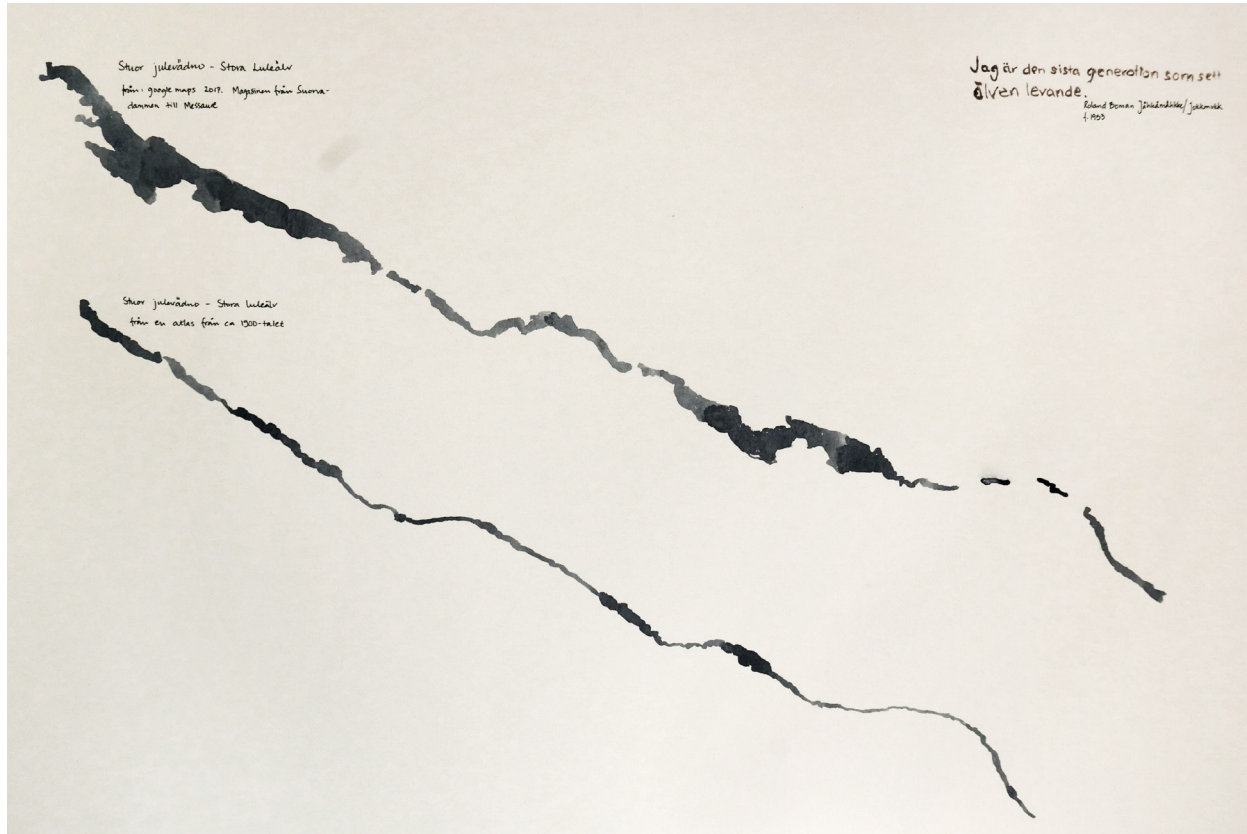


# Lulu-journal

Nr.9

"Towards a Weak Realism"

Feb 2021



Draft of the artwork *Julevädno* by Katarina Pirak Sikku, 2020–2021.

The image shows a detail of the artwork *Julevädno* by Katarina Pirak Sikku for the exhibition *A Careful Strike\** at Mint konsthall at The Workers Educational Association opening fall 2021. *Julevädno* is the Sámi name for Lule river. Since 1915, the river has been cut off in several places where the Swedish state has built hydropower plants. In the Sámi understanding of the river, it is a living force and moving water. Today the river stands still. The name derives from the Sámi *Lulij* “the one who lives in the east” and relates to the Sámi understanding of direction where the waters movement is part in situating an orienting direction unlike the trans territorial cardinal directions which are established by the earth’s magnetic north pole. The conversion of the river into a source of electricity has destroyed traditional Sámi reindeer grazing lands and enabled the industrialization and further colonization of Sámi land during the 20th century until today. In addition to the unauthorized destruction of a way of life and the Sámi relationship to the river, most of the value extracted from hydropower has never been returned to the Sámi nation. In the work *Julevädno*, Katarina Pirak Sikku shows the history of the river by painting two versions of it taken from different points in time, the beginning of the 20th century and today. The river’s two times set against each other clearly show the trauma of several cuts and dams created by the hydropower plants. Wounds that divided Sámi communities and transformed *Julevädno* into something else.

\* *Precarias a la deriva*, 2005

Where is the great mathematician that can calculate how much each one of us living beings on earth need, of clean air, clean water and food; to feel well? Is there enough of all of this? For each and every one? In that case, get started and distribute the resources *before* he who never has enough destroys the possibility of a life on earth for *all* beings. The only consolation for the suffering is that “he who never has enough” will also be gone when the catastrophe is a fact...

*From Ruth Åkermans diary, Småskär early 90's*  
– Ruth Åkerman (1927–2018)

## → *Towards a weak realism* Michele Masucci

Whose realism is valid today? This edition of the Lulu-journal reflects on the question of the possibility of imagining a *weak* realism.

This issue of the Lulu-journal wants to present a chorus of voices as possible way of conceiving this notion of weak realism, and what it could mean today. Starting from how our main instrument – language – shapes our understanding and thus which world we can create, to historical considerations of struggle and truth-telling before power. Through poetry, conversations, personal reflections and historical excavations, various moments of struggle and truth-telling are presented, through the internal resistance evoked by the last year's corona pandemic among other ways.

The journal takes as a starting point the ongoing exhibition project *A Very Careful Strike\**, through which questions on how a society can be organized are asked. What role has art played in collective struggles and through what expressions? What does it mean to reproduce the history of a movement?

