with twenty-one stages of idiocy. *Toast to the Idiots* was a therapeutic "drinking game" practiced by the members of Gurdjieff's women-only group *The Rope*. The ritual was designed to de-automatize patterns and hence get closer to one's essence—one's own. Alcohol was used as the agent of choice for producing the desired effects on the consciousness, allowing one to move through the stages. It was never to be practiced apart from a sacramental meal and always with spirits (i.e. Russian vodka).

*FOOD FOR THE MOON's somewhat stupefied state might suggest that it has been guzzling its own inflamed moonshine. Give way to rigid idiocy! A drunken toast!*

# ENCHANTMENT-IFICATION: Notes on the work of Lea Porsager

BY CAROLYN CHRISTOV-BAKARGIEV

In “The Absolute Paradox” from his Philosophical Fragments (1844), Søren Kierkegaard stated: *Paradox is the passion of thought, and the thinker without the paradox is like the lover without passion: a mediocre fellow. But the ultimate potentiation of every passion is always to will its own downfall, and so it is also the ultimate passion of the understanding to will the collision, although in one way or another the collision must become its downfall. This, then, is the ultimate paradox of thought: to want to discover something that thought itself cannot think. This passion of thought is fundamentally present everywhere in thought... But what is this unknown against which the understanding in its paradoxical passion collides, and which even disturbs man and his self-knowledge? It is the unknown.*<sup>1</sup>

Danish artist Lea Porsager’s experiments are based on transgressing rationality and awakening alternative states of consciousness and body/mind experiences that create an expanded field of weird and mad reflections, a field of enchantment and fascination. Her complex practice, often containing references to alternative modes of perceiving and knowing the world in an attempt to go beyond the normal limits of daily experience and knowledge, echoes Kierkegaard’s definition of the paradoxical and radical impulse in thought to reach its limits of understanding—with a twist.

Porsager’s practice as an artist consists first of all in stumbling upon a subject matter that intrigues her: various spiritualist groups, movements, and subcultures; the occult; and/or socially utopian visions and spaces of resistance. This is followed by reading about the topic, by doing research on the Internet and in libraries and archives, as well as by going on “field trips,” which often lead to collaborations with friends and to performative experiments that might include tantric yoga, trance induction, and/or hypnosis. These experiences are later shared in the public art world in the form of gallery installations comprising sculpture, photography, text, found objects, films, and videos that bear witness to the experiments and in turn become independent works.

In Porsager’s weird cumulative, associative, and research-based artistic practice, there is something that feels refreshingly of our time and yet something that also feels radically past and perhaps obsolete. Her imaginary universe has touched, or might in the future touch on any of the following esoteric practices: Advaita Vedanta, animism, anthroposophy, Ariosophy, Ascended Master Teachings, astrology, Buddhism, cannabis subculture, cognitive science, conspiracy theory, Discordianism, eight-circuit model of consciousness, entheogens, Esoteric Christianity, Esotericism, Freemasonry, fringe science, Gnosticism, Hermeticism, Hinduism, hippie subculture, Human Potential Movement, Integral Theory, Kabbalah, leather subculture, metaphysics, Neuro-Linguistic Programming, New Thought, nonviolence, occultism, paganism, Neo-Druidism, Wicca, pseudoscience, psychedelic music, quantum mechanics, Rastafari movement, Rosicrucianism, science fiction, shamanism, Shinto, Spiritism, Spiritualism, spirituality, Sufism, Taoism, Thelema, theosophy, transhumanism, and transpersonal psychology. To which I would add environmentalism, socialism, dark ecology, feminism, speculative fabulation, magic, alchemy, ayurveda, hypnosis, crystals theory, WikiLeaks, and kundalini yoga, to name just a few interests of the artist that did not come up under the rubric of a Wikipedia search.

And in terms of historical personages that populate her universe, one might mention Madame Blavatsky, George Ivanovich Gurdjieff, Jane Heap, Rudolf Steiner, Krishnamurti, or Aleister Crowley, among others. In our advanced digital age of immaterial information and communication, of technological surveillance systems and corporate proto-fascisms, of exhaustion of the planet’s resources and depletion of any social vision of the future beyond global financial capitalism, Porsager’s mad and wacky anti-information, her pastiches and “recombinations” of every possible irrational explanation of the world she can get her hands and mind on, resist any political control because they define a vertiginous and striated space of complexity. Furthermore, Porsager’s “reperformance” of occult rituals based on hidden knowledge that is or was shared by specific communities and groups of people could be said to repeat the sense of living in a world that has been “black-boxed” and in which we cannot fully understand the secrets of high finance,

for instance, with its insider trading, “short selling” (selling something you don’t yet own), and unethical operations shrouded by a mystique of technology and sleazy bankers. On the other hand, her research and projects break away from the secretive and covert operations of corporate finance and surveillance systems by reconnecting her alternative occult world to the trajectory of visionary revolutionary moments in modernity.

Indeed, Porsager’s works connect us back to the wilder, socially utopian, and futuristic aspects of 19th and early 20th century esoteric thought and practices in Europe, both those that were more socially accepted and those that were more occult. This was a bubbly, imaginative period in which organizing science experiments; exploring magnetism; inventing photography and film (those mysterious echoes and ghostly apparitions of the real); reading tarots and performing séances to speak with the deceased; founding communes in remote woods that hearken to a new age; organizing esoteric groups in Paris that connect with Eastern philosophies and religions; taking psychotropic drugs for mind expansion; figuring out quantum entanglement; or practicing hypnotic inductions where both the conscious and subconscious mind, the voluntary and the involuntary, are co-present, were loosely connected to form a grey zone of modern culture between science and spiritualism. This lesser known trajectory of modernity—from alchemy to psychedelic drugs and antipsychiatry, from spiritualism to the “stuff” that dreams are made of—was well known to the hysterics, those sentient beings with *ὑστέρα* (“hystera,” the Greek for “uterus”), women such as Ann Radcliffe who wrote Gothic novels instead of encyclopedias in *l’âge des Lumières*.

All of these impulses, practices, and desires were the hidden side of a rational, normative, and positivistic Western society bent on developing capitalism through eradicating the spiritual, controlling the material resources of the planet and the colonial expropriation and exploitations of peoples and cultures, and the affirmation of the Ego and “human exceptionalism” above the so-called natural world of all other life forms and sentient beings, not only in the capitalist liberal system but also in the Fascist order and in the socialist world.

Seen from the perspective of today’s ecological disasters, political crises, and general global disorientation of a networked world based on paranoiac control and exhibitionary narcissistic disorders via the Internet,<sup>2</sup> these so-called rational endeavors of “progress” in modernity appear much less logical than they once did. And modernity itself seems much less factual and rational that it purported to be, and much more permeated by spiritualisms and forms of magical thinking, of “*factiche*” more than facts,<sup>3</sup> and much less integrated than the world views of their occult opposites, the Madame Blavatsky or Rudolf Steiner of their times. There is something in Porsager’s work that feels futuristic and sci-fi, something closer to the way Wikipedia operates, with its repetitions, image-text connections, cross references, and archival fervor and fever. Since 2008, Porsager’s installations have included wall texts, objects, films, and photography. They are made from far-fetched leaps of imagination that connect concepts, events, rites and rituals, people and life; trajectories that she mines from the history of the occult, spiritualisms, and alternative medicine. She has a critical awareness of their relations to emergent modernity in 19th and early 20th century Europe. She is both sincere in her celebration of the lunar side of modernity, with its non-rationalistic outlook, bringing to light a trajectory that does not at all comply with traditional post-modernist thinking, and she is ironic because she does not fully believe Albert Einstein’s criticism of quantum entanglement as “spooky action at a distance.” In her celebration of the lunar and non-rational, her practice aligns with a trajectory of feminist art and literature that runs from the Gothic novel of the late 18th century through Mary Shelley’s 19th century fantasies and oblique veiled critiques of the modern age to contemporary feminist science studies and thinking—by Donna Haraway, Katie King, Octavia Butler, Isabelle Stengers, among others—around speculative fabulation and complexity.

On the one hand, her work is something akin to a hysterically determined historical research project into the prehistory of people’s current fascination with spiritualism, animism, and what used to be called in the 1970s, “New Age.” On the other hand, there is something outrageous and outlandish around the actual mind-body coordination and transformations that take place within the artist, among the other participants in her experiments that precede her exhibitions, and for the viewers of her artworks in exhibitions. There is also something that seems to be from another world somewhere in outer space, or from another time, that it is certainly odd to define easily as “art.”

Yet Porsager chooses to locate her practice in the context of “contemporary art”—a magmatic field of human culture that developed throughout the last century from what had previously been coined “modern art” mainly in the Western portion of our planet. In the 20th century, contemporary art had, and somehow continues to have, its rites and rituals, its manifest and hidden knowledge, its objects of veneration and

collection, its vestals and priests, its centers of occult powers and its spaces of alternative freedoms. By the late 20th century, the financialization of all spheres of human activity was well underway, with corporations attempting to control all life, to the degree that what was traditionally free and part of the commons—like air, or land, or breath, or seeds—has now been besieged by emerging corporate fascisms. In such a scenario, contemporary art is becoming a part of a cultural industry keyed towards producing and controlling creativity itself; standardizing it, measuring it, taming it. It has become a stifling, diurnal, logocentric, and tremendously square world.

To withdraw, to retreat from the square, to make alternate universes and to do so with others; to make an organism that can sense the world and at the same time be the world, meeting the universe halfway through “intra-actions,” as Karen Barad would say, or through “involution” and “symbiosis” as Lynn Margulis<sup>4</sup> would argue, beyond a single subject and body: this is both the field of Porsager’s installations and also her own personal inclination towards experimenting her ideas, bearing witness to those experiments and storytelling around and with them.

The question of witnessing and the related term “testimony” imply the practice of storytelling, yet a peculiar kind of storytelling whereby a certain adherence of the story to facts, to first-hand embodied experience is pre-supposed. Etymologically, the Old English “witness” was an “attestation of fact, event, etc., from personal knowledge”; also “one who so testifies.” Originally, “knowledge, wit” was formed from wit (n.) + -ness. So the witness is he or she who has first-hand knowledge and also one who tells or otherwise communicates it. Witnessing carries an ethical dimension, in so far as it is related to the notion of truth, or rather of sincerity: by being a witness, we are stating we have had a certain experience, and we attempt to carry the truth of it over to another, or to others, through our telling or recounting of that truthful experience.

Lea Porsager’s *Anatta Experiment* (2012) is an example of witnessing as an artistic practice. The *Anatta Experiment* was inspired by a research trip to Monte Verità near Ascona, Switzerland. In the early 1900s, this hill was a place of spiritual rebellion, attracting anarchists, free-love advocates, Dadaists, theosophists, psychoanalysts, and occultists, all rejecting positivism and an increasingly materialistic society of late 19th century modernity. The founders of the “Cooperative vegetarian colony Monte Verità,” one of the first artists’ communes and retreats above Ascona, were Ida Hoffmann and her husband Henry Oedenkoven, and the brothers Gustav and Karl Gräser, while others who came to Monte Verità included Hugo Ball, Otto Gross, and the experimental dancer Rudolf Laban. The curator of documenta 5, Harald Szeemann, believed it was a place of peculiar magnetic fields and esoteric meanings, able to bring together art, spirituality, and revolution in alternative lifestyles and under the aegis of Artemis, the multi-breasted goddess of fertility and Gaia, and he collected an archive of objects and documents about Monte Verità and organized an exhibition shortly after his 1972 documenta, in 1978.

In 2010, I visited Monte Verità with Porsager, and we found the remnants of the old houses tucked away on the grounds of a contemporary hotel. We also found Gustav Gräser’s famous cave just above the colony in the woods where he went to live in solitude for a period. In the late summer of 2011, Porsager invited seven friends (there are also seven chakras or centers of energy in our bodies according to Eastern religions and yogic practices) to Casa Anatta, Monte Verità’s principal building, where many communal meetings were held in the early 20th century. Casa Anatta became the scene for a week-long experiment in August 2011, in Porsager’s words, a “vertical drop into Tantric laws and processes normally obscured by the noise of productivity, ultimately finding its crux within Harald Szeemann’s archive and his puzzling *Strukturmutter*. The *Anatta Experiment* delivers a reverse coup de grâce to the utopian *Lebensreform* and to the Mutter herself.”<sup>5</sup>

Porsager produced a video of the *Anatta Experiment* where her witnessing with her camera the experiment of the seven women exploring their bodies, exercising the loss of the Ego, and sensually interacting becomes the breaking out of images from the frames over the events witnessed, where the images of the experiment travel through time and place until they reached a small wooden house reminiscent of the houses at Monte Verità, in Karlshausen Park in Kassel where the piece was exhibited at DOCUMENTA (13) in summer 2012. The presentation included the film, a wall text, and sculptural objects, specifically some egg-shaped wooden objects and others in metal placed on the floor that recalled Sophie Taeuber-Arp’s *Dada Heads*.

After watching the film of the *Anatta Experiment*, and thinking about its paradoxes, Porsager and I discussed at length the essay *Remnants of Auschwitz, the Witness and the Archive*, where Giorgio Agamben indicates the paradox that no witness is truly a witness, since the true witness of the events would also be

dead, and thus unable to bear witness. As Agamben writes, “the value of testimony lies essentially in what it lacks; at its center it contains something that cannot be borne witness to and that discharges the survivors of authority.

The ‘true’ witnesses, the complete witnesses, are those who did not bear witness and could not bear witness.... The survivors speak in their stead, by proxy, as pseudo-witnesses; they bear witness to the missing testimony.”<sup>6</sup> In this way, language is fundamentally inadequate, and a lacuna for Agamben, as it collapses the possibility and is collapsed in the speech of language. “Anatta” in the Buddhist belief system means “Not I, not Mine.” From the perspective of Agamben’s aporia, there is indeed a paradox in this collective attempt to experiment with an anatta state and then to transform that experience into a testimony by way of a film and an installation. If Porsager’s project is to try to eliminate the consciousness of witnessing by entering into an anatta state, it becomes further complicated by the fact that if one were fully able to enter into that state, it would be impossible to bear witness to the experiment, because in that Egoless state, there would be no subject, no “I,” and thus no witness. And yet the particular condition of the witness, that cannot bear ever witness, is not the entirety of the experience of witnessing.

