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“The Heart of the Flower”

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Ode to Honey

Honey is from a different biosphere. We are talking other kinds of viscosities, more dense and ancient fluids. Honey is a geological matter.

In this song by Robyn there are the things we want and the things we need, a distinction we might think ourselves equipped to handle, but which soon slips between our fingers. Within *Honey*’s cartography, what we need is on the surface: light and water. The waves come in and they’re golden, Robyn sings – mmm, and the sun – it sets on the water. This sounds like what we want, doesn’t it: holiday, wholesomeness, warmth. But it’s more basic than that. What we need is not about what appeals, or what would be pleasurable, but about biology: photosynthesis; the conditions for life.

What we want, then, belongs to a different category on the topographical map, or rather off it: *at the heart of the flower, strands of saliva, right where the hurt is*. To get what we want, we have to go deeper, further, longer – both spatial and temporal metaphors are equally (in)adequate here. Did you know there’s life without photosynthesis? Or not life exactly, but a “deep hot biosphere” ubiquitously distributed in Earth’s crust. It is only in the last few decades that scientists have begun to grapple with this world inside our planet, beneath the world as it has so far been understood. There’s energy there, a kind of thumping that never saw the sun. It’s a biosphere of a magnitude only comparable to all the oceans. But far below them, down in the deep.

The spectrum of depth that spans from need to want finds its emotional equivalence in the measured distance between a Self and its object of desire. We might need the intimate presence of another, but – within the *Honey*-paradigm – what we want is to lose ourselves and everyone around us. On Robyn’s previous record, *Body Talk*, tracks

such as *Dancing On My Own* posited an emotional alone-ness caused by severance from the twosomeness of certain others. By comparison, *Honey* plunges the depths of the existential. That is to say, the inescapable, always, already, and again kind of loneliness – one that has ceased to chase redemption. To call on someone and say that, no, *you’re not gonna get what you need*; light and water will not be offered, no life is in the making here. Once melted and now ossified, like resin turned to amber, in the deep hot biosphere, water has long since transformed into honey, and honey, Robyn holds – although it plays no part in photosynthesis – is sweeter.

Why? *Honey* has the beauty and freedom of abstraction; living without a body, or in a collective body. *Body Talk*, on the other hand, is figuration. Figuration indexes accountability and its let-downs: In *Call Your Girlfriend*, for instance, a “you” and an “I”, and this “girlfriend”, who must, at Robyn’s delusional, verging on psychopathic request, be “called”. We’ve all been there, wanting something so bad we just cannot see the truth for what it is (he is never going to call her), but Robyn went and sang it out loud – to all the dance floors. That song and its narrator – how she believes in her own words, but is betrayed by the music and the drag of her voice – lives in the time of waves and tides, governed by the sky and its lights. Sure it’s getting late, but Robyn’s “I” is still awake enough dream.

So let’s think about Robyn’s oeuvre as a descent into night. The time of *Body Talk* is approximately 12-midnight to 3 AM. This is the time of hope-fuelled drunk texts at which even sadness – *I’m right over here, why can’t you see me?* – glows with the memory or expectation of happiness. Then there’s a transitional period during which the laws of physics change: *I’ve turned all my sorrow into glass*, Robyn explains on *Honey*’s opening track, *it don’t leave no shadow*. *Honey* only really starts at 4. At this point, the “you” and the “her” of *Dancing on My Own* and *Call Your Girl-*

friend have liquified to expose the unknowable nucleus over which their projections were cast. It is not life exactly, but whatever lies beneath the oceans, a cool pulse. Life at ontological collapse, un-life: the sweetest and deepest. *Let go of your doubts and say yes*. Robyn asks us to join her in the hollow, but her beckon is one that can only be heard by those already there with her. Flesh, for those who un-live through these hours of the morning, is like a sponge, soaking up the viscous into which every figure has decomposed. That is what Robyn's song is about: becoming one, becoming no one. You never had this kind of nutrition, she assures us.

Nutrition at this nadir, as it's distributed across Honey-the-album, takes the unsteady form of an echo. *Beach2K20* is the beach life fantasy of someone whose technology would short-circuit if it came into contact with water. Its tinny voice pleads *let's go party*, promising a tropicana that only seems more nightmarishly hyperreal as desperation intensifies: *I mean it's right on the beach, they do really nice food*. Closing Robyn's party, *Ever Again* has left all nuance behind for the emotional clarity of a hologram never ever to be broken-hearted again – *trust me*. It has the delirious levity of a room with no air: energy flowing from an empty reservoir; the cadence of life without photosynthesis is as exasperated as it is infinite.

Robyn's music is all about desire insofar as desire is all about lack, and lack often stems from loss. For twenty years, the theme of her music has been relentless perseverance in the face of equally relentless loss. The loss of love, or even the fear of it while still securely in your grip. The fact that its value lies in being entirely outside of your grip, always. It's unbearable. And although, in Robyn, a good thing could never make up for all the pain, her only suggested cure is to become completely consumed by it.

Much if not all music is about desire, but not all music is about loss. And few pop artists take it where Robyn takes it: pretty far into delusion and sabotage, of self and others. Robyn knows the vastness of forests; she understands just how cold and remote things can get. If the Robyn of *Body Talk* keeps dancing, she'll get to *Honey*, and to the place where all that's left are bodies – no talk – only miraculously upright promises of fleshy pools. And as we fall deeper into the night of her music, it doesn't matter that, in the end, the light returns. We've felt the strength of the deepest currents, and there's no coming back from that.

Kristian Vistrup Madsen is a writer based in Berlin, and the editor of this issue of the Lulu Journal.

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→ *The Artist as Queer
Ethnographer:
Hubert Fichte's Palais
d'Amour*

Edited and introduced by
Malte Fabian Rauch

Before his very last public talk, Hubert Fichte was asked to introduce himself to a Viennese audience. He replaced formality with frankness: "I am a writer who in his life has hung around more with rent boys, street girls and voodoo priests than with those important personalities a writer should surround himself with." It is January 1986. Fichte knows things will come to an end soon. He will die of Aids-related illness only two months later.

Fichte's story both is and isn't one of a poète maudit. It is, above all, a story of an artist who refused categories, be they theoretical, sexual or geographical. Born in 1935, just months before the enactment of the Nuremberg Laws, Fichte grew up without his father, a Jew forced to flee to Sweden a year later. During the war, Fichte lived in an orphanage in the south of Germany. Soon thereafter, he would turn displacement into a strategy of his own, at first by his attempted escapes from post-War Germany, which would take him to France, Sweden and Finland; later through his extensive stays in non-European countries. In keeping with this spirit of expatriation, Fichte went on to explore his own queer sexuality, the life of sex workers and faraway cultures, including Brazil, Bahrain, Belize, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Tanzania, Togo and Trinidad, among others. In the German literary milieu of the time, still firmly in the grip of old themes and habits, such a practice was unprecedented. It was bound to provoke; it flew in the face of so much.

Still, Fichte's writing is animated by dialogue and exchange, not confrontation. His main work, *The History of Sensitivity*, was conceived as a nineteen-volume novel in the legacy of Proust, whose political horizon was a utopia of universal queerness, a world beyond hetero-normativity in which global tenderness would allow for intimacy among strangers. This politics of queer tenderness is also at play in the excerpts trans-

lated here, which are taken from a collection of interviews Fichte conducted with sex workers in Hamburg in the 1960s, published under the title *Palais d'Amour* in 1972. Characteristic of Fichte's approach is the way in which he addresses their world in an ethno-poetic fashion, yet without ever laying claim to ethnographic authority. In all of his interviews, Fichte refuses the position of an objective observer and stable subject. Instead, he insists that every inquiry is framed by desire, that ethnographic description is never pure, objective and detached—an aspect of his work that acquires a particular urgency in light of ongoing discussions on the role of ethnographic methods and the place of alterity in contemporary art.

Sex work has been and remains a delicate subject for capitalist societies, as it mixes the sphere of money and work with the supposedly private domain of sexuality. The principle way to deal with it has been to hide it in darkness—Baudelaire, for one, praises "la Nuit noire," the black night, that dark freedom beyond good and evil which the sex worker supposedly enters. If Fichte seeks to shed light on this world, his torch is of a particular kind. He brings no moral enlightenment, yet he does not romanticise the darkness either. What we encounter in these interviews is rather an art of the threshold, a game of shadows. Distant voices flare up, voices that would otherwise have fallen into oblivion. Their tone is rough, their spirit resistant. They are traces, not portraits, of life on the margins—often revolting, always running away.

*Malte Fabian Rauch is an art theorist,
philosopher and translator based in Berlin.*

Sandra

Fichte: When were you born? And where?

Sandra: On May 6, so **06.05.1949**, in Bad Driburg, close to Bielefeld.