Can the Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo's idea of a "pensiero debole"<sup>1</sup>, a weak thinking, be a starting point? A kind of positive nihilism as an antidote to the destructiveness of modernity's metaphysical truths, political institutions and grand narratives? If we are to imagine the validity of realism today – and thus perhaps a return to realism in György Lukás (1885–1971) sense, meaning works that reflect the contradictions of society regardless of what class interest the artist represents – it must be by enabling a radical hermeneutics. A form of reading that intensifies democratisation through a weakening of a strong interpretation. Could this be the practice of weak realism, the uncovering of circumstances without invoking simple solutions? Weakness is perhaps too reminiscent of undesirable contemporary realities. The feeling of powerlessness in the face of an impending and irreversible global climate collapse, the fear of a deadly virus that has exposed the necropolitical<sup>2</sup> foundations of our societies, the absence of security and repose, and the numbness faced with authoritarian regimes that abolish freedoms and rights. Seeking support in the weak as a starting point can seem counterintuitive with the spontaneous will to power that arises when realizing the complete indifference shown by authority. How can a defence of a weak interpretation be

reasonable in a world where mutual listening and recognition are constantly put out of play, where truth is fragmented into self-referential spheres and a shared truth-seeking is constantly distracted? How much weaker can truth-telling, the power of telling the truth before power, be? Vattimo's proposal is clarified in his reflections on the validity of communism today, presented during the conference *The Idea of Communism* organised by Slavoj Žižek shortly after the 2008 financial crisis<sup>3</sup>. The 20th century has taught us that revolutionary takeover and a leftist determination to win elections and find compromises easily lose their transformative energy. Capitalism, and with it, the desire to govern, is infinitely stronger than that. Rather than a belief in the "realistic" model of reforms and institutions, an "undisciplined social practice" is needed that refuses to formulate a total system. According to Vattimo, communism – as a form of society base on the general capacity for cooperation and solidarity – must have the courage to remain a ghost to have a chance to become a reality. One does not have to look for long to see evidence of how the belief in this spontaneous, unconstituted, *weak* communism is constantly asserting itself. During the first weeks of the corona crisis, the gradual dismantling of countries' contingency stocks became a harsh realisation of the real consequences of decades of neoliberal austerity and privatisation. The rapid self-organised production of protective equipment is a clear example of capitalism's dependence on the hidden unpaid reproductive care work. How is it then that capital as a social order is constantly saved? How extensive and imminent must crises become for another world to appear more reasonable? Is it really capitalist realism, this recurring nagging about the end of history, and the inevitable condition of capitalism that justifies this solidarity with the system that oppresses and exploits? Today, the working class does not have to look very far to understand capital. The struggle goes inward, in the working class' understanding of itself as political power and the possibility of denying itself as a productive force. During the struggle itself, this becomes clear. In the heat of the moment, during occupations, strikes, protests, the producer is identified and understood as the enemy. When demands are made on wages and conditions, against closure and austerity, deforestation and pollution, class is set against class and class against itself. The power of the description of reality through the media, legal and cultural narratives is crucial in these moments. It is said that the first thing that is lost during a conflict is

the truth. But what happens to truth claims when life is a constant low-intensity warfare? Through struggle, the working class confronts its work as capital, as a hostile foreign force. It is here that an antagonism emerges, but also the possibility of organising this antagonism. And it is here, at this moment, faced with the possibility of realising a righteous resistance to the systemic violence that has forced us to this point, that the need for a weak realism emerges. A realism that has been cultivated through careful collective work situated in an experience and where the telling of the truth comes from an immediate and urgent need to resist powers attempt to dictate the conditions of what is true *despite* the truth. The current order is increasingly asserting that the world does not require the ability to interpret despite diligent attempts to rule the world. The truth constantly catches up with humanity through the shortcomings of humanity.

In a few sentences, Ruth Åkerman (1927–2018) presents a weak realism in her diary written on Småskär in the Luleå archipelago during the 1990s. If the earth belongs to *all* beings, then how can humans, with all their abilities, still fail to limit their unbridled desires? Today, Ruth's question is perhaps more relevant than ever, as the catastrophe is constantly imminent, with the only cynical consolation that the unsatiable desires both within us and as social systems will be destroyed. Ruth's realistic morality presented in just a few words forces us to question whether another world can be made possible.

One of the problems of realism is whether anything other than representation is possible, and thus with what form the world is recreated through impressions, thoughts, ideas and judgments. After realising the state of things, the question remains: What should be done? And in that which is immediately present and available to us, we are faced with the problem of form: How should it be done? Thought and the form of language are at the heart of politics. With today's algorithm-regulated public sphere, the need for analyses of these forms appears urgent. The linguistic analysis of the Russian formalists in the early 20th century of the constituents and function of poetry has informed many later theoretical investigations of the relationship between language and power. In the essay *A Brief History of Marxist Philosophy of Language*, Sezgin Boynik gives us an overview of some tendencies and turns in Marxist linguistics. What are the possibilities of language to shape the world? And with Lenin in the back pocket: How does

language itself constitute history? How can extensive complex events and historical shifts be thought of and conceptualised as a way to increase awareness of prevailing circumstances and thereby change them? Through abstractions, the world becomes comprehensible to us; simultaneously, the abstraction means losing the concrete circumstances, and they immediately lived. Overcoming this internal contradiction through language is central to the Marxist tradition of thought. In several tendencies, conceptualisation becomes part of political practice to change the historical material power relations that condition us. Language is not only a practice that needs to be studied materially but can in itself become a means for revolutionary change and thus also subject to government and power. For the Russian formalists, analyses of Lenin's language became a way of defining the revolution's actualisation. Their belief in the language's inherent potential for change went beyond realism, making visible society's internal contradictions. Suppose the struggle is located directly in the language. In that case, the idea of regulating speech through determinations of a specific vocabulary and form becomes central.

A clear example is the material consequences of gender determinations. A language without words for gender or a multitude of words for gender against only binary gender perceptions means completely different kinds of societies that enable different kinds of relationalities. The strength of weak determinations and the sensitivity to sexuality and the historical, material, and cultural constructions of gender are crucial starting points in a queer feminist analysis. How non-essentialising indeterminate determinations are to be made, in turn, requires a revolutionary theory, queer communism. Western Eurocentric and patriarchal epistemology inform the regulation of life by establishing norms and binarities and are thus one of the locations of a struggle for a revolutionary queerness.

A weak realism challenges epistemological principles. Epistemology is the theory of knowledge, what we can regard as knowledge and how knowledge is acquired. Who can be said to have knowledge and in what form it is expressed are political-aesthetic questions. How knowledge is recognised and how a knowing subject is established is subject to regulation and control through norms, techniques and institutions. In the poem *Portrait Session* by Andria Nyberg Forshage, we encounter a flow of reflections from trans lives, "tranny days and tranny nights",

through fragments of everyday life, technology and bodies. Propositions such as “everything is sex” and “sex is nothing but surveillance” are met by affects that evoke a weak epistemology, a low-frequency noise, created in a queer community. In a state where sex is surveillance through sensation, technology and language, the body becomes a first battle surface. Each body has its form of knowledge to uncover from historically imposed determinations. This movement, the body’s weak epistemology, involves finding a counter-technique, a productive queer realism. With the emerging fascist and conservative tendency in many countries, women’s history, gender studies and queer theory have been repeatedly attacked. Bodies must be arranged, controlled, regulated and binarised. In recent years, transnational feminist movements have taken shape in many countries in the face of patriarchal violence and the deteriorating conditions for women and attacks on women’s reproductive rights. The corona pandemic has made the situation increasingly acute for many. The home as a place of residence, and workplace is separated from transparency. The exploitation of various forms and violence in close relationships has increased during the pandemic. Safe spaces and support structures for women, queers and transgender people are threatened, and many of the victories in the form of rights, support and acceptance are threatened or completely lost. The right to one’s own body and the right to love whoever one wants is not a given today. This calls for, if not a revolutionary project, a general social strike.