In her essay on Alain Resnais’s film *Hiroshima mon amour*, artist and writer Bracha Ettinger introduces the notion of “wit-ness,” achieved through the rendering fragile of the subject in love, “communicating” via a form of traumatized love.<sup>7</sup> The most archaic psychic level of Self is based on the maternal love that is traumatizing to the emergent subjectivity (the baby being born). It is a compassionate love “with-in” the “non-I.” What Ettinger would call a “non-phallogentric” theory of the witness is substantially a form of *wit(h)ness*, almost a state of anatta, according to which witnessing an event is never a detached experience, but is rather referred to the fragile condition of the pre-birth and post-birth matrixial relations between the “not-yet mother” and the “not-yet child.” It is a perspective that, as Ettinger writes, “articulates trans-subjectivity with compassion and *wit(h)nessing* forms of compassionate tenderness.”

Subjectivity is not the moment the I becomes aware that he or she witnesses an event, from the outside, but rather an experience of the “space opened at the heart of the borderline between I and non-I,” a “fragilising encounterevent” which reconnects the knot between love and trauma and re-activated compassion.

In this sense, the paradox of living the *Anatta Experiment*, and bearing witness to it in the artwork, the paradox of esoteric experience and esoteric artwork is overcome, just as the Cartesian cut between the thinking rational mind and the external world bears little fruit today. Rather than considering thinking as a mental activity only, or matter as distinct from language, for Porsager, as for quantum physicist and feminist philosopher Karen Barad, matter and language are not separate, and she eschews both constructivist and realist thinking: “A performative understanding of discursive practices challenges the representationalist belief in the power of words to represent preexisting things. Performativity, properly construed, is not an invitation to turn everything (including material bodies) into words; on the contrary, performativity is precisely a contestation of the excessive power granted to language to determine what is real.”<sup>8</sup> Thoughts are made of “stuff,” the stuff of the universe. That is, the same subatomic particles that matter is made out of are matter and are constantly entangling themselves in ways that make the world move in meaningful relations and through meaningful stories: reality is information, but information is reality, and both are “in-formation,” forming themselves, “solve et coagula” as an alchemist would say, condensing and liquefying, becoming “subject” and dissolving into Ego-lessness; objects exist and behave differently according to how and what we think about them, or imagine them, yet stuff and things exist somehow “out there,” independently of whether we are thinking about them, or imagining them. More precisely, they and we do not exist a priori, and then interact relationally, but rather we are mutually engendered intra-actively.

And, ultimately, the world is not made of mind and matter, separately, but it is made out of grey zones and apparent in-betweens, something akin to the thought-forms that hover as objects in front of us, embodied thoughts or sculptural materializations of the mind, as the theosophists proposed in the 19th century. Barad proposes a useful “agential realist” elaboration, according to which: “phenomena do not merely mark the epistemological inseparability of ‘observer’ and ‘observed’; rather, phenomena are the ontological inseparability of agentially intra-acting ‘components.’ ... The notion of intra-action (in contrast to the usual ‘interaction,’ which presumes the prior existence of independent entities/relata) represents a profound conceptual shift. It is through specific agential intra-actions that the boundaries and properties of the ‘components’ of phenomena become determinate.... Relata do not preexist relations, rather relata-within-phenomena emerge through specific intra-actions.”<sup>9</sup>

From her “Dada heads” in the *Anatta Experiment* to her *How to Program and Use T-F* (thought-

forms inspired by theosophy created after meeting with a clairvoyant and exhibited in early 2013 at the Center of Photography, Copenhagen), to the “Kundabuffer” objects in her new *FOOD FOR THE MOON* project, Porsager’s *sense-able* images, and sculptural thought-form artworks are such intraacting “components.”<sup>10</sup> The new objects are inspired by Georgij Ivanovitj Gurdjeff’s (1886–1949) ideas that most humans live their lives in a state of hypnotic “waking sleep,” sluggishly, with an unconscious memory of having been enslaved as food for the moon and that their masters had but-plugged them with odd objects he called “Kundabuffers.” According to Gurdjeff’s novel *Beelzebub’s Tales to His Grandson: An Objectively Impartial Criticism of the Life of Man*, it is possible to transcend to a higher state of consciousness and achieve full human potential by working on the Self and removing the “sluggish” state of consciousness. Emanuele Coccia’s 2011 book, *La vita sensibile*<sup>11</sup>, comes to mind, in which the author returns to Alexander of Aphrodisia’s *De anima* (circa 200 AD), where the sensitive/sense-able (i.e., able to be perceived by the senses) life is the locus where live organisms become *animals* (they have an *anima*, which means “animated” or “with spirit”); the sensitive/sense-able life being the faculty that allows all animals (including humans) to enter into relations with *images*, and thus have experiences, “and by images we mean all forms of the sensitive/sense-able, whether visual, olfactory or acoustic”<sup>12</sup> so that the senses put us in touch with something vaster than what is specifically human and allow us to relate to images, thus embodying what we generally speak of as the “spiritual” realm. These images exist outside of the objects themselves—and outside of the subjects perceiving them—in an intermediary zone that Aristotle defined as *metaxy* in his earlier 4th century BC *De anima* (419 a 20: *hōst’anagkaion ti enai metaxy*). So Coccia concludes, “phenomena live before the mind and beyond things... something becomes sensitive/sense-able, able to be sensed, only in the intermediary body between the object and the subject.... This space is not empty, it is a nameless body whose ability is to generate images.... The sense-able occurs only because beyond things and minds there is something of an intermediary nature.”<sup>13</sup> The world of the sensitive/sense-able has been rejected by political powers and theology, as well as by modern philosophy (with the 18th century Cartesian cut between mind and matter). Even 20th century phenomenology and modern psychology, which recovered the experience of knowledge through direct engagement with phenomena, never attributed autonomous existence to images outside of their being perceived by a subject.

There is one more part of this diffraction I would like to add, something in the artist’s life and personal history that sheds light onto her practice. Lea grew up in a commune in Denmark with hippie parents. When she was a child, her younger and only brother came down with meningitis. Although his mind is perfectly lucid, since that sickness he has had difficulties with the coordination of his bodily movements, which he cannot control. The spasmodic condition of her brother—which also involved two severe and shocking epileptic episodes—somehow altered the fabric of time for Lea. Time was no longer the same as the chronological time that she had lived before. She remembers her father spending years inventing and building machines that her “handicapped” brother could use to communicate with others even though he does not have the ability of normal speech. Living life through other dimensions, with a different *umwelt*, her brother had machines to write with, to express himself with, to be normal with—differently normal. In *The Time That Remains*<sup>14</sup>, Giorgio Agamben comments on the Letter of St. Paul to the Romans, in which St. Paul refers to the time after the coming of the Messiah and before the end of Time as the “Time which remains.” It is not chronological time exactly, in which we are, but a contracted time, a *messianic* and irreparable time which repeats the time before the revelation and yet is an operative time within which kairological time, the event, the eruption of the presence of time, occurs as well. It is a time which remains, a remnant, and yet within which hope is inscribed, a hope located within the irreparable.

Beyond a veil, perhaps in a state of anatta, or universal compassion, or within a “faith of the faithless” which is a consciousness of the experience of failure and the horizon of love that has been discussed recently by Simon Critchley; Modernity had claimed to be faithless yet it had a blind faith in objective scientific truths, and in rational deductive and inductive thinking. In today’s remnants of Modernity, we require instead a “faith of the faithless that is an openness to love, love as giving what one does not have and receiving that over which one has no power,” a “visceral register” and an “act of spiritual daring that attempts to eviscerate the old self in order that something new might come into being.”<sup>15</sup> In a recent email<sup>16</sup> in which she commented on the materiality and solidity of her sculptural thought-forms, the artist quoted passages from her artist book:

...I found it relevant [In *How To Program and Use T-F (2013)*] to search for new thought-forms, thought-forms that might have an intrinsic resistance to surrounding systems.... They are the physical manifestations of thoughts and they are impervious to analysis.... They are not convertible.... They are unfit

*for the constant flow of communication, they defy the grid. And that is why I describe them as a kind of shell—that you can hold and in a way protect yourself. The new thought-forms I went looking for happened to be solid. Today, we are so much in the field of thoughts. The field of transmission.... If you look at the text from the work, the concept of cool thinking is very much related to T-F 3. But again, that kind of thinking has its dangers, too. It might become too cool. I mean, if you are not flexible—not willing to be influenced or changed by existence—you are identified with a totalitarian state of mind. But I do think there is some kind of need right now for encouragement from something that is resistant and does not submit to all kinds of fluctuations.... It's not a secret that I went to see a clairvoyant [for guidance]. But it's not necessarily important for the work, either.... The clairvoyant. The seer. Somehow, I've connected him with cyberspace. The Cyber Pioneer sort of became the facilitator of the darker aspect of "connectedness." ... It's the doing and undoing thing all over again with the clairvoyant as the entry point... It's the same as with the Anatta Experiment. A lot of stuff went on there, and the more private aspects of what we did exist in the work as undercurrents, as energies and atmospheres on which strategies—conflicting narratives, fictions, stories, I don't know what to call them—are built. The point of these fictions is not to keep reality a secret. To me, it's the complete opposite. The doing is the catapult. The fact that the basic events are real—that they happened, that they left a mark—is what makes it possible to take flight. Not to get away from reality, to escape it or anything like that. But to transgress it. And in order to do so, something has to be done. Then, the undoing part is the weird alchemical labour in which Artemis transmutes into a seven-levelled geometrical multi-breasted monstrosity, friends turn into spheres and a nice clairvoyant man mutates into a shady Cyber Pioneer. Maybe you could call undoing some kind of "enchantmentification" process. To me, undoing has to do with... I guess, making the doing resistant to individual mythologies and their restrictions on "what happened." And in doing so, maybe even facilitating voices or gestures from other realms, other layers of reality or truth—from space itself.<sup>17</sup>*

Paradox is the passion of thought, and the thinker without the paradox is like the lover without passion: a mediocre fellow.

- 1 Johannes Climacus [Søren Kierkegaard], *Philosophical Fragments*, eds. and trans. E.H. Hong and H.V. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 38–9.
- 2 A reading of the work of Lea Porsager in relation to productive forms of paranoia and counterculture in the digital age remains Lars Bang Larsen’s “An Egg With a Future: Paranoia and Networks in the Anatta Experiment,” in Lea Porsager, *Anatta Experiment*, eds. Lea Porsager and Synnøve B. Brøgger (Aarhus: Edition After Hand, 2012).
- 3 Bruno Latour, *Nous n’avons jamais été modernes: Essai d’anthropologie symétrique* (Paris: La Découverte, 1991). Latour analyses the preconception of a dual reality that modernity created between nature and culture, and coined the term “factiche” combining “fact” and “fetish.”
- 4 Lynn Margulis first presented her endosymbiotic theory in Lynn Sagan [Lynn Margulis], “On the Origin of Mitosing Cells,” *Journal of Theoretical Biology*, 14 (1967): 225–74.
- 5 Synnøve B. Brøgger, ed., *Lea Porsager, Anatta Experiment* (Aarhus: Edition After Hand, 2012).
- 6 Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz, the Witness and the Archive* (New York: Zone Books, 1999), 34. Jean-François Lyotard’s 1983 text, *Le Différend*, already stated the same paradox and impossibility of bearing witness to the killings in the gas chambers, a notion followed shortly thereafter by Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub’s *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992), which articulates the “event without witnesses” in relation to the Shoah: “it is not possible to tell the truth, to testify, from the outside. Neither is it possible...to testify from the inside.”
- 7 Bracha Ettinger, “Communicating: Reflexion around *Hiroshima mon amour*,” in *PostGender: Gender, Sexuality and Performativity in Japanese Culture*, ed. Ayelet Zohar (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 251–75.
- 8 Karen Barad, “Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an understanding of how matter comes to matter,” *Signs. Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 28, no. 3 (2003): 802.
- 9 Barad, 815.
- 10 Synnøve B. Brøgger, ed., *Lea Porsager, Ablaze with the Fires of Matter* (Copenhagen: Officin, 2013).
- 11 Emanuele Coccia, *La vita sensibile* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2011).
- 12 *Ibid.*, 17.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 37–8.
- 14 Giorgio Agamben, *Il tempo che resta. Un commento alla Lettera ai Romani* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2000).
- 15 Simon Critchley, *The Faith of the Faithless: Experiments in Political Theology* (London and New York: Verso, 2012), 7–20.
- 16 From an email from Lea Porsager to Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, 20 September 2013.
- 17 Brøgger, ed., *Lea Porsager, Ablaze with the Fires of Matter*.