Fichte: Who was your father?

Sandra: He was a toolmaker.

Fichte: Your mother was a housewife?

Sandra: Yes, she works only four hours a day, she's employed by the post.

Fichte: Do you have siblings?

Sandra: Yeah, three boys.

Fichte: What is your relation to your siblings?

Sandra: Oh, you know, one of them is fifteen, going on sixteen. The other one is fourteen, going on fifteen. Boys growing up. One of them, the fourteen year old, asked for drums for his confirmation, and he got them. And now he's all set on starting a band one day and so on. And he is really very interested in that; I think that's good, they do not at all neglect their homework because of it. The big one is pretty quiet. He does a lot for school. He speaks – though he's only fifteen – insanely good French. I think one day he will really succeed in doing something, like crazy.

Fichte: Do your brothers know that you walk the streets?

Sandra: No, no.

Fichte: They know nothing. But your parents ...

Sandra: Yes, but they don't talk about it. I mean they would never ask me about it.

Fichte: Did you see anything remain of the war or the years of famine? Did anyone tell you about that time?

Sandra: Yeah, you know, it's like this: my father lost a leg in the war, and so you're naturally concerned with this at that moment. But it wasn't at all the case that we'd understand anything about it, that we'd talk a lot about it or anything like that. Because my old man had lost his leg in the war, you don't talk about it in order not to trigger the memory. And then, my old man came to Germany because of the war. And that's all such a hassle, I don't even want to go into that ... My old man is from Hungary. Straight from Budapest.

Fichte: And how was your childhood?

Sandra: You know, over all it was pretty normal. I started school when I was six, got out of school when I was fifteen. Went to school for eight years, worked for half a year, then began to work in some kind of shop, not as an apprentice, but just like that. So I made pretty good money ...

Fichte: As a sales assistant?

Sandra: Yes, as a sales assistant, directly as a

sales assistant, in Düsseldorf. Yeah, and then I got asked whether I wouldn't like to model. Then I went to a model school for half a year, finished that with a diploma, and worked as a runway and photo model in different cities.

Fichte: You were roughly seventeen, eighteen?

Sandra: Yes, eighteen.

Fichte: And then?

Sandra: Yeah, and then I met a guy who was insanely rich and who kind of kept me from working in fashion. I got everything from him. He was my sugar daddy, in a way. And he was jealous like hell. For half a year I was together with him, wasn't allowed to go out on my own etc. Then I was so annoyed by it that I thought, no, it's not possible, I can't stand it, I'll leave. So I packed up my stuff and left. I wanted to go back into fashion, but I had lost touch with it. Because of the anti-baby pill, I gained weight like crazy, around twenty pound or so I guess. I blew up like a balloon. And despite my height, that meant something. I could still get into the clothes, but they didn't really look good anymore. They fit somehow, but it didn't work anymore. Effectively, I'd missed the boat. Now if you are used to having money all the time, to be able to buy anything you like, well, I had this idea, because I got to know two or three girls in a little bar. They were quite cute, not at all the kind you'd normally expect to walk the streets. I thought they were quite entertaining, the way they walked around. They did whatever they wanted and they always had guys around them who were fun. Both of them also didn't have longterm boyfriends but instead did whatever they liked. Seeing that, I thought, well, that's not a bad idea. So I made friends with them, talked to them and thought to myself: why not?

Fichte: But you still lived at home at the time?

Sandra: At that time, I still lived at home with my parents. And then I thought, why not. So at eighteen – yeah, I was already eighteen by then – I turned up in that café, sat there with **50 pfennig** [c. **\$0.30**] in my pocket, and let it all happen.

Fichte: Who was your first client?

Sandra: You know, that was – how old might he have been? – forty, with moustache, a real john type, you know, exactly as you would imagine him. He walked to my table and took a seat, asking me whether he can pick up my check. Because he had never seen me before, he didn't know whether I hooked. And so, yeah, I said straight away – all cheeky – yes, why not. Now I had no idea, didn't have any condoms in my bag either, didn't even have the courage to walk to the next

pharmacy and buy some or to ask anyone. Yeah, and so on, I said, what's happening, 100 DM [c. \$60], in which hotel are we going? I don't know, I said; well, then come with me. So I went into the car with him and we drove to the next hotel. He gave me – no, not true, I didn't say anything about the money. Nonsense, not true. He did not speak of the money at all. Yes, I came with him, he paid for the hotel, went upstairs and pulled out the condoms. He knew I never had a client in my life, he said so afterwards. He pulled out the condoms, undressed himself, put the thing on and I lay down and had no idea of it all. And I only thought, well, let him get on with it, I put no effort in it whatsoever. Yeah, and afterwards, when he got dressed again, he placed a 100 DM bill on the table and said: girl, how are you doing this, are you crazy or what? I immediately got that you are new to this, and I also got that you have no clue. But think for a second you'd come across someone else, and he'd fuck you about. He would have fucked you nicely and wouldn't have paid you a penny. Remember to always have one of these with you, and remember: money always first. I thought that was so nice of him.

Fichte: So he did not really let himself go, or?

Sandra: No, no ...

Fichte: And that's when you realised, that you're able to completely detach yourself...

Sandra: Yes, that was absolutely clear. Completely disconnected. It was never the case for me that I would be concerned with anyone, intimately, I mean, that I was not crazy about.

Fichte: But in that case, you go all out?

Sandra: When I really like someone, yes, with pleasure.

Fichte: So you are not frigid.

Sandra: Not at all.

Fichte: Then why not with this first client?

Sandra: Because I was sitting in that café with the intention to hook. And because I knew, and instinctively you just know that, if you get money for it, you don't just give yourself away like that. You know that you only let the guy get off, and that you get money for it and that afterwards it's done with.

Fichte: And you were clear about that from the outset?

Sandra: That was clear to me from the outset. I wasn't stupid, straight from dumbville or whatever, since I had worked in fashion and had intimate relations with several men before. That's logical; it gives you an idea.

Fichte: So you are not for wangling then?

Sandra: Well, he fucked me, after all, but without

any feeling, as I said.

Fichte: Without any feeling?

Sandra: Without any feeling, totally without feeling. The entire time I was only hoping, hopefully he'll be done soon, that was the only thing I cared about.

Fichte: And next time, you were wiser?

Sandra: Next time I was wiser. I simply asked for the money upfront, put the condom on him and then again I was also thinking, hopefully he'll be done soon. And so it became nicer everyday. I was already beginning to flirt a little and to approach the whole thing actively, going to the café and placing myself directly next to someone, all cheeky.

Fichte: But you were still living at home?

Sandra: Yes, yes, I was still living at home at the time.

Fichte: And why did you leave Düsseldorf?

Sandra: You know, because I didn't want that. Because, first of all, I had my family in Düsseldorf. And then, I had my private life, my friends. You aren't into them getting to know about it. And then I also thought it was not not quite exciting to – I don't know – to shout it from the rooftops that I hook.

Fichte: Were you disgusted by it?

Sandra: No, no, at first you have the feeling: money, money. Then you absolutely don't care about all of that, that only comes after a certain time. In my case, after half a year or so.

Fichte: And ...

Sandra: That only happened because of the smoking, that I started to hate it all like crazy.

Fichte: From the hashish?

Sandra: Yes. So I am totally convinced that the hate comes from it. When I've smoked, nobody can lure me here in any way. When I've smoked there could be twenty guys that approach me in the yard, wanting to come with me. I'd only laugh at that. That's so uninteresting for the moment, when I am somewhere else and have smoked, let's say until 9 or 9.30 and I think, fuck, actually you'd have to work. Nothing on earth can drag me here.

Fichte: But when you meet a friend, with whom you like to let go, then you go with him?

Sandra: Of course, that's fantastic, when you're high. You are much more outgoing, you have a totally different feeling and you are much more receptive to everything. You are feeling everything in a much more sensitive way, be it a kiss or whatever, you experience that in a much nicer way. And when you get to the climax and get off, there's such a feeling that's totally absent when

you're sober. One has such a feeling of fully flowing out, such a relief, it's incredible, you cannot describe it.

Fichte: You have been in Hamburg now for one and a half years?

Sandra: Yes.

Fichte: Did you ever get into really big trouble?

Sandra: Never. I stay away from those people here. Well, I know them, that's logical, you simply know the people, you have to know them.

They accept me, they know me; they know how I think about the whole thing. Of course, during the first three, four months they tried to hit on me, to get my money and so on. And I had such a big mouth, and I was so completely against the whole thing, that after some time they figured that it doesn't make any sense. I came from Düsseldorf, on Friday, and that was really too much with them again. On Friday I almost went insane.

Fichte: What do you want to do?

Sandra: You know, I don't know. I am sure that I will stop with this soon. It's not possible overnight. But at the very latest, when I am 21, then I'll beat it. Full on.