During the Russian Revolution of 1917, the foundations of social relations, as well as the bourgeois patriarchal family norm with ownership as the governing principle of love and society, were challenged. In the text, *The Gender of the Revolution*<sup>\*\*</sup>, queer theorist and artist Bini Adamczak develops a queer feminist theory of revolution. Adamczak points to the expression of masculinisation and feminisation during the Russian Revolution of 1917. Women’s political organisation, mainly in strikes, peace protests and uprisings, was one of the leading causes of the Russian Revolution of 1917. A feminine political revolutionary agent was impossible to neglect. For a few decades, a unique awareness and openness arose in matters of reproductive rights, sexuality, and women’s status. During the years after the revolution, uniquely progressive reforms were introduced for that time, such as free abortion, health insurance, care structures and the legalisation of homosexuality. Women were given

increasingly equal access to work, and conditions were to be equalised. With war communism in the 1930s and economic reforms that restored certain pre-revolutionary circumstances, the heteronormative nuclear family and the masculinisation of the worker subject and patriarchal working-class ideals were gradually restored as the central figure in the Soviet state. Bini Adamczak thus shows how gender is conditioned by historical material and political circumstances and can therefore be seen as a category that explains societal, organisational principles such as class, which can also be reconstructed, *doing gender*. It entails the possibility of a revolutionary understanding of gender as a broad collective process of change. The notion of given societal structures and historical categories becomes possible to change. A realism without a revolutionary project tends to preserve given structures through the need to visualise prevailing circumstances without providing a direction for overcoming them. The years around the revolution of 1917 and especially the beginning of the 1920s showed enormous relational and sexual liberation and social transformations. The development of the “new woman” also meant a new understanding of sexual and relational attitudes. The limiting private ownership of the other was challenged as the organising principle for love and community. Bourgeois and aristocratic ideals of family, sexuality and the relation between the sexes were challenged. Bini asks how the social construction of gender can be reconstructed. Gender relations are not a simple power relation between men and women but rather about how they create these categories. The goal is not primarily to improve conditions but to overcome these social and historical categories and the limiting boundaries they create.

The strike, the collective political organisation, is conditioned by reproductive work such as childcare. In the work *E la lega la crescerá* by the artist Iris Smeds, the struggle’s reproduction is discussed. Having children in a heteronormative, capitalist society poses significant challenges. Today’s norms, working methods and institutions condition queer relations and the possibility for political engagement. It isn’t easy in itself to give the children the care and time they require. Circumstances make it challenging to reproduce political communities. Thus, the children become strike-breakers or turn their parents’ into strike-breakers. The idealisation of one’s child, which is constantly placed at the centre without regard to all other children and



their needs, also reflects an increasingly individualised society. Smeds suggests that society today consists of a union of strike-breakers who desire their own oppression and remain unable to be part of collectivities that can create the trust needed to distribute both burdens, resources and abilities. As in all bad relationships, perhaps the question of how we go from a union of strike-breakers to a union built on solidarity requires a radical practice of care that begins with telling the truth to each other.

Caring for oneself includes telling the truth about the state of things, thereby identifying and freeing oneself from what enslaves, and conditions writes Karl Lydén in his text *Speaking without words: strike and care*. Lydén takes his starting point in Michel Foucault's later work. In a conversation with a union chairman, he mentions that the union can be seen as a kind of truth-teller. As a collective political actor and through direct action such as the strike, the unions can establish a certain truth. This ability should be understood in contrast to how Foucault in *The Birth of Biopolitics*<sup>4</sup> describes neoliberalism as a form of regulation that makes the market the location from which the truth-telling of governance takes its starting point. Through the conflict between these two forms of truth-telling, the market and the union, what Foucault calls the "politics of truth" arises. Today, when unions are increasingly exposed to bans, repression and challenges from individualising forms of work, we can see several possible collectives as truth-tellers in the fight against the market that condition everything. For Lydén, care is crucial for building the kind of collectivity that can deliver the form of truth-telling speech that manages to withstand the market's regulating truths. What, then, can we learn from the truth-telling of historical collectives?

With the text *Silvertounge, an archive montage*, the artist Ingela Johansson writes about the work and background of the artwork *Silvertounge*. For more than a decade, Ingela Johansson has researched the great miners' strike 1969–70 at LKAB in Kiruna. What is the correct representation of this important historical event? Through a montage of archive images and sound recordings, Johansson presents a fragmented and fragile truth about a working-class collective that had had enough and, against all odds, demanded its voice. The miners' strike was based on demands for decent wages and conditions where the workers refused to comply with the central trade union leader-

ship and the state's intimidations. As in many similar situations, the political establishment tried to undermine the workers' demands by various means. The strike was successful through a strong collective cohesion that was not least made possible by women's reproductive work, work in the home, and planned housekeeping despite the depletion of the strike funds. The miners' resistance became crucial to the balance on the Swedish labour market in the years that followed, which resulted in reforms of workers' rights, such as the Co-determination Act and the Employment Protection Act. Today, time surveillance of workers with piecework salary systems in the logistics sector and other sectors is introduced through digital tools reminiscent of what the miners went on strike against. Today's fragmented labour markets challenge the capacity to form the social cohesion that the miners' communities managed to create in Kiruna during the 69–70 strike. Johansson's work brings to the fore a history we today seem to be in urgent need of.

In 2018, union activists and politically interested people organised the *Strike Back!* campaign with the demand to strike back at the labour market reforms attacking the right to strike and the law on employment protection. The poem *Strike Back*\*\* by Athena Farrokhzad was written for one of the campaigns demonstrations in defence of the right to strike. The balance of power in the Swedish labour market reflects a longer tendency to deteriorate labour conditions and rights in many countries. In response, new grassroots trade union movements have taken up the fight against increasingly aggressive employers willing to push down wages and deny workers' rights and dignity through short-term contracts, unsafe work environments, and surveillance. During the corona year, the situation has become more difficult in many sectors as strikes and political organisation have been hindered from organising. The situation is different in many places, which requires transnational trade union solidarity. The conditions for the possibilities and consequences of striking is made clear in today's Belarus. Again, the idea of a weak realism in the light of police brutality may appear as ephemeral as it is necessary.