# Lea Porsager squirming her way through Gurdjieff’s work with a certain impoliteness

BY MILENA HOEGSBURG

Lea Porsager’s installation *FOOD FOR THE MOON – Sluggish and Well-lubricated* (2013) centers on Armenian mystic and spiritual teacher George Ivanovich Gurdjieff (1866–1949), specifically the first volume of his magnum opus *All and Everything*, titled *Beelzebub’s Tales to His Grandson*. First published in 1950, this 1248 page science-fiction novel can be viewed as an idiosyncratic reflection on and critique of human life, behavior, and thought. Through a scatterbrained narrative style and exhaustive monologues, the extraterrestrial narrator Beelzebub, onboard the spaceship *Karnak*, accounts to his grandson Hassein, the course of events which dealt a severe blow to human self-awareness and thus to the spiritual potential they possessed. As the story goes, at one point in time, a violent interstellar collision occurred, which split two fragments off the Earth and flung them into space. The smaller and less visible of the two fragments was quickly forgotten, while the other came to be known as “the moon.” In order to keep the two entities from breaking free from their orbit and wreaking havoc on neighboring solar systems, the cosmic energy field around them had to be constantly fed with a life force provided by human beings. To ensure that humans would have neither the knowledge of their fate nor any desire to rebel against it, a cosmic intelligence implanted a new organ, the “Kundabuffer,” inside of the humans at their tailbones. The tail-like organ caused humans to lose their sense of reality—in essence flipping their world upside-down—ensuring that they remained blissfully unaware of the fact that they had become food for the moon. Unfortunately, the inserted organ had permanent side effects, condemning man to a perpetually lethargic, horny, and senseless state of mind. Later, when the cosmic intelligence deemed the fragments no longer a threat, and the Kundabuffer was removed, the organ had already managed to crystallize into the human body, and its effects were irreversible.<sup>1</sup>

In Porsager’s solo exhibition *FOOD FOR THE MOON*, we enter the story seemingly after the fact. Sets of nine differently shaped Kundabuffers lie scattered on the wooden floor of the exhibition space. Cast in bronze polished in different shades of black, blue, and bronze, these sculptural shapes evoke the crystallized organs post-removal; no longer live organic matter, yet nonetheless biomorphic forms. In the middle of the gallery, 134 bronze rods mounted in the ceiling, hang down at equal distance, creating long symmetrical rows, just wide enough for a viewer to pass through. Here, Porsager has reimaged the *Karnak*, which borrows its name from the ancient Egyptian temple complex and its Great Hypostyle Hall of 134 columns. The temple columns and all the other elements that inhabit the gallery—the Kundabuffers, a rope, 2 videos, text, wool, and rubber—have been flipped upside down, opening up different perceptions of time, space, and Gurdjieff’s esoteric concepts. Porsager positions us neither on the Earth nor the moon, but in the center of the inversion, where man perceives reality “topsy-turvy” or inside out. The concept of topsyturvy, with its playful double connotation of something turned or positioned upside down and something in a

state of confusion, presents a wry perspective on Gurdjieff's ideas. Rather than confine us to an interpretive space of mysticism—which might well require more knowledge than we possess—the installation situates us instead in the more familiar space of imaginary possibilities and science fiction.

*FOOD FOR THE MOON* points to how Porsager, an assiduous researcher, enters and works through her material, and in the process makes it her own. At the core of her project is an interest in Gurdjieff's idiosyncratic exploration of human identity, and his teachings in self-awareness. The artist's approach does not aim to illustrate or materialize occult concepts, but to engage them by, as she writes "squirming" her way through Gurdjieff's work "with a certain impoliteness."<sup>2</sup> The strategy of playful speculation and "fabulations," as she calls it, allows Porsager to move uninhibitedly in and out of the material, without feeling beholden to fact, or to Gurdjieff's theories or directives for spiritual engagement.

The choice of "squirming" (with all the association it gives to worms) to describe her process of navigating Gurdjieff's texts is not coincidental. Porsager exploits a momentary slippage in Beelzebub's story in which his grandson Hassein confuses humans with slugs. One can assume that the reference to humans as "slugs" is an allegory for the hypnotic sleep-state man has been forced in to. The slug too resides in the matter, slimy and undesirable. A video on a small flat screen makes this analogy clear.

Composed of found, low-resolution, black-and-white images of different types of slugs, it complements another video in the installation in which a two-dimensional dissection of the core of a rope spins. In close up, the different fiber threads of the rope resemble moving worm-shaped microorganisms; sidestepping the overly familiar NASA images of the moon, Porsager has chosen this round worm-like core as her reference to the fictional moon that has confined man to a sluggish state. The slug is also mirrored in the shapes of the Kundabuffers. Again it is the possibility of double meanings that is of interest to the artist. "Kundabuffer" contains two words. First, "kunda" from kundalini energy, which like two snakes crossed in a helix shape, moves through the chakras or energy centers of the body. Secondly, "buffer," a shock absorbing element holding that very energy in check. In *FOOD FOR THE MOON*, it is the hanging temple that holds the slugs in balance. Slugs cannot tolerate copper (the main component of bronze). While it does not kill them, it gives them a slight electrical shock on contact.

The ambiguous nature of the slug is amplified by its hermaphrodite identity, having both female and male reproductive organs. More importantly, as a "both/and" species, it also embodies the potential of a space outside the usual dichotomies of male and female and culture and nature. To borrow Porsager's words, we make "a queer quantum shift away from a human-centric world view towards a slug-centric one, stumbling into the slimy entangled bosom of slug-occultism, sex magick and sci-fi spirituality."<sup>3</sup> Central to Porsager's thinking, as conveyed in the quirky formulation above, are the two American scientists, Donna Haraway and Karen Barad, whose thinking posits a shift in the centrality of the human in relation to other species, as well as to technology and inanimate objects.<sup>4</sup> Leaning on the feminist thinker Judith Butler's post-structuralist ideas of "queer," as an open term which situates identity as a constellation of multiple and unstable positions, Barad introduces the idea of "intra-action." Individuals, she argues, do not preexist as such but rather materialize in intra-action, and differences between individuals are, she argues, also produced in these relations.<sup>5</sup> Importantly her theory of "agential realism" throws into question the individual/group dynamic, and the dichotomies and inequalities upon which our general understanding of human subjectivity rests: nature and culture, male and female, animal and human, spirit and matter, physical and mental. Barad views the world as "queer," and importantly defines this term as not having a "stable meaning or referential context," in the sense not of relativity but as in "a lively, mutating organism" and a "desiring radical openness" and "questioning of identity and binaries."<sup>6</sup> Barad's theories open up a discursive space where

there is no fixed ground, place, time, space, or matter.<sup>7</sup> It is this space for leaps in thought that Porsager aims to activate and query with *FOOD FOR THE MOON*.

*FOOD FOR THE MOON* solidifies and expands Porsager's longstanding interest not just in Gurdjieff's esoteric teachings but also her own complex and fearless exploration of the "self," specifically how it is constructed and how it shapes perceptions of reality. In several of her previous works Porsager has engaged the occult through social experiments with women (a recurring cast of colleagues and friends), who, in various states of hypnosis or trance, partake in group experiments that push the boundaries of self. In the work *LEAP – The Awakening of the Dark Muses* (2008), Porsager channeled the role of Gurdjieff, placing herself at the center of a group of women who had been hypnotized to act out various aspects of LP (Lea Porsager's alter ego). In *MESMERIZED MACHINES* (2010), Porsager and six other women experimented with trance to act out various aspects of Jane Heap's self for 24 hours. Heap (1883–1964) was a respected American publisher who helped establish the all-women study group known as "the Rope," which she jointly taught with Gurdjieff. The participating women became, as Porsager describes, "an assembly of performing bodies," embodying aspects of Heap's inner thoughts (borrowed from her published notebook) and Gurdjieff's experiments.<sup>8</sup> Curiously, the intensity and radical nature of the ritual is not conveyed in the final presentation, but is instead hidden from view. Despite the strong, often boundary crossing human experiences that give rise to them, Porsager's works are generally conceptually tight and minimal, with strong references to a minimalist language.

Telling are the hours of raw footage documenting the week-long performative experiment that Porsager conducted inside the Anatta house in Monte Verità, Switzerland. During the early 1900s it was a key site for occultists, mystics, anarchists, and other people who felt their ideas fell outside the norms of society. The footage documents seven women engaged in intense tantric activities, revealing the incredible raw force of these types of experiments, which Porsager orchestrates, and the physical actions and reactions they set in motion—extreme corporeal convulsions (outbursts) and screams so deep they seem to connect to an archetypal human experience, like giving birth, or of a deep human loss.

The experiment generated actions and reactions that would require the participants to relinquish a great deal of control over their bodies and egos. The presentation of the *Anatta Experiment* (2012) at DOCUMENTA (13), for which it was commissioned, revealed however little of the raw emotion and the intensity and experiential knowledge produced during the fact. Very deliberately, Porsager chose to edit the footage down to a short, soundless sequence and present it high on a wall, in a constellation of minimal objects and texts. The process of entering deep into the material, only to then zoom out and withdraw from it, is an important aspect of the artist's method. The *translation* of the experience inside the psychological and spiritual realm of the experiment into a visual language rooted firmly in art is what, in the artist's mind, allows for the production of a space parallel to the reality we take for granted. The surrender of the self required by the experiment complicates the process of bearing witness to it; in a way then this condition necessitates the translation of the experiment into something else (art).<sup>9</sup>

In *FOOD FOR THE MOON*, the result of this translation is a surprisingly minimal installation, which seems to envelop us in a meditative silence. The forest of bronze rods, catching and reflecting sunlight, brings to mind the formalism of Walter De Maria particularly his seminal work *The Lightning Field* (1977). In its geometry, Porsager's *Karnak* seems to echo sacred labyrinths, with a surrealist touch. The kundabuffers—simultaneously materially appealing and repelling—evoke the earlier abstraction of several modernists, especially Jean Arp's biomorphic and snail-like sculptures *Pagoda on bowl* (1934) and *Two Thoughts on a Navel* (1932). Aesthetically, *FOOD FOR THE MOON* connects to a lineage of the abstract art

of the 20th century concerned with the spiritual, mystical and occult, and with expressing a reality beyond the material.<sup>10</sup>

Only the texts that Porsager often includes as an integral part of the work convey the dense, extraordinary, and nonsensical core of the esoteric experiments from which her works all spring. As a result, the texts included as part of *FOOD FOR THE MOON* seem at times to ventriloquize Gurdjieff's voice, while simultaneously overturning or re-appropriating elements from the novel. This strategy, which Porsager refers to as the "undoing" of occult material, happens both through the process of appropriating and connecting disparate-but-linked esoteric theories (Rudolph Steiner, Antonin Artaud, Gurdjieff and Aleister Crowley) and through the generative collaboration with her long term collaborator Synnøve B. Brøgger. From the position of someone very close to the process of each new work, Brøgger functions as the editorial sounding board that provides the resistance that allows the texts to emerge. Like the esoteric writings that inspire them, Porsager's writings are not explanatory or mediating, but rather opaque echoes of the raw material from which they spring: experiments which try to "attain something beyond the grasp of judgment and criticism."<sup>11</sup>

It is less surprising, then, that the texts that anchor *FOOD FOR THE MOON* require a lot from their reader; enough that perhaps they will be disregarded by the viewer who will contemplate the aesthetic objects that lie quietly fossilized in space, exuding an inert power in their own right. This sense of reflective quietude which, I would argue, characterizes many of Porsager's earlier works, is even more pronounced in *FOOD FOR THE MOON* because of the absence of the human figure—the performing subject. As with *LEAP* and *MESMERIZED MACHINES*, *FOOD FOR THE MOON* explores the relationship between the individual and the group, between the self and other selves, but does not take the form of a social experiment of acts of "doing" or "undoing." The self is still front and center but not the human performing it. That space has been left open for the viewer to occupy.

The final element in *FOOD FOR THE MOON* takes us from inside the core of the project to an external space, following a long rope that runs from the gallery to the outside of the building, then up along the tree tops and down to the fjord. Here Porsager makes reference to Gurdjieff's devoted followers in the Rope as well as to the allegory that Gurdjieff used to illustrate to the women how their individual "inner-world journey" was reliant on their mutual support in the group as if roped together in the climb across the mountain towards greater awareness. In *FOOD FOR THE MOON*, the rope provides an image of the possibility of an outside; both in Gurdjieff's sense of heightened consciousness, which would allow humans to cease to be controlled by the moon, but also in the sense of (fictitious) worlds parallel to the ones we perceive.

This idea of the possibility of ascension culminates in Gurdjieff's "toast to the idiots," a 21-step method, intended to jolt man out of his sluggish state. Although Gurdjieff retains the pejorative meaning of "idiot," he sees the journey down as what would enable one to fully see the self and eventually rise beyond it.<sup>12</sup> In *FOOD FOR THE MOON*, the idea of "idiocy" completes the installation through the ritual performance of a local choir KORET and the serving of vodka and moon cakes at the opening. Curiously and controversially, Gurdjieff had an unsubstantiated belief that pure alcohol would allow one to break free from learned behavior and draw out one's inner essence.<sup>13</sup> During the opening, visitors will be asked to "toast to the idiots," and thus partake in idiocy. Set topsy-turvy, those who choose to participate will be one step closer to connecting with their inner essence. As Gurdjieff argued, no insight comes without serious effort.

