

The Compromised Audience

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Abstract

This paper begins with an outline drawing connections between fiction and delusion. I continue by turning fictionality into a device in artistic practice. I will then give an account of an exhibition that positions the spectator within fictionality, whilst being deprived of definite meaning. However, a withdrawal from meaning as reality, may function as a potential.

My case includes an artistic practice with a fictitious collaborator. This partnership is manifest in the on-going process titled Lena Séraphin, Andrea Meinin Bück and The Don Quixote Complex. The work consists of letters, drawings, imagery and documents from the Finnish Defence Force and the Imperial War Museum in London. The archival photographs are repurposed in the exhibition. They are exhibited in a narrative context in order to show that interpretation is contingent (to context).

In order to present a fictitious figure as true I have to fully claim the illusion of fiction. As a result, the audience is being compromised. This can be regarded problematic, but in my paper I regard fictionality as a productive method. Conclusively the fictitious data will be interpreted anew arguing for belief rather than knowledge. Interpretation is less seen as acknowledgment of contents than an encounter with a hybrid self that drifts between substance and insignificance. A fictional approach stresses subjectivity, designs potential and is independent of the proliferation of meaning.

Keywords; fictionality, subjectivity, the double, potential, doxa

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This article presents a motif, that concerns a blurring of fact and fiction. The Don Quixote Complex, refers to identification as a total process, a problematic state according to Jay Martin. He argues that “The identification does not stop at resemblance – it becomes total, incorporating the violent and depressive aspects of the fictional character without self-examination, in a completely scrutinized, indiscrete manner (Martin, 1988, 81).” However, as I demonstrate in artworks and presentations, identification in art can be a productive device. In order to argue for a constructive use of identification in art, this paper begins with introducing a fellow-artist and counterpart Andrea Meinin Bück. The presentation is based on artistic collaboration and an over ten-year-long correspondence. Our mutual exhibitions consist of images, both artistic photographs and documentary material, drawings and excerpts from letters. Meinin Bück is an Austrian photographer and a documentarist of European cultural heritage under the threat of demolition. In her work she has become acquainted with cultural heritage sites that are threatened because of aggressive new

construction and inadequate resources for renovation. Meinin Bück has become increasingly disillusioned about the factors that drive the preservation of cultural values and her burning interest has resulted in radicalisation. Lena Séraphin is a Finnish visual artist and currently a doctoral candidate at the Aalto University in Finland. Her research investigates the potential of fictionality in contemporary arts. Séraphin completed a radioessay titled *The Life-thirsting Shadow*, show-casing the literary motif of the double for a broad audience, in 2013 for YLE/Radio Vega. Writer Kurt Vonnegut has shown in his works, how people come alive when they are in character and play a role (Vonnegut, 2010). He conveys a conception of art as a transformative force. Vonnegut published a short story entitled *Who Am I This Time?* in 1968. However, it had been published as *My Name Is Everyone* in 1961. The two titles summon a question and an answer. Vonnegut requests identities and answers by opening potential for projected subjectivity. The literary motif of the double or the *Doppelgänger* can be regarded as a study of projected subjectivity. My work with Andrea Meinin Bück brings the double into a visual contemporary realm.

I became acquainted with Andrea Meinin Bück via a plethora of disreputable articles in the French media thirteen years ago. At the time, Meinin Bück, an Austrian photographer born in 1968, had a contract with the Vera Incessu Patuit Dea Foundation.¹ Her assignment was to document European cultural heritage on the verge of abandon. In her work, she visited cultural heritage sites that were threatened because of aggressive new construction and inadequate resources for renovation. She became increasingly disillusioned about the factors that drove the preservation of cultural values. Her burning interest resulted in radicalisation. On one tragic night thirteen years ago, good intentions led to shocking consequences. Meinin Bück has been serving a life sentence for the murder of a French property agent since 2001.

Liebe Lena,

10/12 2001

Thank you for your kind letter and interest. Yes, I do get a lot of post, most of it is twisted fan mail of all sorts. Some see prison like a resort. My vacation is of a permanent nature, not really holidays when it lasts forever. I don't have access to the internet so emails are not possible, but please do read my note as one of many to be sent northbound.