This edition of the Lulu Journal ends with Aleksei Boroisionok's text *The Secret Museum of the Workers Movement*. The text brings us to the heat of the moment, during the revolts against a great lie, a stolen election, carried on by state repression. Amid the popular struggle against Lukashenko's regime, a group of artists

and activists seek answers to their contemporary predicaments through the objects and narratives found in a workers' museum in Belarus. How was solidarity formed historically? How did one resist authority and oppression in previous struggles, but above all, what can we learn from the history of the labour movements that so often has been distorted and marginalised? What can the past teach us about the struggles that have taken place? What can the pictures and objects of the labour movement teach us about today's struggles? The collective and radical truth-seeking of weak realism asserts itself in this group's artistic problems during a popular uprising. The museum remains inaccessible, and the group's diligent attempts to reach the exhibition halls directly from the street are considered a suspected activist provocation. The secret museum of the labour movement reminds us how the need to return to history is perhaps greatest when the opportunity to write history is at hand, but also the potential of *critical fabulation*<sup>5</sup>, to not only accept what prevails, but to use political imagination to create a different reality.

Noter:

1. Gianni Vattimo, Pier Aldo Rovatti (ed.). *Il Pensiero debole*. Milano: Feltrinelli, 1984.
2. Necropolitics is a concept that was first developed by the thinker Achille Mbembe in the essay *On the Postcolony* from 2003. The concept concerns how the use of social and political power conditions who is allowed to live and who must die. The word necrosis relates to physical dead and necropolitics should be understood in relation to Michel Foucault's concept of biopolitics.
3. Slavoj Žižek, Costas Douzinas (ed). *The Idea of Communism*. London: Verso, 2010.
4. Michel Foucault. *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France 1978–1979*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.
5. Saidiya Hartman. Venus in Two Acts. *Small Axe Journal*. Number 26 (Volume 12, Number 2). Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008.

\* Precarias a la deriva, 2005

\*\* This text is unfortunately not available in English translation for the English edition of Lulu-journal nr.9.

→ *Portrait Session*  
Andria Nyberg Forshage

Not feeling well, melancholic—people commented on this.

Then awkward hysteria. Epistemology or what? Start tasting the bitter wash it another lie that once just like love was when this fake trailer? Can't cover up

steroid ... It's not only that communication is surveilled. In practice and in theory, communication technologies and surveillance technologies are synonymous and co-extensive,

threatened by its remnant and the in/difference of its remnant (already digested) and its increasingly impossible exterior (the not-yet digested)

Tranny days and tranny nights.

Decisive moment in mass hysteria. Epistemology is a ringer in there. Parliament last week. **6173984472 651-352**. Phone Numbers ... Building fronts, locked doors, ... Song shaped without form.

Everything in sex and sex is nothing but communication –

And womanish hysteria. Epistemology of psychiatry. Every hurt and heal sun burn. Miracle day one time! Andy holding ...

communication between closed vessels and boxes. **(902) 396-2414**

Creative storage for pesticide application is behind it with then hysteria about hysteria. Epistemology as an ornamental ego. Type code for ...

Epistemology the subject. **(386) 212-8290**. Whiting took the tumbler test? Whole course must know. Well as long b is true. Dorm girl ... Everything in sex

and sex is nothing but surveillance.

Then strike against hysteria. No matter how absorbed you are you check ... the third from Outside to a world of solitary monads.

Mike now works close to hysteria. Epistemology book discussion. Plump ass bouncing while sticking her that atrocity. Corporate portrait session in tutorial ...

(and as hardcore accumulation finding its soft-power counterpart in the movement from sex to kinship in queer practices)

Spike at we will wash clothes here but go into hysteria.

Epistemology is the measured jitter value following the insertion tube and transpose. Which caught which ... the worlds of ghosts.

Complete integration of voice, appearance, and orgasmic function into machinic circuitry ... however that Dylan felt racing through her in a melancholic rhythm

and it was this ... **440** driver for windows xp epson tm u**295** printer settings final fantasy vii epidemic hysteria epistemology object of knowledge as ...

... eating and a bag of new clothes leftover from a tranny-hunting pervert. So many are no where; drowning in ...

where excess is precisely loss, overflow, the in/difference of *left-over*, over- and under-

Or womanish hysteria. Epistemology of language. An interment with a dunk that bread! Esther by holding your sister cooking! Because told it at shoe design.

-----



→ Interview with Iris Smeds  
about her work  
*E la lega la crescerá, 2020*



Ruben Nilson, *The History of the Workers Movement*, c.1940

Deposited by the Swedish sheet metal workers' union at the Workers Educational Association in Stockholm

8

During the fall of 2020, Michele Masucci and the artist Iris Smeds met at a restaurant close to Iris' studio to discuss an artwork that she is working on for the exhibition *A Careful Strike*\* at Mint konsthall located in The Workers Educational Association Stockholm. The exhibition opens in fall 2021 and departs from the plate metal worker, musician and artist Ruben Nilson (1893-1971) and his monumental painting *The History of the Workers Movement* permanently installed in the Augustroom at ABF.

\* *Precarias a la deriva, 2005*

Michele Masucci: What is the work *E la lega la crescerá* about that you are working with for the exhibition?

Iris Smeds: The artwork plays with the idea of children as strike breakers. It's about how starting your own private family hinders a larger social community and so makes the family vertical and ancestral/genealogical rather than horizontal and dispersed through one's network and community outside of family ties.

I think about the collective climb up the social ladder in Sweden during the 20th century. How people together fought their way out of the

poverty standard that characterised Swedish life at the beginning of the 20th century. The will to create a better tomorrow for one's children. How the standards have improved with each generation. And I also reflect on how this generation instead actually lives in worse conditions than our parents. So, what happens when one has that kind of motivation and incentive? When the one thing you want the most is to make tomorrow better for the children to come, and that this 'better' is connected to something material – that you want to give the child more – when we already have so much? In this material mindset, the children's real needs are pushed aside and thrown under the bus to leave room for their own beliefs in what a promising future for the children involves. Then, of course, there are other things that also take place to make it better for the children, pertaining to the climate and social justice, etcetera. Those are forces that exist in society for the children's sake; they are here to give the children a chance to live in a better world. These thoughts are where I started with *E la lega la crescerá*.

– When you [Michele] sent me a picture of *The History of the Workers Movement* by Ruben Nilson I noted and took much interest in depiction

8



of playing bourgeois children in the painting. The interest the children sparked, I believe, was mainly because of my situation, that I have kids. Before starting my family/having kids of my own, my idea of society consisted of diverse wills, driving forces and ideas. One realises that when all these big events, ideologies and ideas are formed, the one thing, one foundation - working for families' ability to function and prosper. That is what has become more apparent since I got a kid. It has also shifted to become so much of the 'petty life'. That, I fear, could become a problem: the simple life becomes a catalyst for happiness and a measure for success and happiness in relation to society. One part of you feels that connection with the society, as you fulfil a norm. At the same time, you have your little world in and besides that society in which you're not as exposed to it, since you have your sub-version in which you can build a whole world for yourself. There's escapism in starting a family. Then there is also something regarding the queer family. There are a lot of people who can't start a family since it's not physically possible. Concerning that, starting a family is, in a way, a betrayal of the queer community of that space. Overall, I am dealing with this idea of a betrayal since I had a kid.