# **HOW TO PROGRAM AND USE T-F**

## **(Ablaze with the Fires of Matter)**

(2013)

How to Program and Use T-F [quote from the work]

**T-F 1 ~~Ego-hard drives, susceptible to ideological drifts~~**

**T-F 2 ~~Endless reproduction of frayed brown ideas and doctrines~~**

**T-F 3 The psychometric event of being caught between a rock and a hard place had caused the Programmers spasmodic “cool thinking” to materialize.**

**In a state of rare extremism, odd selfishness and unpleasant depression, the novice T-F Programmer met up with the Cyber Pioneer, one so seemingly connected, so thoroughly networked to the extent of being downright clairvoyant.**

**Breezily bouncing off surrounding grids of communication satellites, this vertically challenged, multi-angular and neurally plastic Cyber Pioneer left the Programmer to her own lame devices.**

**While the Cyber Pioneer spoke in a foreign tongue, the Programmer reached into the astral plane and pulled out a mutated mental entity, a T-F 3. It landed on her lap, on her knees and in her open hands. Shaped like some kind of boomerang, it was heavy and cold despite its dark brown color. On the horizon, right where the earth’s surface began, another one hung, blunt and cold. Above it lingered another shape, a silver bullet.**

**It was as if these cool thought-forms themselves had willed their own matter into being. Opaque, inaccessible, heavy, meticulous and anti-plastic, it was as if the T-F 3 refused to become anything more or less than thoughts embodied.**

**Let us assume for a moment that the Cyber Pioneer’s connectedness equalled panoptic vision. Let us furthermore assume that this vision – however casual and webby – is a potential power-tool for thought control. Let us then assume that these T-F 3 thought-bodies – sovereign in their matter-ness – disdainfully reflect the eye back to its beholder, resistant as they are to flattery, influence, control and judgement in any way, shape or form. And finally, let us assume that connectedness is synonymous with an outlandish state of exhaustion. That only in the very center of the purple and brown fog, an inorganic spark can be found. *Thank you, thank you, thank you.* T-F 3 the Shield. The Sturdy Mental Explosion. O!**

# ABLAZE WITH THE FIRES OF MATTER

A symbolically authentic non-Euclidean conversation between Marco Pasi and Lea Porsager about her two weirdly related works: *Anatta Experiment* (2012) and *How to Program and Use T-F* (2013)

Edited by Synnøve B. Brøgger

*No one who has devoted any study to these musical forms would hesitate in ascribing the marvellous mountain-range depicted in Plate W to the genius of Richard Wagner, for no other composer has yet built sound edifices with such power and decision. In this case we have a vast bell-shaped erection, fully nine hundred feet in height, and but little less in diameter at the bottom, floating in the air above the church out of which it has arisen.*

“PLATE W. (MUSIC OF WAGNER)”

A. Besant & C.W. Leadbeater, *Thought-Forms* (1901)

*Anatta Experiment* (2012)

MP: First of all, I would like to make some general comments. I should say at the outset that I am more an historian of esotericism than an art critic or an art historian. In this respect, the reference to Monte Verità in your work is particularly intriguing for me. At the turn of the twentieth century, Monte Verità was part of a larger galaxy of communities, groups, and movements. If we want to borrow the term used by James Webb, an important historian of these movements, we might call it an “illuminate” galaxy. Now, what was the cultural value of this phenomenon? I think it is even more important to ask this question if we consider the way in which esotericism has been perceived from a political point of view (and I will return to this point later), also considering that your work has been presented in a city like Kassel, where the traces of the Second World War are still so visible and present, as in many other German cities. In a short essay entitled “The Modernity of Occultism” I wrote some time ago that, in order to fairly assess the cultural legacy of these heterodox and alternative spiritual movements, we also have to consider aspects where they acted as an enzyme of creative experimentation and progress. These aspects, or fields, are: gender relations and feminism; attitudes towards the body and sexuality; concepts of the self; imperialism, orientalism and attitudes towards cultural alterity; and attitudes towards institutional or traditional religion. An analysis of the role that communities such as Monte Verità played in all these fields frequently shows a rather liberal, progressive pattern that strongly contrasts with the widespread image of esotericism as an epiphenomenon of fascism. Alternative spiritual or esoteric movements often acted as a factor in social and cultural innovation, and sometimes anticipated changes that would affect society at large only later and at a slower pace. We cannot enter into too many details about this point here, but I would only emphasize that this is an important background for understanding some aspects of your work, since it is so closely related to the history of and the physical places at Monte Verità. And I do think it is possible to see several elements that have been

picked up by you from the original experience of Monte Verità and that are being re-actualized, also through the mediation of Harald Szeemann's interpretation. Gender issues, the body, sexuality, the exploration of the self: these are all elements that seem quite prominent in your work.

Now, the question might be, why should this have anything to do with a contemporary artistic discourse? Maybe this has to do with the constant attempt of contemporary art to transcend itself. I mean its constant dialectical attempt to transgress its own boundaries and push them further and further, in order to capture new, unexplored territories of cultural meaning. The question, in fact, applies not only to the single artist, but also to the superstructure of the artistic establishment: how can an artistic work be meaningful not just in a narrowly "traditional" artistic sense, but also in a broader cultural and social sense? Now, in the present political and economic circumstances, the answer to this question can have far-reaching consequences. In any case, this is why "experimentation" has always been an important component of the identity of contemporary art. There seem to be no real limits to the range of experimentation, and it is only natural that this would include items such as the "exploration of the self", or alternative models of society, politics, and sexuality. It is in this context that the legacy of "illuminate" revolutionaries from the turn of the twentieth century – of these nudists, vegetarians, Theosophists, occultists, and anarchists – can be revived and transposed into new frameworks of artistic discourse, as is the case with your *Anatta Experiment*.

This leads me to a general remark about a phenomenon that has been visibly emerging in the last few years in contemporary art, and in which I have been increasingly interested. I am referring to a certain curiosity about and fascination with esoteric, mystical, and occult themes, which is also so present in your work. Now, why is this phenomenon manifesting itself? It is not easy to give an answer and I wonder if enough thinking has been devoted to it. I would say that the trend probably started around ten years ago, and it has been growing since. There can certainly be different interpretations. Perhaps it could be seen as a kind of resistance to the disenchantment of the world and as a longing for re-enchantment. It would then be an attempt to rediscover a kind of magic that is felt to have got lost in the sheer materiality and triviality of our secularized lives, and a desire to find alternative dimensions in a much too monotonous reality. Now, in looking at this material, but more specifically at your work, one question I was asking myself was: if I were an artist interested in this kind of material, what could I do with it? I am of course talking about material related to mysticism, esotericism, or alternative religious traditions more generally. Well, some artists are treating it as a source for archival explorations. This seems to be the case, at least to a certain extent, and to mention just one example, with Joachim Koester. This kind of "documentary" choice, which by the way does not exclude forms of reinterpretation and re-contextualization, implies a certain degree of distance from the material itself. The material is displayed, pictured, even decomposed, analysed and explained, but the artist himself does not really seem to engage personally with it. Now, it seems to me that something different is going on with you. I see a different kind of approach to this material, partly because there is a kind of self-performative element, to which the installation and the film presented in Kassel bear witness.

But there is another element that I think is very important and very conspicuous for me – also because of my particular background. It is a certain kind of creative approach that you have to the material. You use the material as a kind of palimpsest, and are basically doing what other esoterically-minded people have been doing with it before you. You actually create something new and original, not just in an artistic sense, which would of course be interesting enough, but also from an "esoteric" point of view. And this is where it gets a bit tricky perhaps. If I look at what you are doing with this material, it seems to me that you are putting together elements from different sources, different traditions, different movements, different

currents. What you get in the end is a kind of new discourse, a new text that can be interpreted as an artistic gesture, but also as an esoteric gesture. And I would not be surprised if the kind of material that you have produced – the texts, the film, the objects – were to be used, for instance, by a new esoteric group. Now, this would surely be an interesting development. If you are at all familiar with the world of new religious movements, you will be aware that, in fact, this would not be an exception, because it happens all the time. It happens all the time that the starting point for a new religion is something that was not produced with the intention of creating a new religion. Would this be a problem? I don't know for sure, but the point is that once the work is there – as with any text in general – anybody can do whatever he likes with it. Both in terms of interpretation and re-actualization of it. And then the other element which I think is very interesting is a certain kind of inspired tone which you use in your texts. If I read the text you have produced to accompany the Anatta project in Kassel, titled “Lebensreform, Triangular Attitudes and Mountain-sized Truths”, I can see a tone that is far from being “distant” or “aseptic”. Again, this might be used in a religious context, not just an artistic one:

“Love is the Law, Love under Will”

In the Sun, in Planets, in Humans, and in the Atom there exists a flame, a cavern of fire, a nucleus of heat. 7 friends on the Mountain of Truth, 7 egoic spheres ablaze with the Fire of Matter enter Strukturmutter's wooden ark, her abstract triangles and palmate cunt-flower, on an obscure quest for the hidden eggs of *Anatta* [the Buddhist notion of “not I”, “not mine”]. Conducted by the coiling rays of the Sun, the 7 spheres rushed into Mutter's index-body, revolving around, within and forward, slamming into her 7 planes of cosmic-physical realization. Under Mutter's scrutinizing gaze, they dragged the thought-forms of LEBENSREFORM and its Group Perfection through the denser planes of *doing*. Thought-forms that, when confronted with the fleshy spheres of matter, became more like electrified sludge, not resembling eggs at all. The 7 geometrically inept spheres shifted and stirred, reorganized and regrouped in an awkward staging of an act that indeed was not an act, but a venereal plunge into lameness. [...]

Well, this is certainly a kind of inspired, poetic language that is not meant to “explain” or “illustrate” the work, but rather to enhance the aura of mystery that surrounds it and increase, using Bourdieu's term, its “symbolic capital”. As the historian of religions Hugh Urban has shown, esotericists and occultists use this strategy, consciously or not, all the time. It is in fact a significant aspect of the social behavior of esotericism.

These are just a few general considerations that I wanted to mention about your work. Now perhaps I would like to focus with you on more specific aspects that intrigue me. The first one concerns sexuality, because this is an element that is very much present, at least implicitly if one reads between the lines of your text, but it is also manifested in the film. In the text you make a reference to Tantra. Now, as far as I know in the Indian tradition of Tantra, the idea of the polarity of sexes, the masculine versus the feminine, is quite important. And the persons you invited to participate in the *Anatta Experiment* were all women. This by the way also reminds me of another historical precedent, because it sounds so similar to what the Swedish painter Hilma af Klint was doing around the time when Monte Verità was being established, the early years of the twentieth century. In fact she had a group composed only of women, with whom she held spiritualist seances and other kinds of group work. It was called the “Group of Five”, because that's how many they were. And I believe that later the number varied, and they became seven, as in your Anatta project. Now, the question is, how does an all-female group relate to, or possibly conflict with, the traditional tantric idea of polarity, since men were completely excluded from the situation?

LP: Hm. I guess it never felt like masculinity was excluded, considering that male energy was very much present on the mountain and in the source material itself. When I researched Monte Verità it was from the male figures that I got the most information. The Mountain of Truth is in itself an erected gesture of some kind. You have to stay on top of it and from there work your way down to the female energy which is way less talkative in the archive. In fact, the overexposure to male figures in the research material inspired a lot of male elements. On certain days my friends wore hats or erected elements on their heads – a reference to Hugo Ball – and they talked about literally feeling as if they were penises; that these props helped them get that *rising* feeling. So tantrically speaking there was actually a need for a feminine counterpart. But it is true, it could have been interesting to include men, and I also thought about it at the beginning – about what would happen if I did an experiment with both sexes. We would most likely have had to spend a lot more time dealing with sexual tensions, and I don't know if it was that aspect of sexuality I was interested in. And if you go back in time to the pre-hippy nudity era on Monte Verità, they had separate areas for women and men. I think it felt right for the experiment to be just women when the decision to use Strukturmutter as an entrance point had been made. And that was Szeemann's idea! In many ways, having it as a women-only group actually terrified me. I feared that if I stayed on the surface, the woman-thing would become a feminist cliché – this blunt, matriarchal, Goddess-cultic statement about women's superior connectedness to nature and so on. In the post-production of Anatta it therefore became very important for me to take both the concept of Strukturmutter and the seven women themselves to a whole other level, one of geometrical-cosmical dimensions. And I do think that the intimacy that can exist among women is quite extraordinary, as may also be the case in all-male groups. There is a lot of accumulative energy.

MP: Well, the Multi-Breasted Monstrosity [the Anatta Experiment version of Szeemann's Strukturmutter] makes you think of a form of "excessive" femininity that might relate to masculinity in that particular way, I mean a single woman leading a group of men into this kind of experiment. Another question I was thinking about is the problem of consciousness. The performative element is in fact very important in this work. There is clearly a direct personal experience where you are pushing boundaries to the limit: group boundaries, but also boundaries of consciousness. This appears to be related to certain practices to which you refer in the text, but which you don't explain exactly. So it is difficult to say what was going on. If you just watch the film it is hard to have a clear picture of the situation. I also remember that during our meeting in Kassel, somebody from the audience said that you used all your talent to cut the scenes in the film exactly the moment before the meaning of the situation would become clear. You always stayed behind a kind of hermeneutical climax, which I find a very interesting aesthetic choice. The result is quite impressionistic. You get the feeling or the impression of a situation, but you don't understand exactly what is the sequence, where this is coming from or what this is eventually leading to. Now, the problem of consciousness affects the very title of your work, the "Anatta Experiment". As you know of course – also because you refer to it in the text I have quoted earlier – in the Buddhist tradition *anatta* refers to the conscious realization that all that belongs to material reality is not really a part of yourself. You should not identify yourself with any particular "object", and interestingly enough this relates also to your own body, which is external to your true self like any other object. Experiencing the body as a part of yourself is a subjective experience of reality that is in fact only an illusion. Now, in order to overcome the resistances that this kind of thought naturally produces in human beings, and to strip your perception of reality of all its illusions, you would normally need years of spiritual training, with the guidance of a master or of a person who has already gone farther than you along the path of illumination. So, I wonder how you dealt with this problem, also

considering that the experiment was meant to last only a very limited amount of time. How were you able to construct this exploration of the *self*? And what was the actual goal of the experiment for you?

LP: It is very hard to say if we managed to do any of that. But I think *Strukturmutter*, the concept of the mother and the seven levels we went through, were very much devices, ways to structure oneself out of one's *self*, if that makes sense. So I think that sometimes you need to have something to focus on, or at least have *something*... I don't know how to put this, but you need to *do* something. I can't just say "O my friends, come and be not-yourself and not-identified with who you normally are". I think that would be impossible. People would not know where to start. Try to be *not* yourself? That would be quite difficult. So there had to be some sort of vessel, a fiction of some sort to support that movement.

MP: But it wasn't a random process, right? You were using some specific techniques?

LP: In a way, yes. The experiment was guided by an index – a seven-levelled system of spiritual enlightenment in Theosophy. The seven chakras of the body were also an inspiration. Each level corresponded to one of the seven days of the experiment. You might say that this created a schedule, if a loose one. The experiment conductor converted some of these abstract devices and turned them into processes we could move through each day, because I was not sure I could do that myself. That's very much how *Strukturmutter* herself sort of came to embody the Theosophical index.

MP: Was it important for you to have this extra person, the conductor?

LP: Yes, I think that otherwise I would not have been able to go as far as we did. It would have become something else. I wanted it to be a bodily experience, and I think that as soon as you work with something that goes beyond, like, "let's sit and talk and try to analyze each other", things start to happen on a whole other level. And the people in the group were all my friends and I think it was important to have somebody from the outside on the inside, so to speak. So the ones on the inside could go outside, or deeper inside. Who knows how this really works.

MP: It seems to me that you created a structure before and then a structure afterwards. I mean, the structure before consisted of exercises, where you let it go — or at least you try — with all these bodily activities. And then structurally back in the moment when you started to edit the film.