Andrea

Andrea Meinin Bück was both arrested and released in 1998, and convicted as late as 2001. The court processes have been obscure and even ambiguous, as some forensic evidence has been neglected. The crime was committed in Arbresle, in south-eastern France when Meinin Bück was carrying out a commission for VIPD. Her project was to photograph the eighteenth-century Louis Quinze-style castle, le Château Guereule. According to what was originally stated, a disastrous accident had taken place. The damage affected by a spring mistral resulted in power cuts and a large part of the telephone landlines in the entire Rhône district were mute. During heavy nightly rainfall the property agent Michel Le Boeuf had volunteered to ensure the wellbeing of Meinin Bück and her two assistants, Jean-Paul Klevemühle and Steven Aldrich, at the isolated château. Le Boeuf was mistaken for an intruder. He died of a brain haemorrhage due to blows by a blunt object.

Lena

2/10 2005

Today I'm not doing anything at all. My cell is transforming and I want to enjoy that. I asked to draw the starry sky on my ceiling but I wasn't granted permission to use paint. I drew on the wall instead, a beast with horns and a blown up belly is my adoration now. During nights I whisper its name, Bête.

Yours, Belle

After her release in 1998 new substantial evidence was detected and numerous cross-examinations were conducted. They led to a more accurate and more unsettling picture of events. Klevemühle, Aldrich and Meinin Bück had a joint project, which was defined as a folie à trois syndrome. A throw of a single die had provoked the killing. The trio decided that the winner would have the opportunity to manifest what they regarded as real power. A carrier bag from Carrefour stuffed under a staircase eventually revealed the truth: A stained wig, a VIPD yearbook entitled Personality and Culture on the Verge of Abolition, tattered clothes with semen and cut-outs from papers. Surprisingly, Andrea Meinin Bück was the sole person to be arrested for the murder.

To you

11.14 2007

I look at myself as a fading reflection. A mirror showed how contrasts slowly disappear. The light was bleached, washed out. My hair faded, my eyebrows disappeared. My facial features were flattened. I tried to stare at them to keep them there, but I disappeared. I poured out of the mirror.

From

Meinin Bück acted according to her ideals, believing that she was taking society towards a better direction, but her dedication carried her to a borderline state. Sentiment and judgment became obscured. As a result of a ten-year-long correspondence we held a mutual art exhibition in 2011. It was entitled Lena Séraphin, Andrea Meinin Bück & The Don Quixote Complex. It depicted a journey to a destructive borderline and the way back to reality – a reality that frightens Meinin Bück. “I don't need to give in to senseless intentions any more, but it is difficult to distinguish what is real and what isn't, to be who you are without assuming a role.”ⁱⁱ

Identification as potential

Miguel de Cervantes' novel *The Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote of La Mancha* dates from 1605 and 1615. Alonso Quijano, the protagonist, assumes a new identity in order to measure up to the ideals he adopts from chivalric romance novels. Quijano's case is acknowledged in the novel. He suffers from false identification due to too much reading. In order to expel the magical powers of fiction, holy water is sprinkled and books are burned as a means to exorcise fictionality. A blurring of fact and fiction, described by Jay Martin as possession, takes place.

Steven, Paul and me slipped into being saviours on a mission of god knows what. We were sent to Italy by Vera where a family was planning to sell their 17th century park. I mean the parks actual future lied within a shopping mall. What might they have there then? A Gourmet Kitchen Exquisite Hyper World? Our idea or the lesson was to break into their home and give them a good fright. "If you sell the park, something bad happens." And when it didn't work out I collapsed. Yes and no. I can look back at it now. But it makes me estranged. Because I really, truly loved that park. For me its demolition was a personal loss. Why should beauty be something I can't keep? The destruction of the green theatre was a breaking point for me. A bit difficult to say but humanity was lost in me and for me. I rejected everything.

A

A visual transformation towards the Don Quixote Complex can be seen in Meinin Bück's photographs from 1998, shot shortly before the tragic events, when her ever more utopian fight for building conservation led to the irrevocable conclusion. Was art making a catalyst, a triggering factor generating radicalization? I quote critic Harri Mäcklin's response

"Meinin Bück's photographs can only be described as eerie: derelict houses, overgrown parks where something unknown lurks behind wild bushes, faded signs of human presence, decrepit statues, and spider webs where raindrops form pearl necklaces. The images are dominated by melancholic anticipation, almost intolerable silence. The ominous nature of the works increases when you know what they drove their creator to do (Mäcklin, 2011)."