[...]

Fichte: When did you hear about hookers for the first time?

Sandra: Seventeen – sixteen – seventeen.

Fichte: Not earlier?

Sandra: Oh, naturally I knew of it, after all, I think; but I did not deal with that.

Fichte: Were you good in school?

Sandra: Mediocre, so I was not the best, but I wasn't bad either; I had somewhat mediocre grades.

Fichte: Didn't you have any interest in going to high school?

Sandra: Not at all.

Fichte: Why not?

Sandra: Oh, you know, because I had awful teachers.

Fichte: Did you hate your teachers?

Sandra: No, I didn't hate them, I thought it's terrible, because I was repressed by these people.

Fichte: In which way?

Sandra: Well, they are the ones who can prescribe things, and they are the ones who can decide what we should do. And I refuse any coercion, any kind of coercion.

*

Johnny

Fichte: Do you have a strong sense of honour?

Johnny: Sense of honour, yes, a very strong one even.

Fichte: What goes against your honour?

Johnny: What goes against my honour, that's primarily disrespect towards women. For example at the train station last week. Two young guys pushed away a forty-year-old woman from the entrance. She wanted to get in. Well those two I roughed up, trust me. Gave 'em a real smack, yelled at 'em "if you don't pop off" and so on. I didn't get into a real fight. Only beat them twice.

Fichte: Are you vengeful?

Johnny: No, not at all. I'm quickly outraged and say: fuck, if I meet him again, I'll beat the shit out of him. After a couple of hours it's all gone.

Fichte: So the people from the approved school, wouldn't you like to rough them up a little again?

Johnny: Nope.

Fichte: Teachers?

Johnny: Nope.

Fichte: And neither the raiding party?⁴

Johnny: Only one of them. One of them I would like to have all to myself now. He was a kind of building manager.

Fichte: And what would you like to do with him, if you could?

Johnny: I would give him a couple of slaps, only to humiliate him. Only give him a couple of slaps.

Fichte: You wouldn't like to take revenge on any of your clients, none of them?

Johnny: Well yes, also one of them.

Fichte: Why?

Johnny: He promised me 50 DM [c. \$30] and he also gave me the money. And then he stole 40 bucks again. He looked all serious, well-off and so, and I thought: he has money, if he says so, he'll also give it to me. And he really had given me 50 DM in 10 DM bills. And then he walked away from me. I didn't realise it, I was completely hammered and I still don't understand it today. Usually I always wake up if someone gets up next to me; and then I did not. He left and stole 40 DM from my wallet.

Fichte: Yes, and what would you like to do with him?

Johnny: What I would do with him? I'd pack him a punch and take 40 DM from his wallet.

Fichte: Are there a lot of things that you find inappropriate or improper or indecent?

Johnny: Nope, practically none. Well there's the obvious, as I've said. Improper, what's improper:

to leave a girl when she's having a child, and that sorta stuff. I mean here in Germany now. I mean, I see matters differently, since up there in Finland I have a child. And I mean, she understood that perhaps, that I won't come up there. But you know, if I'd be fucking a girl here, well, if she'd get a child, I think I'd even marry her and get a job.

Fichte: Do you lie a lot?

Johnny: Only white lies, almost only white lies.

Sometimes I show off a little as well.

Fichte: Did you lie a lot in this interview?

Johnny: Nope, that's all true.

Fichte: Do you think one should honour one's parents?

Johnny: Not always.

Fichte: When shouldn't one?

Johnny: Well, for example in the case of my parents, in particular my mother. I'd never honour her. I would not even – ok, well that sounds a little brutal now – I would not even go to her funeral.

Fichte: Would you go to your father's funeral?

Johnny: To my father, yes. Because I know exactly that he always shows understanding for me.

Fichte: Is there anyone besides your father that you respect a lot?

Johnny: That I respect a lot. If I should say that, well I mean, if I'd meet my fiancée today, so my last fiancée, the young one – she's eighteen now – I'd immediately start something with her again.

Fichte: But none of your teachers or mates?

Johnny: Nope. Well, I had a mate, yes. The one in the approved school. That was the best mate I ever had. I'd still accept him as a friend any time.

Fichte: Is your father a role model for you?

Johnny: Nope.

Fichte: Don't have a role model?

Johnny: I have an athletic role model. Cassius Clay [Muhammad Ali]. And as a sportsman, I consider him a role model. That's practically the only sportsman I know. Who's now a real sportsman through and through, that's this Finnish guy, Nurmi [Paavo Johannes Nurmi]. Nurmi, the long-distance runner. Because I once read that he made a run, and he would't have been beaten; but then his adversary fell down. And he stopped on the track and helped his adversary back on his feet again. And then they ran together through the finishing line. Well, and in my opinion, there's nothing better in sport.

Fichte: Do you have feelings of guilt? Or a bad conscience?

Johnny: At the moment, nope, not at all.

Fichte: Do you feel slightly ashamed?

Johnny: Yes, that I have to say after all. I still have ... it's just that I'm still embarrassed.

Embarrassed I still am. If I only go out with men, well then I do feel embarrassed.

Fichte: Do you feel embarrassed on the street that you go with clients or do you feel embarrassed in bed?

Johnny: In the room, in bed, on the streets. It's known, after all, that if I'm walking around on St. Pauli and there is, let's say, there is a man with me who looks older than me or who also is older than me. Well then most people who know me, they know what's going on.

Hubert Fichte (1935–1986) was a German novelist. His life and work is currently the subject of a research project at Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin.

Hubert Fichte's interviews with sex workers were first broadcasted on the national radio stations WDR and NDR and then published as a book. The excerpts translated here are taken from the first edition: Hubert Fichte, *Interviews aus dem Palais d'Amour* etc. (Hamburg Rowohlt, 1972), 170–175 and 134–136. An expanded version – including several interviews with the brothel owner Wolfgang Köhler that did not appear in the first edition – was published six years later under the title *Wolli Indienfahrer* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1978).

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Hubert Fichte, *Wolli Indienfahrer*. © S. Fischer Verlag, Frankfurt am Main 1978.

1. Hubert Fichte, "Hubert Fichte warnt vor sich," in *Homosexualität und Literatur*, vol. 1, ed. Torsten Teichert (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 1987), 7. For a recent overview of Fichte's life and work, see Dietrich Diederichsen, "The Price of Intimacy," *Artforum*, vol. 57, n° 3 (November 2018).

2. Hal Foster locates an "ethnographic turn" in the 1960s and traces its development into the 1990s, carefully highlighting the potential and pitfalls of this paradigm. See his "The Artist as Ethnographer," in *The Return of the Real* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1996).

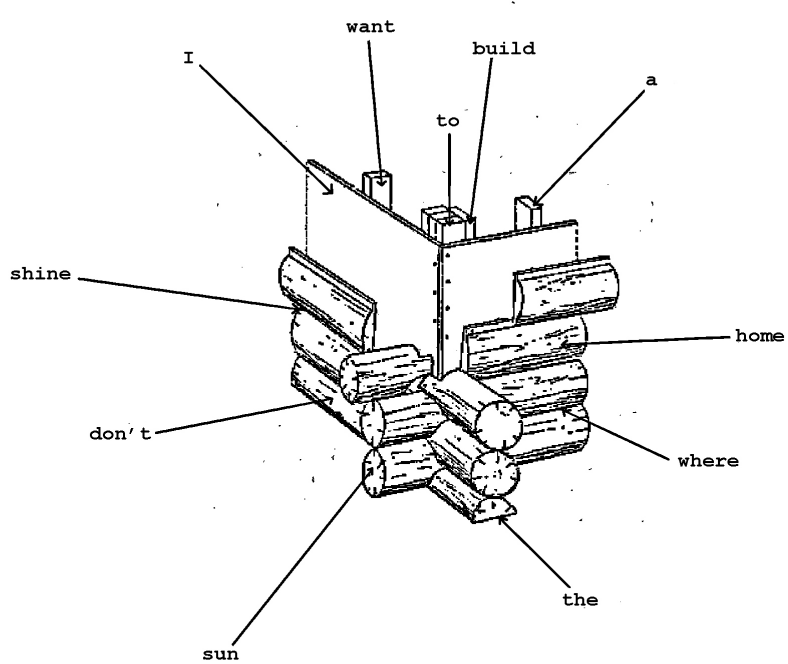
3. Charles Baudelaire, "Allégorie" (*Fleurs du mal*), in *Œuvres Complètes*, ed. Claude Pichois (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), 116.