LP: Very true. It makes me think of a concept Lars Bang Larsen discusses in an essay he wrote for the congress [Anational Congress of the Multi-Breasted Monstrosity, Kassel, 26 July, 2012]. I've started using these terms myself. He talks about *doing* and *un-doing*. If the experiment itself was the *doing*, then I guess the *un-doing* part of the experiment was the development of the installation, the text you quoted earlier and the edit of the film. The process of finding the fiction that comes as close as possible to giving some visibility to the ultimate reality of the material. In my case, that often seems to involve making a lot of stuff invisible.

MP: I can assume it was a very personal experience, because as the director of the experiment you dealt with every aspect. So, how much were you affected by these bodily experiences, and also by your

relationship with these friends of yours? From the film I think one can see that these practices were having concrete effects — you can feel it — but as you said yourself, what really went on remains invisible and unspoken.

LP: I see it a little bit as a mutated version of the *Theatre of Cruelty*, in the sense that there is something extremely, let's say *real* about it. And it stays real, I mean, in the finished work. And then at the same time, I think the film looks very fictional. It must be a by-product of the aforementioned alchemy of *undoing*, some trick of the eye when playing with the shine that images give off when cut loose from individual mythology. I don't know. But the actual events are imprinted on the material. To me the experience of being in Casa Anatta with my friends is still very much present.

MP: This is so interesting. It makes me think of René Daumal's *Mount Analogue*. The story is about a mountain that is very different from Monte Verità, even if the metaphor points to similar aspects. Mount Analogue is the symbol of impossibility, of an immanent transcendence that we can only find absurd, and yet without which our life loses much of its sense. This is made clear in a key passage in the book, where the protagonist, who to some extent is Daumal himself, says: "I was feeling that something deep inside of me, in spite of everything, had to believe firmly in the existence of Mount Analogue." In fact Mount Analogue stands here for the sacred mountain of many different religious traditions, which is supposed to be the centre of the world. It is a legend, a myth, and a modern man should therefore dismiss it. And yet, the need to believe in its reality, even in its materiality — because in the story Mount Analogue is a real mountain that you can actually climb, not just a spiritual concept — can never be entirely extinguished.

Let's get back now for a moment to politics. As I said at the beginning, we all know that there has been for quite a while, and there still is today in many quarters, a typical cultural resistance towards esotericism, occultism and related phenomena. It is often a resistance that takes on a political aspect. Part of it is based on historical considerations, claiming that esotericism had a strong relation with fascism. The implication is that there must be some common ideological traits between the two. Even when a possible relation with fascism is not emphasized, still you frequently have the idea that esoteric beliefs or ideas make you disconnect from reality. If you get too much into this stuff, then you lose contact with social or political problems. Because you live in a world of myth, you become insensitive to important issues such as exploitation, oppression, alienation. But then, when you look at Monte Verità and at what these people were doing, you seem to get a totally different picture. Without idealizing it too much, it is hard not to see Monte Verità also as a social, and even political, experiment. Many of the residents were actually anarchists, and it is no accident that authors such as Martin Green have described it as one of the historical roots of the counterculture of the 1960s. The residents of Monte Verità were trying to explore alternative visions of reality, but also of society. They wanted to experiment with alternative understandings of human relationships and with non-exploitative ways of living together. Whether they were successful is another matter, of course. So how important is the political dimension for you? Do you see your work also as a political statement in any way?

LP: Yes, or I hope so. I mean, anything political is problematic, so it is difficult not to be problematic. It's problematic that eleven people went to Switzerland for this experiment, if you think about climate change and the environmental strain. It could have been done in a more eco-friendly way. There are a lot of things that aren't exactly right to do. But I think that what I am interested in always involves some kind

of transgressive behavior. It comes down to the relationship between me, people and things. Being together with my friends for a week on Monte Verità told me a lot about politics. And then of course the politics of undoing the whole thing afterwards – the power of the image, the supremacy of form. The mountain itself, heavy with politics – Theosophy, occultism, anarchism – and people like Rudolf von Laban, who performed wild rituals with his dance group on Monte Verità and then went on to work for the Nazis. Again, there is this link between spirituality, spiritual movements and fascism that you also talk about in your work. Misused, *anatta* can turn into fascism on a dime – the dark side of surrendering to *not me, not I* – ultimately just exchanging the individual ego for a collective one. And I think we all felt these... conflicting impulses while we were working. The presence of tension, sometimes even violence. The inability to observe one's own or another's expression without judgement – the seeds of oppression, I guess. But at the same time, this was intertwined with all the other things – empathy, love, laughter, intimacy. Respect and caring.

The connectedness that arises when people interact while in their *matter-ness* is a different kind of connectedness from the one achieved solely in the realm of thought-forms. And this difference is somehow connected to the role of the T-F 3 in *How to Program and Use T-F*. The point that anywhere matter is involved, there will be tension and resistance and laws like gravity to deal with. But out of that tension, great intimacy can transpire. Not in spite of – but because of – its limitations. In a way, the T-F 3 feed off the very same Fires of Matter that my friends embodied in the *Anatta Experiment*.

#### *How to Program and Use T-F (2013)*

MP: OK, let's focus first on a few general aspects. Why *thought-forms*? Why is this concept so interesting and powerful for you?

LP: Again, it's been on my mind for a long time. It just continued to come back to me, this idea that a thought has form. In visual art it has been used by many artists. It's just a very powerful notion. That somebody else can see thought-forms around you when you are thinking about something specific, or that you are more susceptible to certain forms than others. For me, it was also the meeting... I went on this DOCUMENTA retreat to Banff in Canada, and there was a philosopher, Catherine Malabou, who talked about how the brain has changed, how flexible the brain is.

MP: The brain has changed compared to when?

LP: It's just constantly changing. Malabou talks about the plasticity of the brain and how this hyper-flexibility can easily lend itself to whatever form the ruling system demands. In that sense, our thoughts have become less resistant. It is as if we adapt into systems without the will and/or ability to say no. Our brains are constantly being influenced and formed by outside forces, and how do we escape that? As I understood it, she suggests that the space of fiction might propose a way out. This is probably a bad paraphrasing of what she said, but it was very inspiring. When I re-visited Besant and Leadbeater's book on thought-forms [*Thought Forms*, 1901], I realized that I have always felt them to be more sculptural, and not so much these watercolor paintings. I don't know if it has anything to do with our brains' sculpting ability, but I found it fascinating to think about thought-forms as being sculptures flying around our bodies. Then, after returning from Canada I saw this Google live recording of the global satellite grid. They are all over, the satellites. They're just... they look like a hive of bees swarming around the earth. And I felt that it was interesting to think about how these communication matrixes in our atmosphere affect the behavior of thought-forms.

I just... I found it relevant to search for new thought-forms, thought-forms that might have an intrinsic resistance to surrounding systems. There's this video on YouTube showing a map of the world's satellite grid. You should watch it, it's really scary.

MP: Yes, I would be curious to see it. It is fascinating that they go their way without colliding with each other.

LP: Yeah, it's a whole science. Also because there are so many of them that are damaged. So there's just all this garbage in space.

MP: Space rubbish, I love that! So in Banff you had this idea – this is where you decided to make a specific work about thought-forms?

LP: While I was doing *Celestial Body* and the *Anatta Experiment*, the concept of thought-forms was present all the time, so I just thought, "OK, now I give them my full attention, now I go into it". So thought-forms have been there since, well, 2008. In all my pieces. Not only is the book by Besant and Leadbeater very strong visually; there is also an element of control that I find interesting. How a thought-form can be deemed "bad" or "good".

MP: There is something very general that strikes me about thought-forms. Besant and Leadbeater were extremely successful with this idea, and the reason is quite clear. They just conceptualized something that has always been around. Because the basic idea is how you give shape to your thoughts, a shape that tends toward visibility. So, this is a kind of objectivization of thought, in the sense that something that you produce only with your mind can be shared by others. Maybe we can think a little bit about that. But first there is something more general that I wanted to mention. And it's the fact that this idea of objectivization of thought is in fact the key to all magic. What is magic really *but* the objectivization of thought? Magic is based on the power of imagination. When you read theories of magic – not just modern theories but theories from the Renaissance and even earlier – you see that there is such a strong connection to imagination. But, of course, imagination is not understood here as fantasy, in the sense of producing images that are just in your mind and don't exist in any objective reality. Imagination is understood as something that can give shape to or manipulate reality. Something that can interact directly with the outer world. So I think this is very close to the concept of thought-forms. But the interesting point is that Besant and Leadbeater presented this concept in a way that could be of particular interest to artists. The relationship between art and magic has always been around after all, and is not really a discovery of contemporary art; for the simple reason that art and magic are both based on the same powerful principle, which is imagination. And in art, imagination produces very solid effects as well. I see a very strong relationship between the two, and this, perhaps, is one of the possible ways to approach this particular piece of yours.

And then of course there is still the other problem, which we might call the sinister side of the idea of thought-forms. A friend of mine, John Crow, who is now writing a PhD dissertation on Theosophy, religion and the body, has recently presented an interesting paper on thought-forms at the meeting of the American Academy of Religion. John focuses on an aspect that, as far as I can see, has been neglected by historians and critics so far. Understandably, scholars have mostly been interested in the influence of the concept of thought-forms on art. But John focuses on another aspect, which is the fact that thought-forms could also be

used in the context of the Theosophical Society as a tool to discipline and to exert power over other persons. Why? Well, because if you are a leader of the organization and claim to have the clairvoyant ability to see the thought-forms of other people, then, of course, what happens is that...

LP: ...you have the power

MP: Yes, you have the power over them. Because thought-forms usually correspond to your inner feelings and emotions. In the context of Theosophy you are supposed to attain a certain degree of control over them. Now, if someone can see your thought-forms, he is also able to tell whether you are successful in disciplining your emotions and your feelings, and especially negative feelings such as anger, envy, lust. Knowing that someone can have access to your emotions may create anxiety, and will push you to discipline the emotional side of your personality even further. So, thought-forms show themselves here in a different light that is perhaps less immediately positive than the usual one.

LP: Yeah, as with Monte Verità, it's really interesting how organized spirituality has these sinister aspects. Abuse of power, mind control etc.

MP: Absolutely. Now, can you tell me something about the actual thought-forms that appear in your work? I see that there are different kinds of them: T-F 1, T-F 2, T-F 3...

LP: T-F 1, T-F 2, T-F 3 are categories of thought-forms introduced by Besant and Leadbeater. Apparently, T-F 1 had to do with the projection of one's self into the world. In *How to Program and Use T-F* they appear on the floor as a series of photographs that sort of constitute the solar panels of a satellite. T-F 2 has to do with old thoughts continuously being reproduced in the present, and they appear as the other series of photographs. They too are arranged like the solar panels of a satellite. In *Thought Forms*, I believe Besant and Leadbeater describe T-F 2 as... I think they use the image of an author, writing, and then a dead author's idea will suddenly plant itself into his or her script.

MP: In the text that accompanies the work the two first lines refer to T-F 1 T-F 2, but I am intrigued by the fact that they are crossed out. Why is that?

LP: It has to do with not wanting to draw too much attention to them, but merely having them point to where the actual focus is, which is the T-F 3. The lines also structurally resemble the lines that run through both satellites. In the beginning, I thought about having texts on them, but I found I wanted them to stay more open. They are mostly there to give T-F 3 something to be *other* than – be opposed to

MP: And what about T-F 3?

LP: In *Thought Forms*, T-F 1 and T-F 2 are believed to be the most common but least important. According to Besant and Leadbeater T-F 3 are observable forms that can be glimpsed by *seers*, and all the illustrations in the book are of T-F 3 – visual representations of those glimpses. Emotions belong to this category of thought-forms. This is where my work departs from Besant and Leadbeater, who identified T-F 3 as belonging strictly to the astral plane. In *How to Program and Use T-F* these T-F 3 have mutated and

become resistant. They're iron and bronze and they're here. They are the physical manifestations of thoughts and they are impervious to analysis. In *How to Program and Use T-F* all the physical thought-forms are resistant T-F 3. They are not convertible. They need to be here in physical form. Like this. They are unfit for the constant flow of communication, they defy the grid. And that is why I describe them as a kind of shell – that you can hold and in a way protect yourself. T-F 3, the silent speaker. The new thought-forms I went looking for happened to be solid. Today, we are so much in the field of thoughts. The field of transmission.

MP: ...of connectedness.

LP: Exactly. And how can we mobilize some *resistance* to this? I believe that matter may be key to that.

MP: It's interesting, I think I had misunderstood the work at the beginning. For some reason I thought that T-F 3 did not have matter.

LP: No, no. T-F 3 are objects, they are *really* matter. That's what makes them different from Besant and Leadbeater's T-F 3. It is because of their *matter-ness* that they are resistant. They have become forms, specific to themselves and impenetrable.

MP: I understand. Now, this is how misunderstandings sometimes become interesting. In the history of esotericism you have an infinite number of them.

LP: I can imagine! New concepts born out of misunderstandings.

MP: Absolutely. Most of the creativity in esotericism comes through misunderstandings, actually. Now, what I had understood was that T-F 3 was something that did *not* take shape and could *not* take shape. Something that would not become visible. So, something whose presence would remain totally virtual. That is why I thought that they would always be with you wherever you went.

LP: Actually, I believe you can produce them and have others use them. But they will forever remain themselves.

MP: The interesting thing is that one day you are perhaps going to separate yourself from them and they will go into the hands of other people. You think they will continue to have the same function of resistance?

LP: Yeah, I think so. I mean, I've already tried to have somebody sit with it, just hold it, and apparently it had an effect. If you look at the text from the work, the concept of *cool thinking* is very much related to T-F 3. But again, that kind of thinking has its dangers, too. It might become too cool. I mean, if you are not flexible – not willing to be influenced or changed by existence – you are identified with a totalitarian state of mind. But I do think there is some kind of need right now for encouragement from something that is resistant and does not submit to all kinds of fluctuations.