Andrea Meinin Bück, Petite Dove, 1998

Meinin Bück referred to a particular image, *The Petite Dove*, as an auto-portrait. When I commented on the genre, she described her entire production between 1996 and 1998 as auto-portraiture. This is an evaluation given in retrospect, a post-construction that does not include an intentional output. But even so, it has an impact on the self-portrait. In this case it depicts what the pictured person sees. The French philosopher Jacques Rancière discusses literary theorist and semiotician Roland Barthes' concepts of *studium* and *punctum* as concepts reducing photography to transportation arguing that "Thus, he [Barthes] makes photography into transport: transport of the unique sensible quality of the thing or the being photographed to the viewing subject (Rancière, 2011, 110)". Barthes associates an optical relationship with a tactile relationship. I find that Barthes gives the photograph a compensating quality and installs it with void promise. Rancière continues exposing a repudiation of knowledge in order to reach the effect of transport. "To play the image against art is, then, not only to negate the character of the image as object of fabrication; it is almost to negate its character as something seen (ibid)." Barthes unleashes the beast as a mania of the gaze, but in turn Rancière marks the release as a dispossession or a subjugation to the transportative traits.

I suggested that Meinin Bück should continue with auto-portraiture by making new works. She declined, and chose to reconsider some of her previous motives. She desired to repossess her gaze and to regain authorship. With therapeutical guidance Meinin Bück reworked photographs, adding comments, line drawings, the routes of movements, points of reference and her signature with a black marker pen. Meinin Bück reflected on the process, stating that her sombre shadow, the *Doppelgänger*, had finally vanished. There are many writers that share authorship to her present life. The *Doppelgänger* is an allusion to the name referring to her that was used in the French yellow papers. She was referred to as *La Rouquine* or the *Redhead*. A pun inspired by her ginger hair has operated as a stigmatic baptizing and a sordid neonominalism. Both the French and Austrian media have written about the crime according to a cultural script concerning female criminals. It is evident that morbid psychological games and immense pressure stimulated the events. The public contempt of Meinin Bück has been fervent and has had an impact on the court decision. The sentence concerned a single defendant although three persons committed the crime.



Andrea Meinin Bück, Château Guereule, 1998 & 2004

The illustrious state of identification

Cervantes' protagonist Alonso Quijano embraced his fictional state. "There it seems to him that the sky is more translucent and the sun shines with a new clarity; before him lies... (Cervantes, 1605/Grossman, 2003, 429)" Another way to express a transgressive state is "The sky here will seem more translucent, and the sun will shine with a new kind of clarity (Cervantes, 1605/Montgomery, 2009, 381)." An uncertainty of what is accurate or faithful becomes evident when one compares translations. "Here it seems to him that the skies are clearer, and that the sun shines with a different brightness; and here his gaze...(Cervantes, 1605/Rutherford 2003, 456)" Differences seem to be inherent when moving from one version of the novel to another. Even short exclamations can be rendered in quite different words. Appraisal such as "That is a fine thing to say! (Cervantes, 1605/Montgomery, 2009, 381)" can be as good as "That is really good (Cervantes, 1605/Grossman, 2003, 428)!" or even "Now that is a good one (Cervantes, 1605/Rutherford, 2003, 456)!"



Andrea Meinin Bück, *Your soul is nectar of love*, 1997

A black swan is the term describing the odd incident that can change the course of events. It is the inherent error or the unexpected as a substantial element. Andrea Meinin Bück suffers from institutionalisation and does not want to be released. And what are the odds for her to have singular authorship of her life? She claims that she has lost the inner notion of community.