That it's a betrayal to the struggle or the community to have a child?

- Yes, a bit. You get exhausted when you're carrying out a project. You then feel that the project is more material than you earlier realised. In the long run, it feels like I'm more interested in starting and becoming a family. In theatre, becoming a family is a big thing since the first role you play is in your/a family. To have a house and a family is the foundation that the world rests on in a way, especially the little world, your small world.

It concerns the bourgeois family a little and fits into this capitalist social norm: you own your home.

- Yes, and that you can always defend it with the notion that you do it for the kids, and so in that way, it's the right action. There may be a good heartedness in the idea of the family that comes from doing it for the kids' sake. But the question still is, who are you doing it for? This piece is really about the idea of the bourgeois family and how it was built up alongside the workers' movement. Folkhemmet<sup>1</sup> did also imply and implement such a family ideal. It built up a norm where

everyone should be the same. I think there's something special with folkhemmet. There is something unique about how its plan was blended with capitalism. A strong force occurs when these are united, a state that I believe we are living in now.

These are my primary and core ideas. The title *E la lega la crescerá* (And the union it shall grow) comes from a feeling that no one is enrolled in any trade unions, and that it's so fragmented. Everyone is moving across from and to more 'exclusive' engagements and gigs. The title spurs from the notion that society today is a collective of individualists. It is about this community and non-community - that this is the kind of union and commonwealth that grows today: the union of strike breakers.

Could you describe the sculpture itself a bit further?

- The sculpture is a small version of a small cabin. And someone has thrown their child into the fire. There is a child in a piece of sweet bread, which relates to having broken the child with too much baked sweet bread, and that one has sacrificed the child for the child's material success. Although breaking free from the bun and engaging in kissing its ass, the child is just a regular strikebreaking child. It's simply a swine. But it's also about what you raise your child to be: if one teaches the child to kiss ass, how should children relate to authority? What you meditate on and tell the child is essential.

My work is that it should represent an immemorial room in a way, with four walls, a ceiling and the floor. And where the carpet stands for the bourgeois home. I believe that the work will be in a sort of process of decay. It also alludes to neglect. Many great thinkers have thrown their children under the bus for their own advantage, as they are engaging in and creating the enormous and important cause/thing. The work is also about that conflict, the principal conflict between the small and the large "thing" cause.

I'm curious about the child who kisses ass. It's often the opportunist who kisses ass. But when you portray the child as an ass kisser, you turn the idea of children as innocent, powerless units that are disburdened from the adult world or responsibility upside down. What the parents have to do to provide a good life for the child and themselves often ends with becoming an opportunist; you be-

come a strike breaker. Children can be seen as something bad that makes us compromise our values and creates ass kissers and strike breakers. And children are also the only subjects that, over and over again, are excused.

– We do have an image of children as pure and unpolluted. And then the world destroys them. They are slowly broken down. But children do also play a part in the destruction [laughter]. It's time that we demand justice from the children. They are neither good nor evil. That is something you remember from being a child yourself, that you were just a person in a tiny body, and that you were and are both evil and good at the same time.

I also think it's interesting that there exists a sort of escapism in children that's "evil". In this reality that we live in, our children become a sort of comfort.

– That's also how it is. By having children, I have started to believe in the future and think that there is a small world that we can salvage. You can't be a cynic, and you cannot give a damn about it. You don't do so much anyway about it since you have the child to care for. But there is something important in it, in the children.

There are other aspects in your sculpture. How were you thinking about the work in relation to the room? What are your thoughts about the placement of the work in Augustrummet, and in front of Ruben Nilson's painting?

– I see the work and the room as an archetypical space. I'm thinking of placing the lines in angle to each other to construct a room. That the only thing that remains is the construction itself, only the original framework and the symbolic structure. But I also think about how you look into the room, that you don't see that it does not have walls or ceiling. Apart from that, I'm not sure. These characters are in a room. They are not on a levelled surface out in the infinity; they are in a room.

I think that work is also much of a playhouse. A square playhouse where oneself can imagine and set up the boundaries for the game. In this cube real life is what happens inside of it, and what is going on on the outside is not the reality. It is about escapism; that here, inside the four walls of the home, something is happening that's not happening out there, in society.

Note:

1. Folkhemmet is a political concept that in the 30's began to play an essential role in the Swedish welfare state, especially in the history of the Swedish Social Democratic Party. It refers to the time between the 30's and the 70's in Sweden. The folkhem vision was that society should be like a family in which everyone contributes and looks after one another. It sparked more and better housing development; despite its socialist foundation it also became divisive in its nationalist implications and control of the population.

---

## → *A Short History of the Marxist Philosophy of Language* Sezgin Boynik

“Is language our tragedy?”, asked Maria Janion in her book *Romanticism, Revolution, Marxism*. Her discussion of tragic motifs in Marxism inevitably boiled down to the idea that “capitalism is producing its own gravediggers”.<sup>1</sup> It is within this frame of the literary imagination that Marxist philosophers queried how the limits of our world was set by language. The tragedy of this dialectic was inherent in a language that had dual characters—while it reproduced ideology (subjectivisation) through speech, it also enabled emancipation from such ideologies. One could optimistically conclude that the oppressive language of capitalism also produced its own gravediggers. As Jean-Jacques Lecercle argues, the contradictions within Marxist understandings of language created a space for “abstraction that makes [it] possible to think real life and become conscious of it; and it also freezes and veils this same conscious, in the form of bad abstraction of fetishism”.<sup>2</sup> On a philosophical level, this conceptualisation was tightly connected to Marxist understandings of the dialectics between consciousness, history, language, and thought, finding its symbolic expression in the note Lenin wrote in the margins of Hegel’s *Science of Logic*: “the history of thought = the history of language?”<sup>3</sup>

Despite all these philosophical conundrums involving the question of linguistic abstractions, the Marxists’ focus was the practical aspect of language, or more precisely, how people used language to communicate. In *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels described language as “the production of the form of intercourse itself”, evaluating everything through its capacity to socialise human activities. In this respect, language was only valued as a secular activity of social intercourse, meaning that any attempt for language to ascend “into an independent realm”, that could see “thoughts as the forms of words having its own content”, was interpreted as a reactionary position.<sup>4</sup> With this disclaimer, Marx and Engels essentially labeled the conceptual questions of formalism as non-Communist and asocial. They did this for the sake of criticising the specific and professionalised “philosophical language” used by Sancho and Don Quixote