MP: I like this idea of resistance. And I wonder if it has also something to do with a point that I raised when we were talking about the *Anatta Experiment*. I am referring to an attempt at creating a narrative,

or an artistic discourse, that resists disenchantment. I know this moves away from the way you presented your concept of resistance, but maybe the two aspects are not totally unrelated. In order to preserve an aura of fascination and to elude our consciousness or our ability to deconstruct what we see, you need to craft and present your story in a certain way. So the resistance is maybe also the resistance to the disappearance of mystery. You want to cut out a space of reality that cannot be deconstructed entirely, that cannot be understood completely. A space of reality that cannot be seen with the eyes of flesh, but only with the “eyes of fire”, as Henry Corbin put it.

LP: Yes. For me, it is something you decide to believe in – not as in religion or in politics – but as a commitment to an open mind. A willingness to slip into wormholes, murky worlds and universes of abstractions and sensitivities. I think I’ve just realized that sometimes you need iron or some other sovereign element to give some shelter to those tiny little human torches.

MP: Let’s see. The T-F Programmer in the text. That is you, right?

LP: Yeah, you could say that.

MP: So, who is the Cyber Pioneer?

LP: He’s the clairvoyant. The seer. Somehow, I’ve connected him with cyberspace. The Cyber Pioneer sort of became the facilitator of the darker aspect of “connectedness”.

MP: But is this an actual person you’ve met?

LP: Yes. But in the text he has been overwritten. Or fictionalized.

MP: So you met the seer, as if the seer was a representative of what Besant and Leadbeater did a hundred years ago?

LP: Yeah.

MP: May I ask you what kind of seer he was? What kind of powers did he have?

LP: Actually, I’m not sure. They called him clairvoyant, and I also felt that he was. I mean, there was a language barrier. He was Lithuanian, there was an interpreter present, he talked a lot, mostly about other things than my specific thought-form questions. But he was skilled.

MP: Speaking of disenchantment, are you comfortable with talking about this story, now, with me, knowing that it might become part of a publication?

LP: Yeah. I mean, it’s not a secret that I went to see a clairvoyant. But it’s not necessarily important for the work, either. It’s the *doing* and *undoing* thing all over again with the clairvoyant as the entry point. I’m not ... It’s the same as with the *Anatta Experiment*. A lot of stuff went on there, and the more private

aspects of what we did exist in the work as undercurrents, as energies and atmospheres on which strategies – conflicting narratives, fictions, stories, I don't know what to call them – are built. The point of these fictions is not to keep reality a secret. To me, it's the complete opposite. The *doing* is the catapult. The fact that the basic events are real – that they happened, that they left a mark – is what makes it possible to take flight. Not to get away from reality, to escape it or anything like that. But to transgress it. And in order to do so, something has to be *done*. Then, the *undoing* part is the weird alchemical labour in which Artemis transmutes into a seven-levelled geometrical multi-breasted monstrosity, friends turn into spheres and a nice clairvoyant man mutates into a shady Cyber Pioneer. Maybe you could call *undoing* some kind of “enchantmentification” process. To me, *undoing* has to do with... I guess, making the *doing* resistant to individual mythologies and their restrictions on “what happened”. And in doing so, maybe even facilitating voices or gestures from other realms, other layers of reality or truth – from space itself.

MP: So what is the connection between the clairvoyant and the T-F 3?

LP: It comes back to needing a device, a catapult and a point of take-off. The nice Lithuanian man actually helped my imagination along and in some weird way he succeeded in disenchanting my “normal” thoughts, creating space for T-F 3 to land safely. The fact that T-F 3 later became resistant to the very man that assisted their birth is merely due to the T-F 3 being true to their own supreme nature. T-F 3 are not very polite. Or pleasing. They became his *undoing*, so to speak. And from that point on he was the Cyber Pioneer.

MP: Now, to move on to another point, why do you conclude your text with a reference to a “sturdy mental explosion”? What is it?

LP: In a way, I think it has more to do with potential. That there is also some kind of explosion that could happen. The way that these thought-forms are shells and somehow also weapons. There is something uncontrollable about them, because they are immune to judgement.

MP: So there's an ambiguity attached to them.

LP: Yes, exactly.

MP: Now that I see the boomerang-shaped T-F 3 in your hands it makes me think that the shape is familiar, but at the same time I cannot really relate it to something specific, and especially not to the book by Besant and Leadbeater. On the other hand, I believe that something close to the other form of T-F 3, the bullet-shaped one, is in their book...

LP: Yeah, that's true.

MP: As I said, the boomerang-shaped T-F 3 looks familiar, so maybe I'm missing something... Can you tell me something about it?

LP: The first thing I did after my session with the clairvoyant was just to make them in clay. I agree that the one in iron has this kind of bullet-shape that you also see a version of somewhere in *Thought Forms*,

though not in three dimensions.

MP: But, this was intended, or you found out afterwards?

LP: Again, it's hard to tell what's what, because I have seen Besant and Leadbeater's pictures so many times... But these were the ones that sort of fell into my lap in my vision.

MP: Actually, in *Thought-Forms*, the bullet refers to an "upward rush to devotion".

LP: Yeah, although I think it's a little more... I don't know, I think it's colder, somehow.

MP: Not so hot with devotion, then.

LP: No. No, I don't think so. In my vision, the bullet was kind of in the distance. Hovering. It was further away, and, now that it's made, it's... ten kilograms, or something. It's really heavy. Ten kilos worth of "cool" thought.

MP: But what about the boomerang-shaped one then? Where is it coming from? I mean the shape?

LP: I'm really not sure. While I was making the form in clay, I felt that I could not be precise enough with it. The smoothness. So I got a good friend of mine to make it in wood. Afterwards we had it made in bronze. I think that Besant and Leadbeater's thought-forms are very beautiful, and I love them very much, but it was important for me to keep this idea in mind that if our brains might have changed during the last hundred years, our thoughts might have changed, too. And if our thoughts have changed, so have our needs and demands. And a change in demand could also mean a change in supply. It was with this openness of mind I went to the clairvoyant, hoping to discover thought-forms not defined by Besant and Leadbeater's book.

MP: Right. Well, I think this is perfectly consistent with how the book has influenced the world of art from the moment of its publication, in the sense that it is absolutely logical that artists did not take the book and just copy from it. But rather took the process of producing these images as a model. And in the process of course you constantly obtain different results. What is more interesting in the whole story about thought-forms is not the images themselves, but rather how you get to the images, and what the images do. I think that's more important.

LP: Exactly.

MP: In the title you use an interesting formulation: "How to *program*". Why do you think you can program thought-forms? The idea of "programming" has all sorts of associations, especially informatics of course, and seems to point more generally to something that has a specific computational technique to it. In that sense, it doesn't sound like a mystical or spiritual revelation, it's not something that takes shape all of a sudden. I mean, programming makes you think of something that goes in steps, like constructing something with building blocks. So it's not something you receive in your mind with a definite shape and which is

ready to use.

LP: True. I was playing with a notion I have that all thought-forms and concepts, like mindfulness for instance, are highly programmed. There is an irony to it. How to program your *self*, how to program your mind and use it correctly. To become more efficient, more productive as a worker or whatnot. Corporations put employees through courses in mindfulness in order to maximize performance. In the text, I become the Programmer who calls on the Cyber Pioneer – very much in the spirit of wanting to program something, wanting to produce. And then somehow, it fails. Something very material, very much resistant to being programmed comes out instead. Does that make sense?

MP: Absolutely. But that also means that what you have with T-F 3 is not really a result of programming.

LP: No, it isn't.

MP: Right. That is an important point, because I understand more clearly now that the title includes this critical aspect – a kind of culture criticism.

LP: Yeah. Today we are sitting in front of our computers, programming our lives. All the time out there, projecting ourselves into the world. Away from matter. And I think it's interesting, because a lot of spiritual ideas are based on wanting to get away from matter. You want to be uplifted and freed from your body. But the way we use it today is more like... we morph into 1-0-0-1-0's that can be flung through cyberspace. For me, the profile hell of *online-ness* relates more to T-F 1 – this incessant projection of egoic selves connecting with other projections of other egoic selves. The photographs on the T-F 1 satellite display my personal hard-drives, placed in different Malevich-like constellations. All 12 TB of my transportable artsy thought-forms. But what if the absence of matter is in danger of inducing a carelessness of some sort, with the spark of life getting lost in some kind of cerebral haze? Come to think of it, in English, when we speak of worth, we talk about things “mattering”. I haven't thought of that before. “It doesn't matter”, as in absence of matter, or “it does matter”, as in presence of matter. Today, materialism is identified as the culprit, the evildoer.

MP: I sometimes think that, in fact, the Internet is the actual materialization of imagination, of human imagination. This means the realization of things that were perhaps abstract in the past and now get a concrete form through this information network. But again, there is a kind of ambiguity there, because that which is so powerful and gives you access to so much information always runs the risk of overload, as you said. That is precisely the same kind of ambiguity and danger that you also find in magic.

LP: Yes. I think that is what I'm trying to convey with the Cyber Pioneer. He is somehow the Internet, you could say. He's O-so-connected. Connected of course to another world, but today you could also say that the Internet is the one with the Delphic abilities.

MP: Yes, it is fascinating to connect clairvoyance with the Internet. As I said with respect to thought-forms in the context of Theosophy, one of the interesting things about clairvoyance is the problem of privacy. When you are able to read the minds of others, well, the others cannot have secrets anymore. And this is so close to what happens with the Internet. There is a constant, growing erosion of privacy.

Increasingly, all secrets are within the reach of everybody who has sufficient skills to use the Internet as a mouse would use a lump of cheese.

LP: And that is where I think matter needs to re-enter time. Because matter won't necessarily reveal its own internal doings. But on the Internet, online, you are revealing so many things about yourself, all the time. Now it's as if the Internet itself could find out about you. Your thoughts. It can scrutinize your thought-forms, your wants and needs, and respond with either praise or punishment.

MP: So the Internet is kind of a big clairvoyant, or, to use a more traditional image, the big eye in the sky. It is a very powerful image that has a long history and tradition. Maybe the Internet is this kind of eye that is able to penetrate all mysteries, to go through all barriers. Unless it finds something that has the power to resist, of course, such as T-F 3.

LP: Yeah [laughs]. People need to tap into the cosmic supply of T-F 3 so they can be a little more resistant!

MP: I wonder if this power of resistance also has to do with the fact that you can at least use T-F 3 to smash your computer.

LP: Exactly!

MP: I am almost afraid when you have it in your hand. I'm afraid that you will bang it on my head!

LP: [laughs] That's why I'm sitting with it, you know?

MP: Now, can I tell you a kinky thought I have about the boomerang-shaped T-F 3?

LP: [laugh] Yeah

MP: Well, I have to tell you, I mean, the first time I saw it, I thought it was some kind of sex toy.

LP: Yeah exactly, I know. In a way I'm happy you say it, because I was also thinking that when I was making it "oh my god, this is really strange". But then nobody mentioned it, and I kind of went, "OK, people don't see it". But apparently, some people do.

MP: ...or maybe they see it and they just don't say it.

LP: Yeah, maybe they don't say it.

MP: ... although I suppose Denmark is emancipated enough.

LP: [laughs]

MP: But this was not an intention, it was more like a side effect of how you conceived the T-F 3...

LP: Yeah, it was a side effect of how it looked when it fell into my lap. Which is also kind of kinky come to think of it.

MP: Right. I'm usually very suspicious of coincidences like that. I mean, I am no psychoanalyst, but...

LP: I totally agree, I also find it really interesting that there is this... side to it.

MP: In any case, it makes sense in the framework of your artistic discourse, knowing that there is an explicit sexual side to it. This was visible enough in the *Anatta Experiment*, for instance.

LP: Yes, and I do believe power and sexuality are very closely connected.

MP: Absolutely. Now, to move on to something else, are you familiar with Gurdjieff?

LP: Yes.

MP: Because... when I read the accompanying text for *How to Program and Use T-F*, the first thing that came to my mind was Gurdjieff. Maybe something about the language, but also something about the concepts themselves. I am thinking in particular of *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson*. There is a lot about space there, the book in fact can even be seen as an early example of science fiction. But apart from space travel, the book is also full of fantastic neologisms. So, when I read "Cyber Pioneer" and "T-F Programmer" in your text it made me think of Gurdjieff.

LP: That's funny because, in earlier works, I have been very much into his notion of the many selves, hypnotic sleep – that we're constantly in a state of hypnotic sleep – and so on. But actually, I have never read the book, although I have it on my shelf.

MP: It's a very complicated book. Very, very hard to read and understand.

LP: [laughs] Yeah. I have browsed it and it's so long and I kind of went "oh I need to have like... more time".

MP: Yeah, it's quite a thick book, in all senses. And it's very difficult to understand because it's full of words he himself invents. So often you don't know exactly what he's talking about, apart from a broad picture of the evolution of humanity over millions of years, our destiny, our relationship with the Moon, and so on. And it boils down to the idea that we are all idiots in the end. Other books by Gurdjieff are a much easier read, such as *Meetings with Remarkable Men*.

LP: That one I've read. You know, I made this piece around his female group in Paris, "The Rope", in 2008. I based it on one of the members, Jane Heap. She was an American publisher who joined The Rope and then later became the leader of a Gurdjieff group in London.

MP: So you have an interest in Gurdjieff?

LP: Yeah, totally. Again, there's this... if we talk about Gurdjieff, or Wilhelm Reich, they too have this sense that... that there's something about *matter*. Maybe for Reich especially. His Orgone Box, in which you put yourself and it vitalizes and heals you. That different materials – like deciding to use bronze and iron with regard to thought-forms – have different effects on how energies are conducted, and that structures emphasize this capacity. How energies enter wood, how iron contains them and so on. Reich was very specific about how things should be built.

MP: And yet again, with Reich we come full circle back to sexuality.

LP: [laughs]

MP: I suppose we'll have to leave it for another conversation.

LP: ...or another booklet!

MP: Thanks. Lea.

LP: Thank you, Marco.