Lena,

23/5 2009

Everything stopped in Guereule. All was calm and still the morning after the killing. Quiet like in Blütengasse. I was barefoot. Steven and Paul had already left, or fled like they said. I walked in the raped building and saw Michel on the bottom of the staircase. I didn't know why he was lying there. I sat down and spoke to him. J'ai dit que je l'aimais. I loved him, I love you. Michel was the traitor I loved. I continued outdoors, to the patio, through the cherry orchard and continued toward Arbresle. The road was almost washed away by the rain. My step left imprints, left, right, left, right, left. I ran but the imprints were attached to me like soil is earth. This has been my home and my world for more than eight years. In meetings we are guided to integrate both good and evil. To make a full picture, but we sit in a circle and my eyes wander off and look at the whiteness of the walls. It reminds me of the silence at home, in Blütengasse. A

Double as Potential

The fictitious character Andrea Meinin Bück functions as an artistic device in the artworks that stem from the collaboration titled *Lena Séraphin, Andrea Meinin Bück & The Don Quixote Complex*. I design artistic research being based on and in fictionality. In order to present a fictitious person as true I have to fully claim the illusion of fiction. As a result of this assertion, the audience or the reader is compromised. This can be regarded problematic, however, fictionality can be a productive method. Vonnegut ascribes fiction an appealing quality as he depicts a vivid second chance or even an option for everyday life. In my work, a

turn takes place when fictionality is disclosed and Andrea Meinin Bück is unmasked. The previously presented artistic material begins to oscillate, alternating reality with fiction or fiction with reality. It is notable that the artist Lena Séraphin takes on a fictional appearance in the work. The correspondence is pursued in a role and the exhibitions are mounted under a disguise. And, one may request, what is the true role of the spectator?



Andrea Meinin Bück, Château Guereule, 1998 & 2004

The spectator is not a private detective, a sleuth for truth, as there is not really any mystery. Rather the spectator, as well as the artist, is positioned within fictionality. One of the subordinate research questions I have posed is: Does an argument in art launch modes of believing or knowing? I find it unprofitable to reach for experiences as answers, especially if it then follows that somebody's experience is being charted. So, instead, I make an attempt to answer with an approach to alter views on factuality. I consider fictionality both as a conceptual, transgressive and imaginary feature when displaying art. This allows an evaluation of the exhibition as a medium in the practice of art. Rather than regarding a more general object based approach to outline the content or genre within the display of art, I give emphasise to the exhibition as medium and subject matter.

But, let us look at definitions in order to grasp fiction. This article resonates a view on art being defined by practice. Definition is for me an attitude towards art, its conventions, traditions and riots. Maurice Blanchot offers an indexical view in his essay "The Beast of Lascaux", proclaiming that the making of work of art and the encounter with it have distinct similar features.

“There is, in the experience of art and in the genesis of the work, a moment where the work is still nothing but an indistinct violence tending to open up and tending to close, tending to exalt in a space that opens up and tending to withdraw into the profundity of dissimulation: the work is then the struggling intimacy of irreconcilable and inseparable moments, communication torn between the measure of the work that established a certain power and the measurelessness or excess of the work that strives toward impossibility, between form where it grasps hold of itself and limitlessness where it rejects itself, between work as beginning and the origin on the basis of which there is never any work, where the eternal absence of work [désouvement] reigns (Blanchot, 2007, 49).”

I claim that I exhibit unfinished works as the subject matter suggests both refinement and distortion. The unfinished quality is one of the factors that develop a lead-in into potential. In my work I meet issues of disguise, dissemblance, deception and aberration. I delineate an encounter as an assumption; encountering art can be of significance when it is associated with a projected self. The encounter is, interpreted on the basis of Blanchot, omissive but not excluding. Omission is rather a striking moment, and as we have seen, even Don Quixote enjoys the illustrious clarity of fiction.

In my work I relate to the literary motive of the Doppelgänger. A much discussed figure, the rise and fall of the double have been manifest ever since it was coined by writer Jean Paul in the late eighteenth century (Paul, 2006). Writer Vladimir Nabokov shredded the double into pieces (Nabokov, 1965), that I pick up and join in a debate of subjectivity and its multifarious projections. The Doppelgänger is developed into a device, as I transfer it from literature and apply it in visual art. Andrea Meinin Bück can be regarded as my fictitious auxiliary ego that acts as the second party of a collaborative process. I claim that (my) subjectivity is evidenced by a fictitious projection. In its barest form the double stands for consciousness and the fictitious character functions as a device. Andrea Meinin Bück is the protagonist and the trigger factor that launches fiction. In the exhibitions, potentiality is injected as a questioning of authorship and content. My work consists of four qualities; the elimination of the author/actual artist, the existence of fictional artistry, the process of fictionalisation and the unfinished quality of the work. It is notable that in addition to Meinin Bück also Lena Séraphin becomes a character in her work.