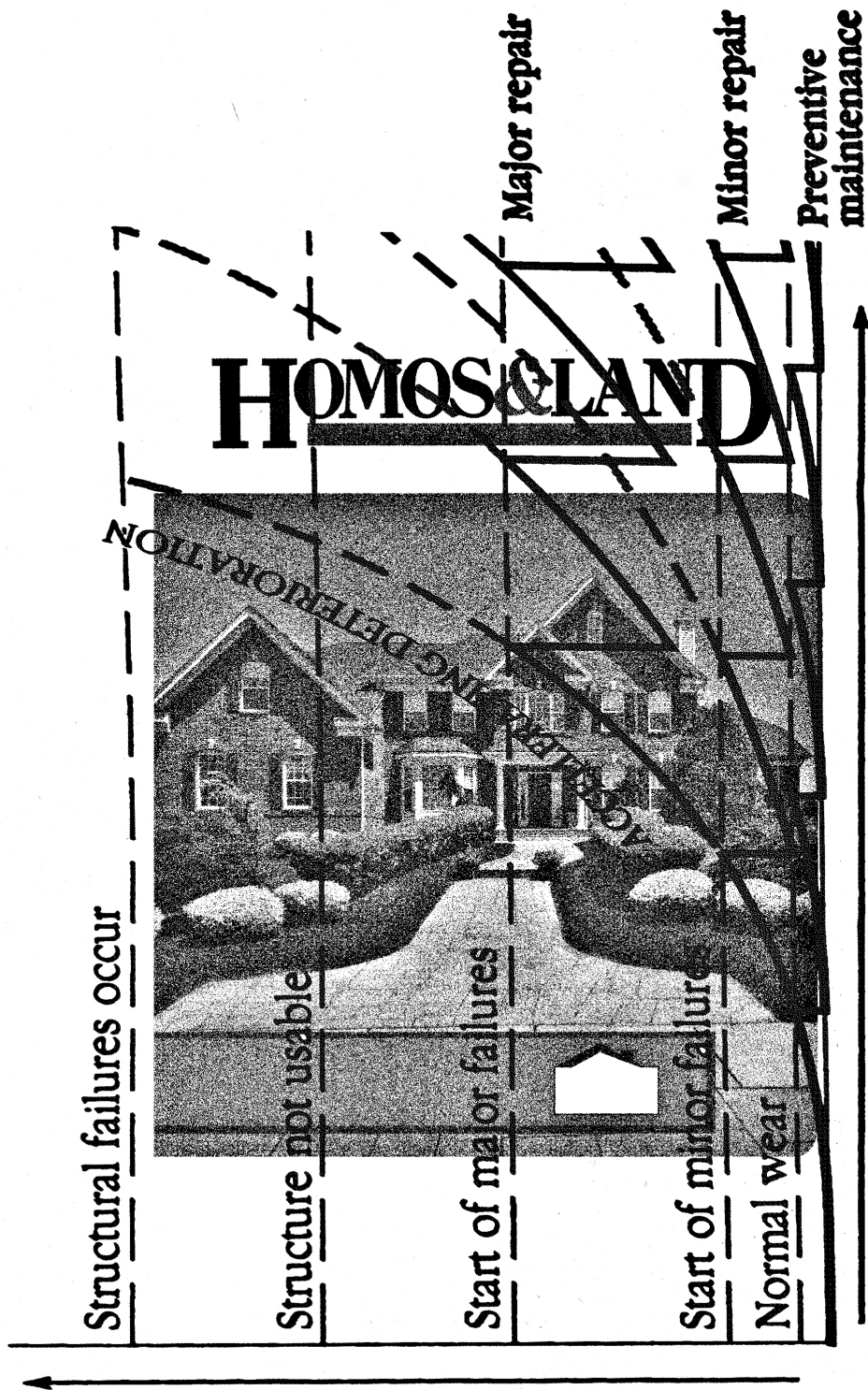
4. [Earlier in the interview, Johnny tells Fichte about his time in prison. According to his account, the raiding party (Rollkommando) was a group of particularly brutal prison guards that used to beat up prisoners who had violated the rules or completely refused to accept orders. See Fichte, *Palais d'Amour*, 120–121. – Translator's note.]

→ *A Homeland for a Sissy Boy*
Alex Turgeon

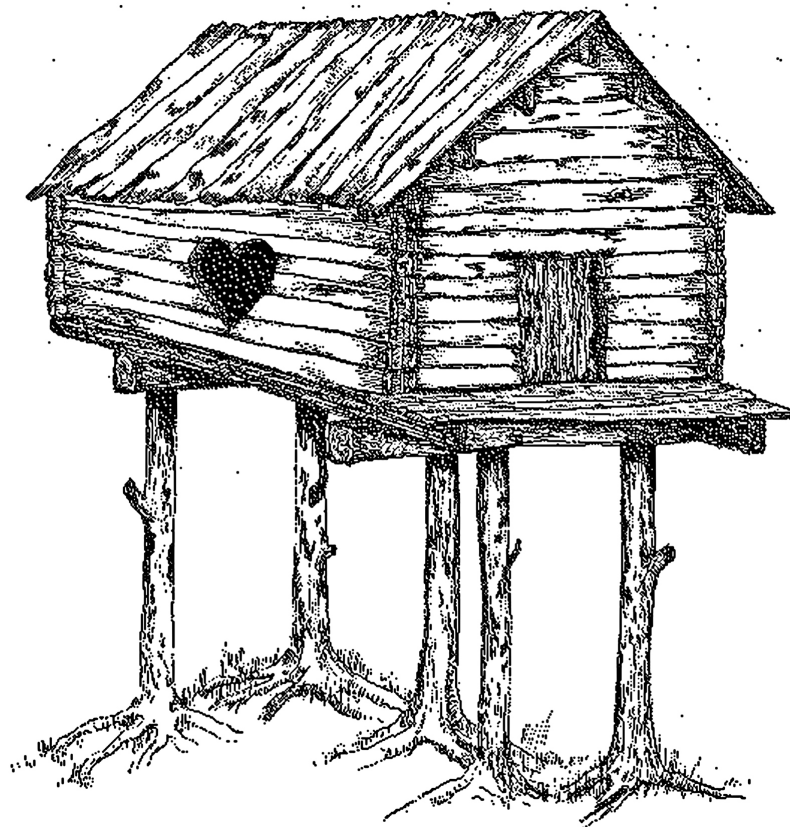
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I WANT TO MAKE LOVE
I WANT TO LIVE TO MAKE
FEED ME, HE - THE BEST OF IT
FOR ANY MORE, I MERELY TAKE
SEW THE SLOWING, SEW THE YEARNING
AWAKE IN COLD SWEET SKINS
TO SHED AMIDST THE BORE
OF TWO ARMS TIGHT, DISCERNING
NEITHER HEADS NOR TAILS
TO PROVE THAT
MIGHT I LOVE HIM
MIGHT I NOT
YET TOILING IN TRYING FOR THE BEST
THAT I AM SURELY KNOT
BUT GIVE ME FOUR DOORS
WITH A LATCH KEY PIN
AND I'LL PAD MYSELF UP INSIDE
I TILL THE FEELING'S FIN.