(their nicknames for Max Stirner and Franz Szeli-ga). They believed that this language attempted to explain complex social dynamics and entire contradictions through a “word”, which would “possess the miraculous power of leading from the realm of language and through to actual life”. In this “domination of Holy”, Marx and Engels identify a “domination of phrases” that seems to be motivated by a desire to save the world through proper “names”.<sup>5</sup> This “philosophical language” had many varied shortcomings, one of the most evident being Julia Kristeva’s right-wing validation of “poetic language” as an “aristocratic” and “elitist demand” of the speaking animal.<sup>6</sup>

These elitist demands received the most air-time in the seventies post-structuralist theory journal *Tel Quel*, led by Kristeva and others. The essence of the *Tel Quel* project was to support the act of enunciation as an “active mediator of language” that could challenge the structures of capitalist economic laws. One aim of understanding experimental enunciations and poetic and philosophical words in this way was to intervene in how capitalism was inscribed in language, by disturbing the equivalence between speech and money.<sup>7</sup> A tragico-comic element of this project was that it imagined it was possible to escape the implications of capitalist subordination by employing different registers within linguistic subjectivities. Put simply, their project opposed capitalist subjectivisation with linguistic subjectivities.

Maria Janion pointed out that the dead-end of this experimental linguistic Marxism was approached via its fundamental de-historicisation of theoretical concepts. She argued that in order to oppose the assumed teleology and linearity of how Marxist concepts progressed, those within the *Tel Quel* group had a tendency to simply eliminate history.<sup>8</sup> While the mono-linear determinism of this bourgeois understanding of Marxism was also something some Formalists fell victim to, I argue that a more accurate understanding can be found within the Leninist theories of uneven development and combined struggle. A journal called *Change* seceded from *Tel Quel*, and under the stewardship of Jean-Pierre Faye, sought to revitalise philosophical discussions about political language by introducing some Leninist concepts—revolution and transformation. The second issue of *Change* was dedicated to the question of “Destruction”, and was a wild mixture of Leninist polemics, Nietzsche, Marx, alchemy, Russian Formalism, Futurism,

conceptual poetry, experimental writing, Eisenstein, and Noam Chomsky. A small paragraph on the metamorphosis of commodities from Marx's *Capital* was retitled "The Fire and Change of the Forms", alluding to a Heraclitean understanding of fire as a source for transformation. A particular emphasis was given to Marx's elaboration of the "change in form or the metamorphosis of commodities through which the social metabolism is mediated".<sup>9</sup>

This fire of change was the latest fever to strike the post-structuralist theorists, who were grappling with ideas around assemblage—they believed this to be more advanced than the *Tel Quel* speculations around rational aristocracy. By introducing Lenin and the revolution to their dialectic theories, they conceptualised form not as the sedimentation of intrinsic structures, but as a process of transformation, metamorphosis and change. Through understanding the forms language could take as being in constant flux—like history on fire—those writings for *Change* united around the claim that every language passes through the Revolution and its dynamics of destruction. One author included an epigram to his text—a quote from Yuri Tynyanov: "I would not understand literature if there had not been the Revolution".<sup>10</sup> Linguistic propositions such as these were based on the idea that revolution transverses language. This aligned with theories that encompassed a Leninist position, which argued against Proletkult theoretician Alexander Bogdanov's thesis that "truth is an ideological form". Before becoming an advocate of revisionist totalitarianism theories, Jean-Pierre Faye defended Leninist understandings of the revolutionary capacity of words to act as razor sharp tools that could expose political truths.<sup>11</sup> This Leninist position was militantly expounded within sixties artistic spheres, in which destruction had the capacity to birth new truths. However, the Leninist language they wielded was undeniably more related to alchemy than to the complex dialectic of Productivism.

From the ashes of this avant-garde Leninism, a more nuanced revisionism emerged in the eighties. Ernesto Laclau was one of the leading post-Marxist theoreticians who played a crucial role in this turn—he described Leninism "as the surrealist moment of Kautskyism".<sup>12</sup> He co-authored a highly influential book with Chantal Mouffe that worked through how to construct a non-Leninist hegemonic theory. Their core concept envisioned Leninism as a leftist deviation that misinterpreted the relationship between ne-

cessity and contingency (i.e. spontaneity). They argued that Lenin saw a necessary link between "social agents and class", thus foreclosing the possibilities for contingency and articulation.<sup>13</sup> Instead of defending "class identity"—which they claimed Lenin did (!?)—Laclau and Mouffe proposed the conceptual operation of deciphering the precise "plot" and "narrative" of capitalist hegemony, which necessitated identifying between agency and class.<sup>14</sup> They argued that this hegemony could be opposed by a socialist strategy that called for a linguistic articulation of the "impossible suture between signified and signifier". This also involved a parallel task: "the abandonment of the thought/reality opposition".<sup>15</sup> In an attempt to avoid the pitfalls of Leninist identity politics, Laclau and Mouffe proposed a complicated theory combining Wittgensteinian "language-games", Austinian "speech-acts", and Lacanian "suture", resulting in an even more surrealist Marxism.

Laclau and Mouffe's articulation of language as a socialist strategy is just one of the intellectual positions Perry Anderson wittily criticised as the "exorbitation of language", alluding to attempts to create absolute linguistic concepts that could be applied to entire segments of society.<sup>16</sup> This shift is especially recognisable within *Tel Quel* discussions of linguistic economic structures, as well as in the writings of Jacques Derrida. This contradicts Ferdinand de Saussure's initial claims on the absolutisation of language, which are often put forward as the forerunners of this position.<sup>17</sup> Anderson wrote that this absolutist position resulted in "a contraction of language into itself" and the "attenuation of truth", severing any "possibility of truth as a correspondence of propositions to reality".<sup>18</sup> The eighties' post-Marxist turn resulted in this linguistic operation "decisively detaching politics from class struggle" by granting full autonomy to "discourse" as a "principal historical determinant".<sup>19</sup>

Yet another outcome of this linguistic model was the "randomisation of history", which relativised historical struggles as various speech acts. In his brilliant research on class struggles in the twenties within a Moscow Metal Factory, historian Kevin Murphy illustrates the limits of studies influenced by linguistics, "inspiring a call for close investigation of the 'language of class'", ultimately reducing class "to merely [one] of many 'contested' identities".<sup>20</sup> Instead of explaining the contradictions within the proletariat's struggle and the bureaucratisation of Com-



13

munist institutions with the “linguistic turn”, or “Bolshevik speak”, Murphy looks for concrete manifestations of class conflicts and their organisational context.<sup>21</sup> The result is a historical materialist study that separates revolution from representational regimes (identity, language, ethnicity, gender) by asking, “why did the most unruly proletariat of the century come to tolerate the ascendancy of a political and economic system that, by every conceivable measure, proved antagonistic to working-class interests?”<sup>22</sup> It is impossible to answer this question via a linguistic postmodernism that situated the workers’ struggles as deconstructivist identity positions.