**Lena Séraphin, Andrea Meinin Bück & Don Quijote Complex, Kluuvi Gallery, Helsinki
Installation view 2011, photo Yehia Eweis**

Display as medium

To show what I indicate stating, that the exhibition is a medium, let us look at the presented images. One show an installation view, one is an archival image from the archive belonging to the Finnish Defence Force (not shown in article), four are attributed to Andrea Meinin Bück and one will be presented verbally in order to emphasize a textual rendition. This collaged image belongs to the Imperial War Museum and it represents British propaganda during the WWII. Text in white capital letters shows a verbal menace. The four words are an implicit imperative, showing the results of a slip of the tongue. I will here use lowercase in order to avoid the menacing request. The words are: she talked - he died. When transcribed, the document looks like this: The vertical image is a visual assemblage, collecting fabric with a striped pattern and two photographs. The photographs are manipulated. The larger pictorial motive shows the face of a woman in semi-profile. The direction of her gaze is downwards and towards the right. Under the face is a striped pattern assembled towards a vanishing point somewhere deep in the image, and on the stripes is a photo showing a raft in water. The raft carries what seems to be a body. But, the assembled image is double- or multi-faced, with a second look one detects an asymmetric shape high-lightening the mouth of the woman. Using image manipulation and an inverting choice the image of the woman is disclosed as the negative of an illustration. The illustration seems to show a smiling prototype of a woman. The propaganda image is thus a hybrid, claiming a menace and withholding other possible meanings.

The aftermath of the image

If artwork is withdrawn the quality of asserting experiences, then predictability as a research outcome is challenged. Can one analyse the work of art having assets that leave spectatorship apart? In his writings, Mats Rosengren develops the concept of doxology (Rosengren, 2006, 2008). Meaning is evaluated as an understanding rather than a formation of knowledge. I interpret doxology as a repetitive chain of events including doubt, hesitation and choice of belief or doxa. The chain of doxa differs from placing one's faith in something given. Rosengren compares understanding and knowing, which can be vital to forthcoming evaluations of the outcomes in artistic research. I hope that my work offers a counterbalance to a dictum of epistemological cohesion within artistic research.

In conclusion I will contextualise the double as a motif that is instigated in a succession of works. The publications of Charlotte Lennox (*The Female Quixote or The Adventures of Arabella*) from 1752, Jorge Luis Borges, (*Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote*) from 1939 and Cathy Acker (*Don Quixote which was a dream*) from 1986 show a recurring attempt. I ponder if the doubling is enabled due to implicit features, belonging to literature at large or to the specific character of Don Quixote. In order to respond to the principal research question concerning veracity in art, I point at constraints and limitations as well as draw potential. I consider the fragility of meaning as a result, supported by a doxological attitude that encompasses understanding as an engagement in belief. Cathy Acker demonstrates the potential of fictionality

Right now the first girl is thinking about the man she wants to fuck. 'We can,' she says to her friend, 'by fantasizing, increase our possibilities and joy in living, more important, understand

how things work. Why's this? Examine these two events: 1. Last night I fucked with you. 2. I'm fantasizing fucking with you. But these events are now only my mentalities. Therefore there's no distinguishing between the two of them. But what if we hadn't fucked? Take another example: We don't love each other. Is it possible that by fantasizing we love each other, we can love each other? Possibly? Fantasy is or makes possibilities. Are possibilities reality? (Acker, 1986, 53)'

ⁱ Vera Incessu Patuit Dea Foundation or VIPD. The name is inspired by a passage in The Aeneid by Virgil, written in 29-19 BCE: The true goddess stood revealed by her gait (anon. transl.)

ⁱⁱ Letter to Lena Séraphin dated 13/1 2011

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All letters from a private archive belonging to Lena Séraphin.

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