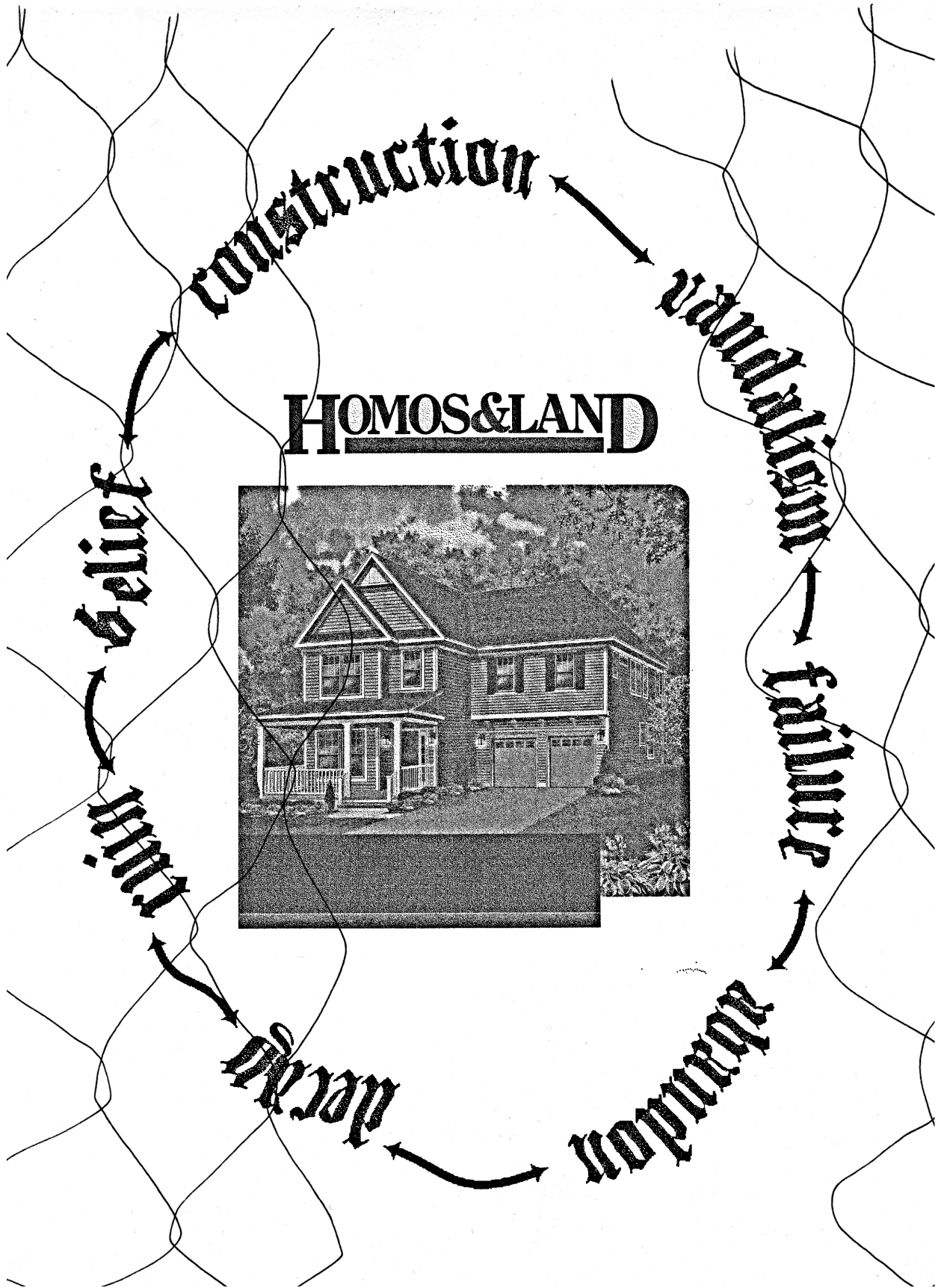


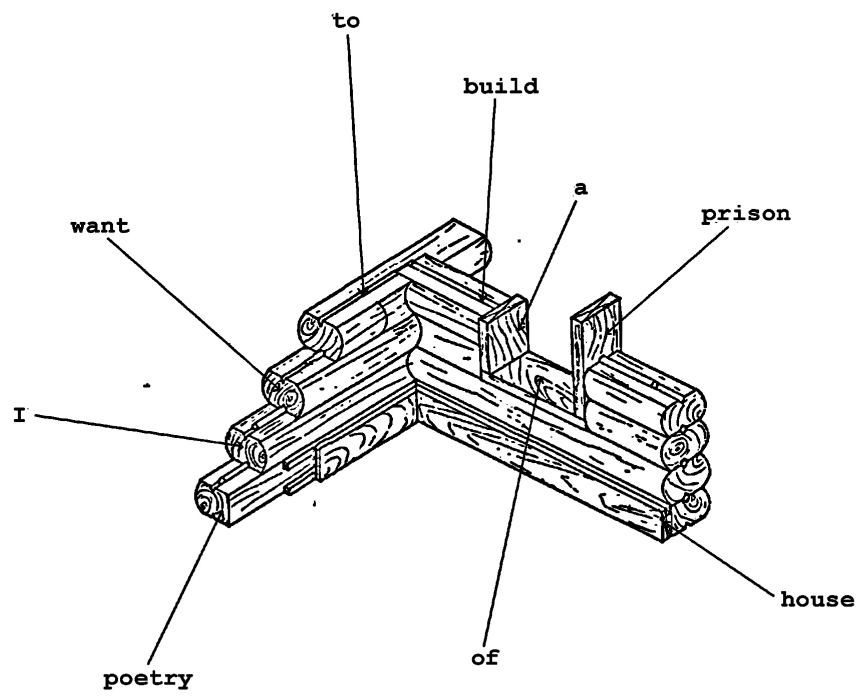
Build it and they will
HOMOSEXUAL come

19



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→ *Through the Back Door*
Anne Nymås
(Introduced by
Kristian Vistrup Madsen)

The sky never really darkens that time of year, but remains bright as if from within, like a rock long hot after the sun has gone down. Still, the old rooms at Biskops Arnö were dim that evening. I met Anne when I gave a talk at the Debutant Seminar last June, where writers from all over Scandinavia were invited to spend a week on the remote island some two hours north of Stockholm. Every night there'll be readings in the old house, the group gathered on heavy, long wooden benches, the reader stood in front of the black hollow of the open fireplace. Since the Danish, Norwegian and Swedish speaking participants get by in the languages of the others, tradition holds that texts be read out in their original form. Anne has also not had her short stories translated, so this is how it had to be. I'd never heard North Sami before. It bears no resemblance whatsoever to the adjacent Scandinavian tongues. And as anything thoroughly strange, the sound of it alone I can only describe as beautiful and poetic. Anne read aloud visibly impacted by her words, a light flare of blush to her cheeks tinged her intonation with hesitation, but she persevered.

"It's not erotica", she'd told me earlier over dinner, "it's porn – and it's pretty hardcore." Exceedingly little literature is published in Sami, and a lot of what is published is poetry. Basically, people have to read the same books over and over again, and they're certainly not pornographic short stories. "I had to ask myself: can you have sex in Sami?". Anne stretches the language, and writes things down, which there has only ever been reason to utter spontaneously. Her collection, *Sex and the Sapmi*, published by Lumio in late 2018, breaks new ground in so many ways.

The story that is reprinted here is the same that Anne read that night at Biskops Arnö. At the author's request, it has not been translated, but appears in the format often used by Sami publications that cater to the 9 different languages spoken among that population: in the original, accompanied by a brief account in lingua franca.

I'll introduce Anne's story just as she did last

summer: It is written using a gender neutral pronoun available in the grammar of North Sami, leaving the sexes of the characters undisclosed. The story is titled *Through the backdoor*, and describes an act of anal sex.

Kristian Vistrup Madsen

Through the Back Door

"Háliidatgo geahččalit?" Su jearaldat lei ovdalge jerron, muhto eaba lean goassege ovdal mannan viidásit. Lei dan dihte go leigga veahá uju ja orui heahpat hupmat dan birra. "Jua, geahččaletne" Vástádusas ii lean eahpádus, ii lean veaháge eahpesihkkarvuohta. Oanehis vástádus lei dan dihte go heahpatvuohta lei meastta lihka guovddáži go háliidus geahččalit juoidá oddasa seksas. "Galggan go viežžat oljju, vai geahččaletne go álggos haga?" Oaivvil jearaldagain lei dego oktii vel jearrat galggaigago duodaid geahččalit. "Viečča fal dan oljju, in mun duostta dan haga. Doaivvun mun dárbbášan dan vai sáhtán vuoigastit ja..." Son ii válbmen cealkaga ollásii. Ii diehtán iešge galggaigo son návddašit vai bodii go leat dušše bávččas ja unohas. "Háliidat go dien oljju mii galmmistá vel, vai dušše dábálaš biebmoollju?" Jearaldagat eai lean vuordnuma dihte, muhto baicca dan dihtii vai buot galggašii šaddat nu buorre ja vuogas go vejolaš.

"In dieđe, váldde dan dábálačča. Dahje vuordil mas, ii go dáppe gávdno eará olju? Dakkár olju mainna galgá ruvvet?" "Sihkkarit gávdno, muhto gillen go oheat álget.."

"Ná, it don dárbbat, váldde beare dien oljju mii galmmistá dasto" Son gaikkehii gokčasa iežas ala dan botta go vurddii goas nubbi boahá oljjuin. Ii dovdan iežas nu álásin de.

"Gal mun vieččan goappaš bohttaliid vai leat láhkosis, de ean dárbbat jurddášit dan birra šat". Son vázzilii olggos lanjas.

"Daga fal nu, buorre jurdda"

Gokčasa vuolde giedain njávkkadii iežas bađa, ja moadde suorpma ohcaledje guras gos ráigi lei. Geahččalii ieš álggos várrogasat suorpmaiguin guoskkahallat birra ráiggi. Ii iešge diehtán makkár vuordamušat galge leat. Ii diehtán eará go ahte lei sáhkki geahččalit ja dovddai iežas doarvái oadjebas dál. Leigo son himus vai leigo dušše diehtoáŋgir analaseksai? Soittii leat veahá goappašagat.

Son gii manai ohcat oljjuid bodii fas seangga lusa ja sus ledje guokte iešgudetlágan bohttalat mielde. Stuora bohtal mas lei fiskes olju ja mii dábálaččat oidnui gievkkanbeaŋkka alde, ja nubbe bohttalas ges ledje mánŋa ivnnát ja bustávát ledje gullevaččat áibbas eará kontinentii. Son gii čuoččui seangaguoras njoressii veahá biebmoollju olgeš gihtii ja vuoidagodii suorpmaid ja giedaid, vai bures liegganit.