**ANATTA EXPERIMENT**  
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# PROLOGUE

## *odd, indexical ideas on the Multi-breasted Monstrosity*

*Lea Porsager*

*Thought-forms and texts in and around the Anatta Experiment were created in collaboration with Synnøve B. Brøgger.*

The *Anatta Experiment* revolves around Monte Verità in Ascona, Switzerland. In the early 1900s, this hill served as a lodestone for spiritual rebellion, attracting anarchists, free-love advocates, Dadaists, theosophists, psychoanalysts, and occultists, all rejecting an increasingly materialistic society. Monte Verità, the *Progressive Underground* and its *Revolt Against Civilization*, expressed in a *dance of nonviolent action*. The diversity of discourses and influences at Monte Verità has resulted in many, often conflicting voices within its historical documents. The only common denominator seemed to be the fact that Monte Verità attracted people whose ideas – anarchic and strange – found little nurturing in established society. This search for something different, something *other*, became the point of departure for the *Anatta Experiment's* “far out” cosmic longing.

In the late summer of 2011, seven friends were invited to Casa Anatta, Monte Verità's principal building, in its final moments before undergoing major restoration. Casa Anatta became the scene of a weeklong “vertical drop” into tantric laws and processes normally obscured by the noise of productivity, ultimately finding its crux within Harald Szeemann's archive and his puzzling *Strukturmutter*. 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. The “nippled woman” became the gateway to the mountain, *anatta* and to the *lived* aspect of the experiment.

*Anatta* in Buddhism refers to the notion of “not self, not I, not mine”. In early Buddhist texts, the Buddha commonly uses the word when teaching that all things perceived by the senses are not really “I” or “mine” and should therefore not be clung to. 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. 7 currents with the mobility of the Nervous System and the plasticity of the cerebral cortex – fluid and flame-like, elastic and magnetic.

In its *doings*, the experiment passed through rays of fire – something in search of something beyond the grasp of judgement and criticism. *Anatta*, Not-I and Neo-Ego, a weird mixture of fact and fiction and something about the death, too. Spirituality and occultism often call for some sort of passage through one's own death, regarded as a profound inner experience. Death as a vertical concept, the hippie ego-death (the Mountain being a pre/ proto-hippie movement, barefooted, naked and openminded!). In search of less ego, more cosmos!

The Asconian notion of the art of the insane – the cult of mad art and extreme expression that allied itself with protest art such as Dada and later Surrealism – is very much present in the experiment's source material, but as it progressed, the theoretical references took a back seat to the experiment itself. Obscured and detached from its sources, the *Anatta Experiment* became something more autonomous. A schizophrenic, mumbling echo of theosophical concepts, dadaistic speculations and lived experiences. In search of a space of non-violent madness, the experiment dealt with avant-garde spasms, transformation, anar-

chy of self, mothers and Mutters, psychotherapeutic processes and different manifestations of fire within seven blazing spheres that all happened to be friends.

### *Strukturmutter – Flower-Powered Mother Revolution*

Mothers, breasts, Milky Way. When researching Harald Szeemann's Monte Verità archive, the Mother figure is inescapable. The archive is loaded with rumors and Mother-myth, whether it is Szeemann's enamored landscape of tits, the life of Gräser (*Ascona's Zarathustra, A Man for All and None*) in a cave with *Magna Mater* ("Mountain Mother", the embodiment of the fertile Earth, a Goddess of caverns and mountains, walls and fortresses, nature, wild animals, particularly lions and bees) or the Ordo Templis Orientalis (OTO), the occult fraternity that had its female lodge in Ascona. Otto Gross (student of Freud and author of such writings as *Journal on the Psychological Problems of Anarchism*) was fascinated by Bachofen and ideas of matriarchy: "The coming revolution is a revolution for the mother-right" he wrote in 1913. In his last years, Gross, the Asconian psychiatrist, tried to restore the cult of Astarte (Gross' emphatic focus on transgression was motivated by a profound realization of everyone's and everything's interconnectedness). There seems to be a complex craving for Mother in both sexes. Rudolf von Laban, Otto Gross and Gustav Gräser all detested their fathers. The idea of God as Mother, the divinity of Nature and Woman, was in its rebellion a word-renouncing religion. Emmy Hennings was probably the mother of Dada – Ida Hoffmann the mother of Monte Verità.

Reminiscent of the unwilling, hysterical *Vaginal Odysseys* of Freudian times, the *Anatta Experiment* could easily be labeled some sort of self-developmental "Get to Know Your Inner Self" retreat. Only the caption would read more like this: "Get to Know Your Inner Not-self and Follow the Puny Flame through the Cosmic Mud into the Void of " (in other words, not to be confused with becoming more self, more harmonious). Anger, joy or sadness arose from one self or (neo-)self to another, under constant exposure to yet some (neo-)other, bringing it all into play. *A will to be pulverized* was perhaps a spiritual necessity, but one cannot simply remove oneself from the equation, nor can one execute an experiment without exerting will. So what to do but welcome the tangled dialectic in which will and the surrender of will – ego and the repudiation of ego – ebbs and flows in a continuous interchange. In order to surrender, there must be something to offer up to the fire – no heat without friction. No Flame. To give oneself, as a project, over to transgressions that may seem mad, violent and spastically far out. In the mist of *anatta*, the heavy hand of judgement fell. The process was immensely fragile, but how does one deal with That Which is Fragile when fragility itself seems to be the most blazing flame of all? Strukturmutter the Scary Nurturer provided her anattaist pups with eggs and flames; "Eggs thou art, and unto Eggs thou shalt return". To be born again as eggs. How disturbing!

Harald Szeemann's Strukturmutter transmuted into what became the *Anatta Experiment's* Geometrical Strukturmutter: a 7-leveled index built into the floor with a dada-head-cunt-flower appendix. Mutter was no longer a Goddess. She had become a grid, a matrix of cosmic fire-potential conducted by the coiling rays of – a *geometrical-astronomical-cerebral-celestial* monstrosity, impenetrable in her fervent mystery and painfully creepy in her absence. The all-too-long and moonless tunnel to the vertical realm. The human form undone as a geometrical spectacle.

### *The Mountain of Truth – Burning Problems and Triangular Attitudes*

The 7 anattaists were not yogis or Monte Verità experts or certified researchers of the occult or members of secret societies or affiliates of spooky men-only lodges. So, the leap to *anatta* was as an unruly and passionate process – a search for something more elemental like eggs, breasts, electric fires, solar logos', the Seven Star Sisters or a Hugo Ball hat – carried out under the banner: "*Love is the Law, Love under Will*" (Aleister Crow-

ley). Specks of miniature flames, or burning problems, on the face of the earth (an *un*-sacred planet, according to Alice Bailey's cosmic law), caught between the severe reality of matter and the relentless flux of *anatta*. The shift from thinking to *doing* is one big, horrendous leap. But, as potential future eggs, one can try.

According to Theodor Reuss, Aleister Crowley's soul and/ or fire was with them on the mountain in the shape of *The Book of Law* which Reuss had translated into German. In a correspondence with Crowley, Reuss wrote: "Let this news encourage you! We live in your Work!!!" . The experiment's alternative title *Anational Congress of the Multi-Breasted Monstrosity* refers to Theodore Reuss's O.T.O. initiative "Anational Congress for Organizing the Reconstruction of Society on Practical Cooperative Lines" which took place on Monte Verità in 1917. Even though the *Anatta Experiment* did not involve any direct reference to occult O.T.O. rituals or Aleister Crowley /666/ The Beast himself, it would still be accurate to say that Crowley's wildness and focus on

actualizing ideas – manifesting them as *livings* and *doings* – had a certain influence on how the experiment was planned and executed. Crowley re-entered the experiment in the editing-process of the film in a scene where one of the anattaists walk up the stairs into darkness, and suddenly, on her head, a LAM-like shape appears! LAM is a figure drawn by Aleister Crowley in 1917/ 18, the *Egg of the Spirit* represented by the Head – a portal to other dimensions (LAM the Little Grey Weirdo who's Numeric Value is 71 had been present during the week in Casa Anatta, everybody agreed!).

Theosophy with all its eccentricities also found its ways into the *Anatta Experiment*, as Alice Bailey's *Cosmic Physical Index* became the new representation of Strukturmutter, replacing Harald Szeemann's Artemis-Goddess. The Geometrical Strukturmutter – The Mother Ship from which smaller crafts are launched and maintained (you *invoke* the Anattaists into the Circle. You *evoke* Mutter into the Triangle. Gosh! A Treatise on Cosmic Fire!). Although the *Anatta Experiment's* floor-index is nearly an exact copy of Bailey's index, small changes have been made. *The Egoic Lotus* became Mutter's Palmate Cunt-flower, which in turn received the numeric value of 71 petals (improving the experiment's probability of reaching space through LAM the Tantric Time-traveler!). What became the Geometrical Strukturmutter's triangular crowns were collapsed and folded while her cuntflower, eggs, ovoids and iron dada-heads remained erected.

O Mountainous LEBENSREFORM! O Countercultural *revolutionary-spiritual-psychosexual-utopian* Ambition! O Monte Verità. The *Anatta Experiment* musters up a tiny fire of mixed material: "*Transfixed by the egglessness of their own flame, they tried*". A burning transversal 7-voiced symphony of small dissolving egos, caving utopian triangles, sagging thought-forms and contorted truth-concepts. Eggs still leaping!

*Geometrical Figures, Thought-forms, Indexes! Eggs, Brains, Theater of Exhausted Identities!*  
*Celestial Bodies, Obscene Gestures, Poetic Speculations, Ironic Space-Time, Autonomous Resistance!*

The following people have at one point or throughout the process influenced, inspired and shaped the Anatta Experiment in more or less schizophrenic ways. On and around the mountain: Otto Gross (a champion of early anti-psychiatry and sexual liberation), Emmy Hennings (performer and poet), Hugo Ball (“We are like birds in cages surrounded by lions”, one of the leading figures in Dada and a participant at Monte Verità), Theodor Reuss (Anglo-German tantric occultist, anarchist, journalist, singer, promoter of Women’s Liberation and head of O.T.O. (Ordo Templi Orientis)), Gustav Gräser (artist and outsider), Hans Arp (sculptor, painter, poet), Sophie Taeuber-Arp (sculptor, painter, poet), Rudolf von Laban (dance artist and theorist) and Mary Wigman (German dancer and choreographer). Other sources include Alice A. Bailey, Aleister Crowley, H. B. Blavatsky, Antonin Artaud, Maurice Blanchot, George Bataille, R.D. Laing, Wilhelm Reich, William Blake, Hilma af Klint, Wassily Kandinsky, Annie Basant, C. W. Leadbeater and Rudolf Steiner.

# An Egg With a Future

## *Paranoia and Networks in the Anatta Experiment*

BY LARS BANG LARSEN

*The essay “An Egg With a Future” is a version of a paper presented by Lars Bang Larsen at the congress “Anational Congress of the Multi-Breasted Monstrosity.” dOCUMENTA(13), Karlsruhe Park, 26th of July 2012*

The pairing of the themes of paranoia and networks may at first seem somewhat willed, coming as they do from different realms and conceptual realities. In the following I will presume that they at least share a status as problematics; that is, that they are not stable figures but involved in a certain conceptual dynamic of changes or transferences of meaning, and that this dynamic also revolves around certain properties and qualities in which the two themes reflect and dramatise each other.

In short, I primarily understand paranoia to be an aesthetic principle and procedure that stems from Surrealism. This aspect concerns artistic method. My angle on networks is a historical or sociological one, related to the information economy; an angle that concerns a cultural critique of contemporary life. In relation to Lea Porsager’s *Anatta Experiment*, you could say that paranoia is the ‘how’ of her artistic dramatisation, and networks is a ‘why.’

I’m not assuming that my discussion will reveal or explain what the Experiment is actually about; I’m not presuming to trace an unacknowledged subtext in Porsager’s work, as if I were digging meaningfully in its unconscious. One can ask if the *Anatta Experiment* has an unconscious at all. It is a piece that lets it all hang out, and in this sense is all surface: whatever Porsager’s group of participants-performers got up to on the Monte Verità is played out for everybody to see—shamelessly, amorally, unworriedly. However on the other hand it belongs to the story (the narrative that can only be that of the Experiment) that not everything is transparent. The opacity of the Experiment is not due to the fact that something is deliberately hidden, but that there are plummeting depths in the desiring bodies of the performers (very un-pornographically, we don’t know where their pleasure will take them); in the play of the text that explains the work (or does not); in the strange collisions between locations and time zones that the work provokes. There is a subterranean undertow and a great openness, then, in and beneath the work’s surface appearances—its images and spatial elements, and the symbolic order that the Experiment is part of (the institution of art).

When I try to trace the presence of the occult in Porsager through the twinned themes of networks and paranoia, I understand the occult simply in terms of Thomas de Quincey’s delightful definition of superstition, namely as *sympathy with the invisible*. De Quincey, writing in his essay “Modern Superstition” from 1840, admitted that superstition can be “injurious, degrading, demoralising” and “a form of non-development.”<sup>1</sup> However he also acknowledged it as much more than *Aberglaube* and old wives tales as the “possibility of religion,” and crucially as “the great test of man’s grandeur, as an earthly combining with a celestial.”<sup>2</sup> The themes of networks and paranoia are similarly double edged: they can be entropic, but can also forge great and surprising links between immanence and transcendence, between earthly bodies and celestial ideas that cannot possibly find rest in this world.

In his essay “Coming Forth by Night” (2010), Marco Pasi writes that the occult is typically seen as either reactionary or revolutionary. The question is if art related to the occult can be judged according the same categories. It will not surprise the reader that to me works like *Anatta Experiment* are closer to being revolutionary—even if the notion of revolution, when we talk about it in an aesthetic context, often provokes a knee-jerk, progressive understanding of history; but of course there are also capitalist revolutions, fascist revolutions, fundamentalist revolutions, etc. Perhaps we can pre-empt and bypass the potentially naïve, automatic value judgment of the revolutionary by instead calling works such as Porsager’s *Experiment* dramatisations. A dramatisation is not something crystalline, clear and distinct. As Gilles Deleuze writes, the clear and distinct is the claim of the Apollonian world of concepts and representation; “But beneath representation there is always the idea and its distinct-obscure depth, a drama beneath every logos.”<sup>4</sup> Works such as the *Anatta Experiment* are dramatisations that don’t grow from modernity’s mainstream of critical thought but from other sources, other ideas, from an Enlightenment we didn’t get, perhaps: a radical enlightenment that exists next to, or beneath the logos—capital and instrumental reason—that we have come to know.