The Russian proletariat that revolutionised working class struggles did not endure worsening economic conditions because their identities were molded by the regime’s representational models (i.e. “Bolshevik speak”, “Soviet tongue”), but rather as a result of a long history of struggles that shaped their politics via completely different registers from those that compelled bourgeois understanding of economics. Simply put, the workers did speak with their own language that was different from the exploitative discourse of the bourgeoisie, but that was not conditioned by Communist institutions. The language of the proletariat was the sum total of their activism and experiences. As Marx and Engels wrote, a prerequisite of enacting revolutionary politics was to “descend from language to life”, although this could hardly happen through the miraculous power of words.

The reduction of truth to a language-effect—or what Alain Badiou named as linguistic idealism, or “idealinguistry”—was also strongly present within studies of the Russian avant-garde.<sup>23</sup> Boris Groys best represents this tendency, arguing that “in the Soviet period, language acquired a new unity, a new linguistic subconscious that had been artificially ‘drummed in’ by the party”.<sup>24</sup> According to him, that new Soviet-Party language became the natural background for the activities that informed the aesthetic or political avant-gardes. Thus, the real creator in Revolutionary Russia were not avant-garde artists, or Futurists, but Lenin himself, “the demiurge of his age”.<sup>25</sup> This is how Groys interpreted the Formalists’ analysis of Lenin’s style: as a canonisation of Lenin, who was the ultimate expression of the subconscious of the state. According to him, the LEFists and Formalists envisioned Lenin as a possible entry point into the government’s deep soul. Groys does exactly what Badiou described as an operation of modern sophists (or idealin-

guisters)—he attempted to “replace the idea of truth with the idea of rule”.<sup>26</sup> In his more recent book *The Communist Postscript*, Groys absolutises language as the tool of state to such an extent that it is granted the “capacity to connect base and superstructure directly and immediately... the capacity which was realized in a socialist, communist society”.<sup>27</sup> Language, according to Groys, was everything—it has a comprehensive logic, it is contradictory, heterogeneous, infinite, and paradoxical. It emulated the Soviet regime, which was “above all the administration of meta-noia, of constant transition, of constant endings and new beginnings, of self-contradiction”. In order to historically validate the “linguistification” of Communism within the realm of the paradoxical state, Groys provided the example of Lenin’s 1908 decision to argue for representatives of the RSDLP (Russian Social Democratic Labour Party) to enter the Duma (parliament), while at the same time advocating for the Duma to be combated underground. It is curious how this Leninist gesture invokes a metaphysical conclusion about the paradoxical form of Bolshevik language, instead supporting Georg Lukács’ observation that “at the core of Lenin’s thought is the actuality of the revolution”, determined to be achieved with any possible means.<sup>28</sup>

Notes:

1. Maria Janion, *Romantizam, Revolucija, Marksizam, Nolit*, Belgrade, 1976, p. 75. The actual quote is from Paul Lafargue’s reminiscences on Marx.
2. Jean-Jacques Lecercle, *A Marxist Philosophy of Language*, translated by Gregory Elliott, Brill, Leiden, 2006, p. 96.
3. V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works Vol. 38: Philosophical Notebooks*, Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, 1963, p. 89.
4. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1968, p. 503.
5. Ibid, pp. 504–505.
6. Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, Basil Blackwell, London, 1982, p. 33.
7. Jean-Joseph Goux, “Marx and the Inscription of the Labour”, *The Tel Quel Reader*, edited by P. French and R-F Lack, Routledge, London, 1998, pp. 50–69.
8. Maria Janion, p. 120.
9. Karl Marx, *Capital Volume I*, translated by Ben

Fowkes, Penguin, 1990, p. 199. Marx, “Le ‘Feu’ du Changement de Forme”, is published in *Change*, no. 2, 1969, pp. 81-83. Now, scans of entire issues of this journal are electronically available through les presses du reel.

10. Léon Robel, “Notes fragmentaires pour une étude des rapports entre Eisenstein et Tynianov”, *Change*, no.2, 1969, p. 57. “Je ne comprendrais pas la littérature, s’il n’y avait eu la Révolution”.

11. Jean-Pierre Faye, “Destruction, révolution, langage”, *Change*, no. 2, 1969, pp. 125-126.

12. Ernesto Laclau, “Metaphor and Social Antagonisms”, *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. by C. Nelson and L. Grossberg, University of Illinois Press, 1988, p. 252.

13. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* [1985], second edition, Verso, London, 2011, p. 42.

14. Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, p. 50. They also wrote that Marxism “must abandon its class ghetto”, p. 58.

15. Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, p. 110, 113.

16. Perry Anderson, *In the Tracks of Historical Materialism*, The University of Chicago Press, 1983, p. 40.

17. Anderson quotes Saussure to support his criticism: “Language is a human institution of such a kind that all the other human institutions, with the exception of writing, can only deceive us as to its real essence if we trust in their analogy”, p. 42.

18. Anderson, p. 46.

19. Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Retreat from Class: A New ‘True’ Socialism* [1986], Verso, London, 1998, p. 47.

20. Kevin Murphy, *Revolution and Counterrevolution: Class Struggle in a Moscow Metal Factory*, Haymarket Books, Chicago, 2007, pp. 2-3.

21. The term “speaking Bolshevik” is used by Sovietologist Stephen Kotkin to describe “the obligatory language for self-identification and as such, the barometer of one’s political allegiance to the cause”. Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism and Civilisation*, University of California Press, 1995, p. 220. Kotkin, on the other hand, takes the clue for this term from Victor Klemperer’s “speaking Nazi”.

22. Murphy, *Revolution and Counterrevolution*, p. 2.

23. Alain Badiou, *Theory of the Subject*, translated by Bruno Bosteels, Continuum, London, 2009, p. 188.

24. Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship and Beyond*, translated by Charles Rougle, Princeton University Press, 1992, p. 45.

25. Groys, p. 68.

26. Alain Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*, translated by Norman Madarasz, State University of New York Press, 1999, p. 117. This is how Groys draws the line between the avant-garde and the state: “There would have been no need to suppress the avant-garde if its black squares and Zaum poetry had confined themselves to artistic space, but the fact that it was persecuted indicated that it was operating on the same territory as the state”. Groys, p. 35.