Son gii veallái seanggas, gokčasa vuolde, jorgalii gávvut ja hárčii. Vuordámušat ja sáhkkivuohta lihkađedje čovvjjis dego beaivelottažat. Lei dan rájes go gulai dan birra vuohččan, háliidan geahččalit, muhto seammás ii lean okto riehta duosttan. Ige lean dovđan oadjebasvuoda jearrat ovttasge eará váldit iežas badas. Ii lean bajássaddan oainnuin ahte lei lunddolaš dahje, ahte oktage anášii ná. Dušše internehta bokte lei ožžon govahallama makkár dat lei. Juostá iežas siste didii juo ovđal gihtii ahte dasa son liiko. Ii lean goassege duodai liikon dábálaš seksai, lei gal vissásii buorre ja gal son fal navddášii veahá, muhto ii lean dássázii dovđan dan albma klimáksa, dan orgásmma mas ledje diet násttiid ja rakehtaidda, daidda maid buohkat hupme. Lei dovđan iežas boastut ja čabuláganin olles eallima, go háliidii ja áibbašii nu sakka, juoidá mii ii lean sosiálalaččat dohkkehuvvon dahje juogá mii ii govviduvvonge nu dávjá.

Son gii vuoiddai olju litna, liegga giedaide, čippostii seŋgii ja rohttii gokčasa eret dan nuppis. “Jorgal ja čurttu mu guvlu”, gohččui son. Ovttatmano nubbi gulđalii ja julki váimmuin geigii bada. Lei amas ja veahá imáš nu álasin leat nuppi lahka. Nu hearki ja vuollegaš. Seammás lei hui turning on go didii ahte nubbi oinnii visot, su álasvuoda. Lei varra juoga olbmo luonddus mii gáibidii muhtomin duollet dálle čájeht iežas hearkivuoda nubbái. “Naba jus doppe lea, dego veahá...baika?” Son gii geaigái badain seanggas dat jearai. Sus lei vuollegis jietna ja meastta ribahii ruvssodit go jearai. Lihkus lanjas lei dušše čuovvgaš báitime, ja das ii bohtán nu ollu čuovga. “Sihkkarit lea veahá doppe, nu han olmmoš lea ráhkaduvvon, ii dat goit daga maidege” Son gii čippostii seanggas vástidii seammás go njávkagodii bahtaráigge birra litna lihkađagaiguin. Njoressii biebmoollju bada ala ja divttii golgat ja goaikut vulos julggiid mielde, oaddádagaidda ala. Visot šattai oljun ja njuoskas. Olju mii golggai galmmistii veahá, vaikko lanjas lei liekkas.

Litna suorpmaguin ruvvii bada, dassáigo varrajohtu oáččui liikii ruvssodit ja báhkistit. Hui buori áiggi válddii oljuin ja son geas bahta geaigái áibmui, illá nagodii vuordit goas nubbi galggai joatkkit sisa, su sisa. Lihkahalai bada veahá, vai jo suorpmat gávnnašii luotta. “Ale doamahala, gal moai goit gerge. Mun háliidan álggos du ligget bures, ovđalgo barge maidege” Jietna lei lihka linis go giedat mat ruvvejdedje. Goappašagat vuoinŋaiga lossadeappot ja jitnoseappot. Seammá háliidusat ja áigumušat devde áimmu suohkadin.

“Ii galgga hohpohallat analaseksain. Rumaš ferte vuoinŋastit ja ieš háliidit. Mun háliidan du gieibmat garrasit, váldet du hui bures, dassáigo doarggistat. Dus lea nu finna bahata”. Go lei geargan hupmame, de fáhkka dovdui njuovččageahči njoalosteame ráiggi birra. Bánit gáskkašedje bada, ja varrogasat njuovččageahči gávnna geainnu sisa. Son gii njoalui doalai giedaiguin bahtaráiggi veahá rabasin, vai lei álkut njoallut. Son gii čurtti, son biesttihii áimmu geahppáin go ii lean vuordán dovdat njuokčama. Lei hui linis ja dat njuovčča jorai olggos sisa nu geahppasit, ja dušše dat jurdda man gielddus dat lei, cahkkehii dego dolá vuolledábiide. Lei nu buorre, ja olles rumaš gáibidii eanet, garraseappot, deavdit ráiggi. Gitta čalmmiguin lei álki návddašit, go ii dárbbasan jurddašit maidege.

“Diet lea oba buorre, ale fal heaitte, áiggun eanet, geahččal coggat suorpmaid sisa”. Son hui vuollegaččat ja jođanit, seammás go cipmui čalmmiid gitta ja gállu vuoinŋastahtii madrassa vuostá. Ii duosttan geahččat, ii duosttan baljo lihkestit amas dat nubbi heaitit dahje lihkestit eret. Go dat nubbi lei njollon bahtaráigge dassáigo varra jorai nu ahte liikii birra ledje dego unna, unna divrrážat mat lihkađalle doppe ja olles rumaš pulserii, de son oktan njuokčamiin coggalii ovtta suorpmas sisa. Lei hui baski ja ille čáhke goappašagat dohko. Ii ádjánan guhka ovđalgo rumaš luoitilii balu ja lodji oáčči. Ráigi stuorului ja olles suorbma čágai sisa. Son gii stoagai suorpmaguin, loktii oaivvi ja divttii dušše giedaid stoahkat badain. Go lei ovttain suorpmain gieibman oanehaš bottu, ja go nubbi orui liikome dasa, de coggalii nuppi suorpmas vel sisa ja váldigodii garraseappot. Doalai ovtta gieda vuolemusas nuppi sealggi alde, gokko gobit ledje. Go guokte suorpmas ledje siste, ja ain lei ráigi loáččas, de coggalii goalmmát suorpmas vel sisa. Son gii gieimmahalai, njimadii veahá go golbma suorpmas lihkađišgohte olggos sisa. Ii riehta ieš

ge diehtán lei go dan dihte go bávččagii vai dan dihte go su rumaš gáibidii garraseappot ja eanet.

“Lea got beare garrasit? Háliidatgo don ahte mun heaittán?”

“Ti, ale heaitte! Nu buorre...garraseabbo, itgo váldde mu garraseabbo?” Ovttatmano go dan lei dadjan, de suorpma jorggihedje birra ja deaddiluvvo ráigái sisa, nu sisa go fal manne ja alge deaddit, dego roahkit, bajás, dáhki guvlui. Dássedis, garra lihcastagaiguin dedde ja dedde, olggos sisa, birra ah’ birra. Son gii čurtti, geigii bada suorpmaid vuostá, njimai ja sáđai. Son gii gieimmai, coggalii njealját suorpma vel sisa ja dan háve ii lean veaháge várrogas. Son lihka-halai olles gieda jođáneabbo ja jođáneabbo ja oinnii mo ráiggáš lei áibbas dievva, ja mo suorpma johte badas. Dušše oaidnit mo nuppi gorut lihkadii su roavvá lihcastagaid mielde bajidii su himuid. Njimman ja sáđđan šattai alibut ah’ alibut, ja go viimmát nubbi bodii de son ieš maid bodii, vaikko ii lean duohtadan ge iežas.

Orgásmma maŋŋel, go gorut lei heaitán doargisteame, válddii son gieda eret ja sihkkulii veahá gávnniide, ovdalgo velledii nuppi báldii. “Nagodatgo don vázzit dál?” Mojonjálmmiid son jearralii nuppis. “Diet lei nu issoras buorre, vuohččan go mun lean ná návddašan seksas! In dárbbat nagodit vázzit, dahje čohkkatge moatti vahkkui!” Nubbi sáđai ain veahá go vástidii mojonjálmmiid ruovttoluotta.

Fáhkka gulllostii biila bisáneame olggobealde, ja son gii lei suorpmaiguin gieibman, njuikii bajás seanggas johtileappot go cubbo, ja láse lusa njágái geahčestit láseliinni duohken. “Vuoi, bearg..., dál got juo bohtet?! Don fertet gárvodit ja viehkalit olggos!” Jođán dego goddesahpan son bidjalasti gárvvuid ala, viegahii bohttalid eret ja manai giedaid bassat. Nubbi ii lean njoazibut songe. Moatti sekunddas ledje biktasat badjelis ja vaikko bahta bávččagii juohke lihcastagain, de aŋkke lei snáhpis viehkat viesu čađa dassáigo ollii nuppi uvssa lusa. Ovdal go ollii ráhppat uvssa ja lávkii olggos, de viegahii nubbi su, cummestii su hoahpus ja čárvestii bada. “Dál don leat guktii otne geahččalan the backdoor, mu finnut. Jurddaš jus oktage diedášii munno deaivvademiid birra, de gal livččiime olles márkani stuora sáhkan”, dadjalii seammás go cummestii. “Nu moai livččiime, muhto ii dat guoská eará go munnuide. Gal moai gulahalle. Giitu, go don leat don”. Liekkus mojit liggejedje váimmuid, ja goappašagain ledje násttit čalmiin, go maŋŋeukša njozet manai gitta ja nubbi ukša rahpasii.