### *Vive la paranoia*

As mentioned I consider paranoia an aesthetic principle, a question of artistic method. I am underlining this because I used to think of it in historical terms of how artists employed occult dramatisation as a response to 9/11. As a violent refutation of the presumption of history having ended with the demise of the Soviet union, the Al-Qaeda attacks on the US, and the wars that came in its wake, clearly started up history again and reintroduced a sense of global tragedy in the popular mind that perhaps hadn’t been present since the Vietnam War. The campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as the many covert operations that are still undertaken in the name of freedom, were the results of a paranoid synthesis: they came out of a belligerent demand for truth that evoked an invisible enemy who was constructed to represent an absolute, historical negativity that could and should be rooted out. It seems that the Western response to 9/11 fits pathological paranoid interpretation in a general sense: the paranoid person or system is always right. Each new element, each bit of new information always fits the bill, adds to the projected pattern that is the excited composition of a big picture that is rife with Meaning and calls for judgment.

However if one reads the 9/11 attacks and the subsequent events as paranoid, one invariably runs the risk of pathologising paranoia and rendering it politically harmful. But there are ways to think about paranoia as a productive force, and with which we can tease out some of its goodness. It can be embraced as an inherent opposition to dominant reality principles, because it is offensive and confusing to those who try to hide their brutal interests behind notions of morality, culture, religion, politics, or art.

(As an important afterthought to the above, one could even argue that the entire post-9/11 charade, with its fraudulent truth claims, was in fact only the simulacrum of a paranoia, a calculated and cynical staging of an obnoxious fiction whose main purpose was to cement the status quo and provide opportunities for business. This would indicate a cold-blooded indifference that lies at a deeper level of corruption than the mercurial meta-nervousness of paranoia. Or perhaps one shouldn’t under-estimate power’s capacity to enjoy the symptoms that it produces of and by itself: that is, maybe they actually believe them themselves?)

Can paranoia be anything else than a single logic that becomes a handle on the world, The One Mania, a monopathology? How does one exceed the paranoid’s reduction of the world to one overruling determination? Can a paranoid method do what is otherwise impossible for the paranoid mind, namely accept that which is outside its own total perspective, its seamless and airtight projections?

Whenever truth becomes exclusionary, phobic or controlling, it can no longer be shared: in such a scenario truthfulness and sincerity become offensive. Instead of truth, then, Deleuze reminds us, art must rely on what Nietzsche called „The power of falsity.” This is a substitution of the form of the true in favour of other forces that resolve the search for truth „(...) in favour of the false and its artistic, creative power.”<sup>5</sup> The power of the false is a way of celebrating creative means of multiplying perspectives, of vivifying the simulacra.

This is all as Salvador Dalí would have wanted it according to the „paranoiac method“ that he outlined in his famous essay *l’Ane Pourri*, „The Stinking Ass“ (1930). Here Dalí describes aesthetic paranoia as a process of deliberate distortion, a grimacing back at power and reality. The most dynamic of psychoanalytic insights since it is global and extrovert, connecting the inside of meaning with its outside, and not concerned with primal scenes and originary truths in the basement of the individual mind, Dalí enlists paranoia as a means of artistic production that “systematize[s] confusion” and fails to “harmonize with reality.”<sup>6</sup>

As a result identity and purpose are shaken, and multiple images are released that create doubles and *doppelgänger*. Perhaps we can translate this to how Porsager invited a group of “friends” to carry out the *Anatta Experiment*; a feverish being-together, rather than an authored situation. Unforgettably, Porsager characterises the Experiment as “an awkward staging of an act that indeed was not an act, but a venereal plunge into lameness.”<sup>7</sup> Happy days!

The paranoid refusal to behave properly, and the refusal to identify with any existing or coming power, can affirm such an explosive communication, such a plunge into lameness, as a kind of projectlessness and egolessness that is channelled through an unbound social energy and subject to spontaneity and desire. In Porsager’s own words it amounts to “take a position that is resonant with the mobility of the nervous system.”<sup>8</sup>

Through paranoia we can create events and effects, and movements and fictions that will literally move us. In Henry James’s famous 1898 novella, *Turn of the Screw*, the protagonist declares when she accepts the position as a governess at a country estate: „(...) that, I think, is what I came for—to be carried away.”<sup>9</sup> She then begins to see ghosts that—maybe—also appear to the reader... Spectres or not, this is in fact a concise definition of why we’re looking at art: to be carried away, to fall in love with a fiction, to escape the stability of identity, to erase what we already know.

This is the aesthetic exit from the monologue of pathological paranoia, and from the pitfalls of the paranoiac method, as seen for instance in the way that Dalí’s Surrealism collapsed in kitsch and how other, comparable styles, such as 1960s psychedelia, altogether dissolved form and often eclipsed the very possibility of aesthetic self-reflexion, too. This aesthetic escape route is the “not self, not I, not mine” that is the Buddhist principle of Anatta, with the obliteration of the ego being a tenet that is decidedly un-paranoid in the pathological sense of the term, given that it removes the paranoid fantasy’s subjective teleology that seeks to reign in and command symptoms and signs.

One can think of the Experiment’s motif of the egg—the wooden eggs that cluster on the installation’s floor like a new embryonic population about to flood the world—from the same point of view of egoless- and unfinishedness: the egg is the form of the proto-being, that which is-not-yet. The egg is the perfect shape for the virtual, understood as a thing or a body that is considered not where it already is, but in its movement and its pre-formed state in which it is inseparably bound up with the real without resembling it, without being obliged to the real in any objective or representational way. Porsager talks about the egg as a kind of spacecraft; it is the vehicle that will carry us away. In this way the *Anatta Experiment* privileges—in an aesthetic, methodical sense—paranoid figures of dissolution and regeneration, of becomings that can

perhaps best happen via the radical regress, the spiritual necessity of the “will to be pulverised” (Porsager).<sup>10</sup> Get carried away, leave behind your common sensically organised self and become an egg with a future.

You could say that a paranoid artistic method sits in an ambiguous place between doing and undoing: it undoes ego and consensuated reality — but at the same time it is a methodology with its own kind of rigour or consistency. Because our projections inveigle us, they oblige us to imagine and produce according to the particular (or idiosyncratic) logics and systems. The paranoid method is not shorthand for a freak-out or an orgy: it is a motivated experiment.

### *The unimaginable globality of networks*

One can talk about connectivity as a precondition for paranoid interpretations of the aesthetic as well as the pathological kind. In the paranoid phantasmagoria, it suddenly all comes together and yields an extraordinary meaning.

In the present historical space we are connected through networks: contemporary life has become subject to the internet and globalised capital as the characteristic media of our time. One of the critical terms that we use for the network is the rhizome, a term that we owe to Deleuze and Félix Guattari. In a felicitous phrase Umberto Eco calls the rhizome „an unimaginable globality“ that poses a fundamental challenge to representation and autonomy (both of the latter, of course, are not only key concepts in aesthetics but also politics). The network is an order that you can’t fathom or gauge, because it might be coextensive with all that possibly exists. It can only be speculated about, conjured up, re-enacted—or perhaps countered artistically with things that exist impossibly. The network has some kind of ineffable sovereignty, or an agency that we can try to identify but remains unknowable and nonhuman. In this it is already close to theology, as its planetary transmissions call for sympathy with the invisible, or the absent.

Eco’s definition of the rhizome as an unimaginable globality links back to the old signification of the concept of the network, with its associations of underground activity, conspiracy, and intrigue: the mafia is an insidious reticular structure, terrorist organisations are connected cells etc. Taken in this sense the network is associated with secrecy, in contrast to the transparency and legality of public relationships—a signification that I believe can be extended to the ways in which public reason recede into networks that are operated by forms of infra-power (such as the obscure and uncontrolled workings of finance capital).

Why would contemporary artists challenge the contemporary condition of being networked with occult ideas and practices that have been placed outside of modernity? To answer this question one can simply point to the fact that a network is not a grid: the grid epitomises architectural and aesthetic modernism, as an interior space of reason, planning, and representation in a space of places. The network, on the other hand, is a space of conjecture, constantly proliferating exterior connections, an unstable space of flows. In other words networked life is something that was not imagined by modernity (except as its paranoid other). Hence we need to look elsewhere than modernity’s mainstream for forms with which one may critically mirror, and dramatisé, the shadowy sovereignty of the network.

Challenging the easy exchanges that take place in and around us, the occult in contemporary art can be seen as a kind of paranoid dialectical critique; a dialectics which otherwise has been lost in networked systems. Over the last decades, the dominant mode of politics has shifted from dialectical concepts and ideological struggles to systemic languages (this is the technocratic tendency that some theorists call biopolitics). An artistic critique á la Lea Porsager, on the other hand, can be called a paranoid version of Lenin’s famous dictum that everything is connected to everything else: the *Anatta Experiment* re-connects desire and critique; logos and drama; the bodies of a few women to the mass audience of the art institution; Buddhism

and visual art; feminism and the crypto-mythical *Strukturmutter*; Monte Verità and anywhere, etc. Perhaps by dramatising networked existence in occult terms artists can make work that is „as radical as reality itself“, as Lenin also said.<sup>11</sup>

As mentioned above the paranoid method is ambiguously situated between doing and undoing. This is one of the ways that the paranoid method, as per Dalí, “systematizes confusion,” does two different things at the same time. The sociologists Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello write that the network is simultaneously a “crystallised form” and a “chaotic non-form”—another self-contradictory characteristic that surely makes it hard to grasp.<sup>12</sup> The networked person is strung out in a duality that is structurally similar, between being an operator of flows and a vehicle for information. Whether you are a mover or just a relay is never quite clear.

When it becomes a social imperative to be connected, to be logged on and hooked up and transmitting, we are—to use a concept from spiritualism—*channelling* effects that have travelled far: we are media for signs, bits, money, desire, images. The comparison works the other way around, too: in the mediumistic or spiritualistic sense, channelling can be described as a networking opportunity to get in touch with people, or with nonhuman forces, that are phantasmagoria from elsewhere.

Adorno surgically defined phantasmagoria as that which effaces the traces of its production. He was—just like the Marx who held that “Occultism is for repressive times”—highly critical of the occult, vituperating it for repressing the critical mind: “astrology presents the bill for the neglect of interpretative thinking.”<sup>13</sup> In spite of Adorno’s admonitions, however, the occult may have something to tell us about ephemeral materialities because it registers the micro-event, the traces of the seemingly un-produced: every mumble, every vibration of the table, every shock received by the medium’s body is significant in the séance. The strange, affective appearances of phantasmagoric phenomena are what spiritualists call materialisations, such as when a spirit or an entity supposedly manifests itself in a body, whether that body is a human medium or another apparatus—a table or ectoplasm, light phenomena, kinetic disturbance, etc. In this sense occult materialisation may have more to do with contemporary relations of production than Adorno and Marx thought. Spiritualist materialisation may be called upon to take part in an analysis of late capital’s immaterial and fleeting relations of production; an analysis unfolding across a paranoid dramatization that takes the liberty of connecting a materialist critique with the occult.

When an artist engages in venereal plunges into lameness it is a way of working out the materiality of a connected being. These experimental states of connectedness have nothing to do with the dynamics of expansion and growth that contemporary networks dictate. In his 1973 novel *Gravity’s Rainbow*, Thomas Pynchon writes about “anti-paranoia”—a sad state of mind: “Anti-paranoia is a condition in which „nothing is connected to anything, a condition not many of us can bear for long.“ Perhaps this in fact describes the network society well. It is not that we are connected to too many things, prey to too much information, and so on: no, in our mediated lives we are in fact connected to too much nothingness, and for this reason we have become unbearably anti-paranoid.

In the *Anatta Experiment* our nervous system is re-wired by way of a paranoid mimicry that renders palpable the nothingness that surrounds us, and proposes new departures, new virtual states... New eggs.

- <sup>1</sup> Thomas De Quincey: "Modern Superstition," in *The Works of Thomas de Quincey Vol. 3.*, p. 286. Kessinger Publishing, Whitefish 2010.
- <sup>2</sup> *Op.cit.*, p. 287.
- <sup>3</sup> Marco Pasi: "Coming Forth by Night" in Vaillant (ed.): *Options With Nostrils*. Sternberg Press, Berlin / Piet Zwart Institute, Rotterdam 2010, p. 105.
- <sup>4</sup> Gilles Deleuze: "The Method of Dramatization" in *Desert Islands and Other Texts 1953-1974*. Semiotext(e), Los Angeles 2004, p. 103.
- <sup>5</sup> Gilles Deleuze: *Cinema 2. The Time-Image*. The Athlone Press, London 2000 (1985), p. 131.
- <sup>6</sup> Dalí, Salvador: "The Stinking Ass" (1930), in Harrison and Wood (eds.): *Art in Theory 1900-1990. An Anthology of Changing Ideas*. Blackwell, Oxford 1995 (1992), pp. 479-480.
- <sup>7</sup> Lea Porsager: "Anatta Experiment. Anational Congress of the Multi-Breasted Monstrosity", Unpublished working paper, 2012, n.p.
- <sup>8</sup> *Op.cit.*
- <sup>9</sup> Henry James: "Turn of the Screw" in *Turn of the Screw and Other Stories*. Oxford University Press, 2008 (1898), p.126.
- <sup>10</sup> Porsager, *op.cit.*
- <sup>11</sup> Quoted from Beaumont, Hemingway, Leslie, Roberts (eds.): *As Radical as Reality Itself. Essays on Marxism for the 21st Century*. Peter Lang, Bern 2007, p.17.
- <sup>12</sup> Luc Boltanski and Éve Chiapello: *The New Spirit of Capitalism*. Verso, London 2007 (1999), p.146.
- <sup>13</sup> T.W. Adorno: "The Stars Down to Earth: The Los Angeles Times Astrology Column" (1953), in Crook (ed.): *Theodor Adorno: The Stars Down to Earth, and other essays on the irrational in culture*. Routledge, London 2002 (1994), p. 23.