Anne Nymås is the pseudonym of a Sami writer based in Sweden. Her debut collection of short stories Sex & The Sápmi was published by Lumio Förlag in 2018.

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→ Excerpt from *New Forest* Josefine Klogart

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She had five caterpillars in one hand and three plum stones in the other. She wanted to keep them, the caterpillars and the plum stones. They could see the stable from there. At eight o'clock in the morning when the large rock in the dyke was still cold from the night, the horses were pulled out of the stable and across the road, hoofs rattling double, the ghost horses came thundering from the other side of the courtyard, and the horses rushed forward, and the girls, in the last minute, managed to get the nylon bridles over their ears, then they beat their heads one last time as if to shake any remaining bands off them and thundered on ahead. She still did not have her first horse. She sat in her room and drew horses from hunting magazines given to her by her uncle. Placed a white sheet of paper over the photographs and positioned the task lamp directly above it. In the window she had a collection. There were crystals and fossils and some large pieces of amber with petrified insects. When the light fell in a particular way the crystals reflected it onto the paper. The field bordered their garden. It stretched up over the hill by the quarry, and sloped down towards the bay. At five in the afternoon the horses were brought back home again, pulled back, chattering hoofs limp ropes in the bridles across the road back to the stable. It was that summer that one of the older girls fell off and was dragged through the woods. The riding boot was tall and shiny. The leather so stiff the instep wouldn't bend. The foot jammed in the stirrup. The boot still looked freshly polished when finally the horse halted back in the courtyard. Started nibbling at the grass that had grown up between the cobbled stones. Before entering through the gate to the yard the horse lowered its head. It dragged the girl after it like a memory or a childhood. She had collected the caterpillars from the lawn one by one. They were soft like bunnies. Later the hand flared up. She moved the caterpillars to the one hand in order to scratch the other. Then she put them away to be able to use her nails. The whole underarm was speckled, and it itched throughout the evening and the night. The mother filled cold water into a mixing bowl, wrung ice cubes out of an orange tray. She sat the bowl down in front of her daughter. There was a towel under the bowl so that it wouldn't stain the table. The ice cubes bounced in the water like boats in a harbour. She moved

her hands through the water, the ice cubes were light, they fell through the water like amber rolling on a wave over the seabed and onto the beach. It was Ellen who owned the horses. The lease of the field was hers. She divided duties and privileges between the girls, mucking out riding polishing the harness collecting the horses when the farrier came. She appointed girls to sweep and girls to give worm treatments, the special pride there was in that. The light yellow paste which was injected into the back of the horse's tongue before the older girls took a firm grip on their strong jaws and pushed their heads up, kept them there until they had chewed and swallowed. Ellen's voice was sharp, and there was no doubt she was aware of her power. Access to water gives power, access to sleep oh let me sleep, let me just lie here with you tonight *the gatekeeper holds the power*, she had the horses. In droplets she allowed the youngest of the girls to lead them across the road. Morning or evening. She made a chart and hung it in the stable on a bulletin board, had them feed or lug water in large 25-litre jugs. Love for the horses grew with the degree of degradation in the work as they were ordered around. When the shaft of the manure fork split and they mucked out with the pieces or with a wide-mouthed shovel. The pride there was in that. The more you sacrifice, the more visible is the love for the others and the more shiny a piece of jewellery it is to wear, get up early and work before school when it's hardly light out, when the others eat when the others are in Aarhus strolling along the highstreet you are in the stable or in the field because you have understood everything, how it works. If they had not swept the aisles properly they were reprimanded, and one of the older girls would have to take over. How shameful that was. The eternal older girls as they exist throughout childhood, and before even being one of them yourself childhood is over and you are not in that stable anymore or in that classroom or in that town simply, the place where it would have been worth something. It is like midsummer and the feeling you can have then, that the summer is over before you even made it under its cover. To again be on the outside. That you were not ready and therefore never arrived before the autumn was suddenly there with its cool mornings and the mist over the bay at Knebel and yellow leaves that fall like faces bearing that enduring question of autumn: What have you brought for me. On which grounds have you come to me for refuge. A plum stone you have hidden inside your cheek to sometimes flash between the teeth slowly biting the long sour fibres off, that is perhaps the

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only thing you have kept and only now have understood is the summer that you have eaten from thoughtlessly, and no new summer will grow as in dreams when you eat, it has been devoured while you obliviously watched tv or walked through town and the day that you thought you were walking through was a whole season and the week a childhood and then there you are hanging from the living fences with soil under your soles and not even that is yours. A friend who many years later comments on her nails, you should really look after those nails. And she is just a child crushed by his words, and at the same time so old that she laughs at this image of herself as the child, crushed, in front of the excavators at the building site at Islands Brygge where the wide white plastic strips clamour in the wind and she tries to hide her fingers in her sleeves or behind the phone. Something she has only borrowed for a time and has made the mistake of bringing with her to the city, to a place where people's movements have no more to do with nature than words have with the things they name. The one who loves the least holds the power.

The salt from the sea had sedimented as a lace collar circumventing her ankles and her neck. He asked her to lie down on the bed. She lay down. Her skin was warm from spending the day in the sun. Take your clothes off, he said. She did it. He sat down on the bed next to her. She took his hand and pressed it onto her cheek. She felt the roughness of his hand under her fingers. Her own hand was shaking or it was his. Just a little, almost imperceptibly, but there was a tremor as before an earthquake or the eruption of a volcano. The uneasy chanting or rasping of a landscape. She pulled him towards her onto the bed. He lay on his side, she turned over. They looked at each other. Were so close they could feel the hot air that only a moment ago had been in the other's lungs. She looked at his eyes. the two irises in different colours with distinct dark rings around them. She thought: I can't be without him. He pervaded into her in a way that made her think: I am inside him. I love you, he whispered. She smiled and blinked some tears out of her eyes. Are you crying, he whispered. She shook her head. He lay across her and she clamped her legs around him hard. Looked him in the eye. He looked at her puzzled. Was he scared. It is too hard, he said and she held on, the muscles in her thighs trembling. Stop, he said and she let go and he rolled off onto his back next to her. She cried as if she was missing someone or as if she had lost some-

thing she really cared about. Give me your hand, he said. She gave him her hand, and turned the palm upwards. She kissed him, said that she had missed him. I have been here the whole time, he said in a deep voice that she felt she could wear like a blanket. Wrapped in his voice she got out of the bed and went to the bathroom where she pulled a towel down from a large iron ring on the wall. It made a noise as it fell back. She turned on the faucet and held one end of the towel under the running water, wrung it carefully and put one foot on the table. then he was behind her, she could see him in the mirror. She sat her foot down on the floor again and turned around. She could see her genitals in the mirror in front of her, the outer lips and between them the darker inner ones, still a bit swollen. She wrenched the towel and hung it in its place next to the sink. Walked back in the direction of the bedroom. From the bed she could see him bend over and drink water from the tap. He straightened himself up and wiped his chin with his underarm. He looked at her through the mirror. She thought about what she had read, that before you kill someone else you look them in the eye. That you don't know anything about what it means to take another life before you've seen such a pair of eyes. She sits on the bed and brushes the sand off her feet. He is already beside her. He puts a hand on her shoulder and she lies down. Come she says as she turns off the light. It is completely dark in the room. Only the small orange eye of the dehumidifier in the corner lights up. It is late, she whispers. He steps over her and lies down. He caresses her back until she falls asleep.

The two girls are hanging out in the stable, looking at the swallow's nest under the roof. At the crossbeams and all the hooks and crevices. They look at the lamps that swing from the ceiling like ships in a church when the weightless birds land on them. The pigeons come to eat grain. Heavy and blue they fly clumsily through the stable like books thrown across the stalls and the ropes into the fodder room where they sit on the floor picking at the spillage. The girls must sweep properly. Fetch the hay and sweep. Get the rolled oats from the fodder room and sweep up the dry seed heads afterwards. She thinks it's awful when Anna has to go home. It is a world coming to an end every time. Anna always has to go home at a particular hour. In a way she wants to go with her and never come back. Then it would just be the two of them, then they could be like a pair of savage sisters. She does not envy her and she never hates her. It is easier that way. They decide to give the horses

a bit extra. It is their secret. They go to the fodder room and mix the compound feed with the oats in a bucket. Then they go into the stall where the two mares are. Anna holds on to Bess's bridle so that the horses won't fight over the food. Still they squeal and beat their heads, everything has to be super swift, but it is, and then both cribs are full. Their hearts are always in their throats when they feed. Even the distribution of it. Horses are caring and terrible. The girls each pet their horse, lift their manes and drill their faces into their warm fur. There is a special kind of quiet in the stable. The other horses are in the fold. There is just the sound of the two mares, the teeth grinding the grains and the pellets the flapping sound of the muzzle as they take in more food. Try putting your ear right next to its cheek, Anna says. She does. The girls look at one another, smile, still with their ears to the horses' cheeks, it's a crazy sound. You can really hear how the teeth crush the grains and grinds the fodder into a thick porridge. I have to go home, says Anna and claps Bess on the neck. A cloud of dust erupts in her face. They laugh. They pat the horses' backs, dust rising like butterflies then descending slowly in the stall between the girls and the horses, making a layer on the tip of the tongue and coating the teeth and around the eyelids that become grey-brown and heavy. You look like an albino, Anna says. They laugh but become serious. The little hairs on the face have also become visible now that the dust has settled on them, just above the lip. Do I also have a moustache, she asks. Yes. I wish I could come home with you and spend the night, she says. Anna's face tenses. She looks down. So do I, she lies.

When they turn off the light in the evening a black-blue darkness opens up in the room at the back. That room is always in the dark. Even during the day when the sun gushes onto the island, the light doesn't penetrate far enough to reach the room. She hears him fall asleep. How he breathes heavier and looser. The breath is a piece of gauze, which, throughout the day, has been wrapped tightly around the body and during sleep is relaxed, leaving the body soft and open. She lies down in the bed next to him. Breathes through her wide-open mouth as she pushes herself back over the sheet towards him so that they cannot get any closer. In his sleep he breathes in through her hair and out with a soft lamenting sound. She reaches backwards, catches his hand, and carefully holds his wrist. She pulls his arm around her like a wing or a blanket. She thinks about standing under the cherry trees at home in Copenhagen and look-

ing into the crown as a bird lands, grips onto a branch, flaps its wings a little before sitting down.

That was when she had dreamt of him – the one she had been with for a short period of time a few years back, the one that she now somehow too late and out of place would think about again and miss. It was in this condition that she bent over him, started kissing his neck and his chest. She pushed further down in the bed and took his cock in her mouth and he sort of woke and grabbed her hair half sleeping, pulled her up, kissed her, pushed her back down where she continued. Do you want me, he whispered she whispered yes and meant it and he was already someone else. She put her hand on his mouth to stop him speaking. She blurred her vision and in that way saw his body only dimly lit in the orange of the oil lamp, the warm light of a Rembrandt to help her deceit on its way. Look at me, he said and lifted her chin towards his face. And she became cold, her body stiff under his. The guilt she would now have to carry, which he, with his hand and his eyes, had placed upon her. That he had let this happen, that he had not taken better care of her. Not held her closer. He didn't notice anything. Just before he came they looked each other in the eye. Although he was remote and sort of isolated in his own pleasure he registered that she was looking at him from a place that seemed to him even further from the bed and the room than where he was at. And without thinking about it herself she instinctively led her hand to his chest, caressed it so as to show him a kind of attention, show him her participation. As he came he pulled out of her. The semen lay in a white fan across her stomach. He sunk onto the mattress next to her it ran down her side, became a clear trace and afterwards a dry white lace over her skin.

Josefine Klougart is the author of several novels of which One of Us Is Sleeping and On Darkness have been published in English.

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→ *Interview with Vishal K Dar* Kristian Vistrup Madsen

Kristian Vistrup Madsen: I understand you were in Luleå for quite a long time...

Vishal K Dar: Yeah, I was there for 11 weeks.

KVM: Why did you choose to stay for such a long time? What did you do?

VKD: Right from the very first conversation between me and the curatorial team (Asrin/Emily/Thomas), we were interested in making a work for the city that emerged out of the city itself. And for that to happen, it was necessary that I live in Luleå and get a good sense of the rhythms of the city and its layout. Most of my time was spent walking around, being with the sites (the Barge/the Crane/the Silos), experiencing each separately and in relation to each other.

When I got in, which was mid-September, the sun would set around 7pm. By the time I was installing the work in early November, the sunset moved to 2:30pm. Each passing week, I felt the light recede. The absence of light was important in ways that I do not know how to express in language.

The walks were quite frequent. At least one a day. Finding timecodes was one function of the walks. Timecodes are the systems by which the intervals between the movement of the torches is determined. The three sites were on the edge of the peninsula, but then they all had multiple viewing points to locate their position. So it was important for me to understand a web of lines that connect and disconnect and how each line can be a timecode through pace.

My work imagines that there is a timecode hidden the city itself, and that measuring instruments, a kind of clock, could be made out of existing infrastructure (the barge, the crane, the silo) and in that way be integrated back into the city. Some time was also spent reading and adjusting to the pulse through climate. Similar to a seismograph, I made notes of the receding light of the sun, the fluctuating moisture state in the air, and the color of the sea.

KVM: What is your impression of life in Norrbotten? How does the darkness and the

remoteness of it affect the people there?
How did it affect you?

VKD: I remember that in one of my conversations with a local, I was told how a person from outside the region should learn how to love the cold. Only then will they be able to really see the beauty in the landscape and its climate. The region of Norrbotten is haunting to say the least. I am sure that the darkness, when it was experienced in the age before electric light, created new imaginations in people of this region.

For some this darkness coupled with the extreme cold can be depressing. I find it calming and meditative. I also don't really see darkness as an evil force – that's a binary reading. Darkness is a primordial, mysterious space. I'm not afraid of it. I do come from a place where one might say there is too much of sun's light and heat. That can have its own maddening effect. In almost all creation myths, darkness plays a vital role. Everything seems to start somewhere in the space of the dark 'unknown' / which often translates to the 'unseen'. It's the correlation with sight that interests me the most, often challenging me in ways that are mostly felt on a visceral level. So much of darkness is to do with sight or the lack of it. We then get into the other relational definitions of darkness – which is ignorance. Now interestingly this connect us back to the 'a person from outside the region should learn how to love the cold' moment. Somewhere ignorance is being hinted at. An ignorance of the human mind's capacity to connect with climate and landscape. The othering is usually about being in a state of ignorance and hence a state of darkness.

KVM: Did you see the northern lights?

VKD: Oh yes, I did. One particular night, the sky gave an extended fabulous display of the aurora. I was excited like a child. I had an app on my phone that tracked the aurora activity in a fair amount of detail and accuracy for my location. When devices produce this kind of information, especially with accuracy that is felt and seen in real time, they become a very interesting part of life. Almost like a wish fulfilling genie-in-the-lamp object.

KVM: Your work is also about light and darkness. How do you think about it in the context of Luleå's port, and the geography of Norrbotten?

VKD: The beam(s) of light is a recurring ephemeral object in my work since **2013**. The beam always finds new meaning in every site work, and that is connected to the scale that it assumes and its breath (the timecode). In Luleå, the beams were much like large measuring instruments and scanners.

Dirghtamas is a phenomenological work in the sense that it reflects on the very concept of light – and not just the light of the beams, but natural light, too. This was the first time that the beams were in an expansive outdoor location. The geo-location, the region of Norrbotten, and being at the peninsula where the atmospheric conditions change constantly, produced a unique environment for the beams to emerge and disappear with the moisture content in the air, the low temperatures and the wind speeds. All these factors affect the quality of the beam of light. Also, the darkness was deep as the sea had not frozen. When it does freeze over, and the snow covers the landscape, we will sense a whole new experience. There will be a lot more reflected light around us. It's also the first project where the beams have been left on **24/7**.

An interesting thing happened on the **3rd** day post the opening of the work. The airport chief called the curatorial team to tell them that the middle beam on the crane was causing issues in the airspace for the pilots landing at the airport. I had to reprogram a new path for this one beam.

Another incident was when the team had issues reaching the barge on the **21st** since the waters were turning into ice and the rowing boat was unable to manoeuvre around the chunks of ice coming down stream.

Mea (a intern at Gallery Syster) told me about her father's reaction to the barge site: "I saw the lights late one evening and thought that the lights were search lights looking for someone that had gone through the ice – an ice skater, perhaps".

Vishal K Dar is an artist based in Gurgaon, India. His work Dirghtamas is a site-specific work commissioned for the Luleå Biennial 2018.

Lulu-journal

Lulu is how Luleå first appeared in writing in **1327**, a name of Sami origin that can be translated as “Eastern Water”. Lulu-journal is made by the Luleå Biennial’s artistic directors and invited guest editors. It is published on the biennial’s website and can be downloaded for printing. www.luleabiennial.se

Colophon

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