27. Boris Groys, *The Communist Postscript*, translated by Thomas Ford, Verso, London, 2009, p. 61.

28. Georg Lukács, *Lenin*, p. 11.

→ *To speak without words:  
strike and care*  
Karl Lydén

1

In March 1983, during a long conversation with the general secretary of the labour union *Confédération française démocratique du travail* (CFDT), Michel Foucault said that the union could function as a *veridique*, that is, as a truth-teller.<sup>1</sup> This unremarked and inconspicuous statement is, as it happens, very interesting in relation to Foucault's late work – and for two reasons. First, Foucault takes a concept he has discussed in his investigations of truth-telling's political and philosophical function during Greek and Roman Antiquity and transfers it to his political present. These investigations that Foucault worked on during the last four or five years – and which were left unfinished, unresolved, and inconclusive, after a long period during which Foucault hadn't published any new books – concern individual rather than collective subjects, and they have been understood by many as an ethical rather than political project. Their relation to a political present has remained unclear and little examined, perhaps also due to Foucault's cautions against the perils in applying one historical epoch's solutions to another's problems. Nevertheless, here he transfers one of the central concepts, “veridiction” or truth-telling, to a political agent of the present, which all of a sudden allows us to engage the rich ancient material with regards to the emergence of collective, political subjects in our political present.

Second, Foucault refers to an agent whose speaking of the truth does not merely consist of speech in its proper sense. Apart from the sheer number of members behind every statement, there lie potential actions. Among the means available to the union, the strike is the most important, but other industrial and direct actions are also necessary. Hence the truth-telling or veridiction of the labour union is not best understood as speech in the strictest sense but as a speech accompanied by a non-discursive, wordless establishing of absolute truth. Why is this interesting? Because Foucault, in his analyses of neoliberal theory in the lecture course *The Birth of Biopolitics*<sup>2</sup>, asserted that one of the central and fundamental characteristics of liberal and neoliberal governmentality is that it makes the

market the privileged site of veridiction for governmental practice, or, in other words, the site and mechanism that states the truth to which all government must be fitted. Moreover, stating this truth is not primarily undertaken with words but with the balance of economic assumptions, calculations, and transactions.

Suppose we put these two forms of veridiction – which Foucault discusses on two different occasions – against each other. In that case, we have, on the one hand, capital and the market as a site of telling the truth that prescribes governmental practice. And on the other hand, labour, the association of workers and the labour union as truth-tellers. Never has such a fundamental and clear-cut line of conflict appeared within that which Foucault calls the “politics of truth”.<sup>3</sup> Nor has such a distinct “dialogue” crystallised on a level of economic relations and relations of force; a social system of signs which, despite being able to harbour various struggles, may bring to mind the social hieroglyphics of Marx's commodity fetishism. At this point, it seems that everything of Foucault's late work is at stake: the years of lectures devoted to the ancient Greek, Hellenistic, and Roman notions of truth-telling and the care of the self, the seizing of the present moment in the investigation of the then still emerging neoliberalism in *The Birth of Biopolitics*, the deep engagement in the Polish Solidarnosc union (which was the basis for the conversation with the CFDT), and that which Foucault defined as the will of not being governed like that in “What is Critique?”. At this point, we also find the prerequisites for moving further in some of the directions he pointed out.

2

In March 2020, when the coronavirus was classified as a pandemic by the WHO, when the lockdowns came into effect, when indoors social gatherings ceased, when different forms of play and games between people stopped, when, in short, everything was affected by a terrible paralysis, a kind of acute state of boredom – then I started having a very difficult time to work. That is, to write on my PhD in Philosophy, which also constitutes my employment. It was not what I wanted or what I needed. It was absolutely necessary: I have to write; moreover, I want nothing other than to write. Time was abundant. But I could not.

It was probably due to different things. I admit that the disorienting condition – of global insecurity, both in medical and financial terms,

16

but also the sudden drive for, until then denied possibilities to with just a few pen strokes take massive financial and legislative measures, hitherto considered impossible – made me question the relevance of philosophy and its ability to in any meaningful way intervene in these processes. In the form of the first self-realised, predictable reactions and comments on the pandemic, philosophy itself did not make it easier. Maybe the vanity of philosophy became more explicit through the new actuality of death, death in the form of drop infection – even if this realisation should have been reached by studying all proper antique and modern meditations in philosophy on that life simply is the preparation for death. On a more prosaic plane, I should not deny an absolute lack of surveillance in my inability to work. At the start, I missed the possibility to visit the university: the unglamorous barracks outside the city centre that seem to be the symbol for administration and blandness have always appealed to me in how they remind of the intellectual and academic work as a public task, where certain transparency is included. This need for a more personalised but still just as much indirect control was perhaps my desire to be back in the panopticon, to the workspace with glass doors where no one watched me, but I knew that I could see.

However, despite these reasons, something that overshadowed the other appeared: a most personal militant and counterproductive labour struggle. Something I could not avoid considering a form of strike: I still tried to start, I forced myself to write the first words in the sentences, the first sentences in paragraphs. However, deep down in what drives my work forward, in the small lighting spark or impulse, in the force, will or what we want to call it, a burst of cold and hard laughter echoed, and an absolute refusal: “No. I will not work under these conditions.” Furthermore, how could I not understand? How could this incomprehensible creative precondition work without everything that I quite deliberately made into the forms for my life: to share food with others as a basis for a conversation, to invite and be invited, to show and receive care, to spend time be in public and in some way dissolve the border between friend and stranger, to play and invent with others, to commit to a political manifestation or act together with others, and then look back upon and discuss all of this with others? How would all of this fare without everything that I in a most unconscious fashion have rendered important components of my life,

that in some instances did not even believe that I enjoyed: the small talk with people one bumps into, the uttering of politeness’es and greetings to colleagues and acquaintances, the slow progressions of conversations with colleagues and friends that sometimes stretch over the years? What I am describing, in other words, cannot be characterised as the care invested in the strike, but rather as a strike against the lack of care, a strike which arose out of the impossibility to tend to myself as I would wish to.

I have now begun to learn new forms of care. It is necessary. Not least because of the fact that strikes which relate to reproductive labour or the reproduction of labour, tend to affect those who themselves are striking, to some extent more than those who are the intended target (as opposed to strikes within production which affect all included parties).

### 3

16

Strikes and unions play an essential part still to this day in the politics of truth. Simultaneously, the situation differs decisively from when Foucault discussed the issue four decades ago. While the organised industrial working class in countries like France has shrunk and lost its power, industrial production has mostly been relocated to places where labour unions are prohibited or strictly limited. Thus, it is probably relevant to reflect upon other possible forms of truth-telling and their place within production – truth-telling that similarly can combat those market outcomes that premise all governance. And even if it remains unclear which collectivities we – we as salaried, unemployed, persons on sick leave, registered unemployment programs, racialised or comprised in the logic of racialisation, we as governed subjects – can come to be merged into in order to adopt this new “speech”, the only thing I think I know is that it has to work through some form of care work not only because I have noticed a lack that the lack of care is harmful to the advancement of critical work. But also because the care of self is in the Hellenistic and roman form that Foucault describes in *L’Herméneutique du sujet*,<sup>4</sup> also includes a truth telling of the world: a critical task to identify and liberate oneself from that which one is enslaved and limited by.



Notes:

1. Michel Foucault, "La Pologne, et après?" in *Dits et Écrits II, 1976-1988* (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), 1323-24.

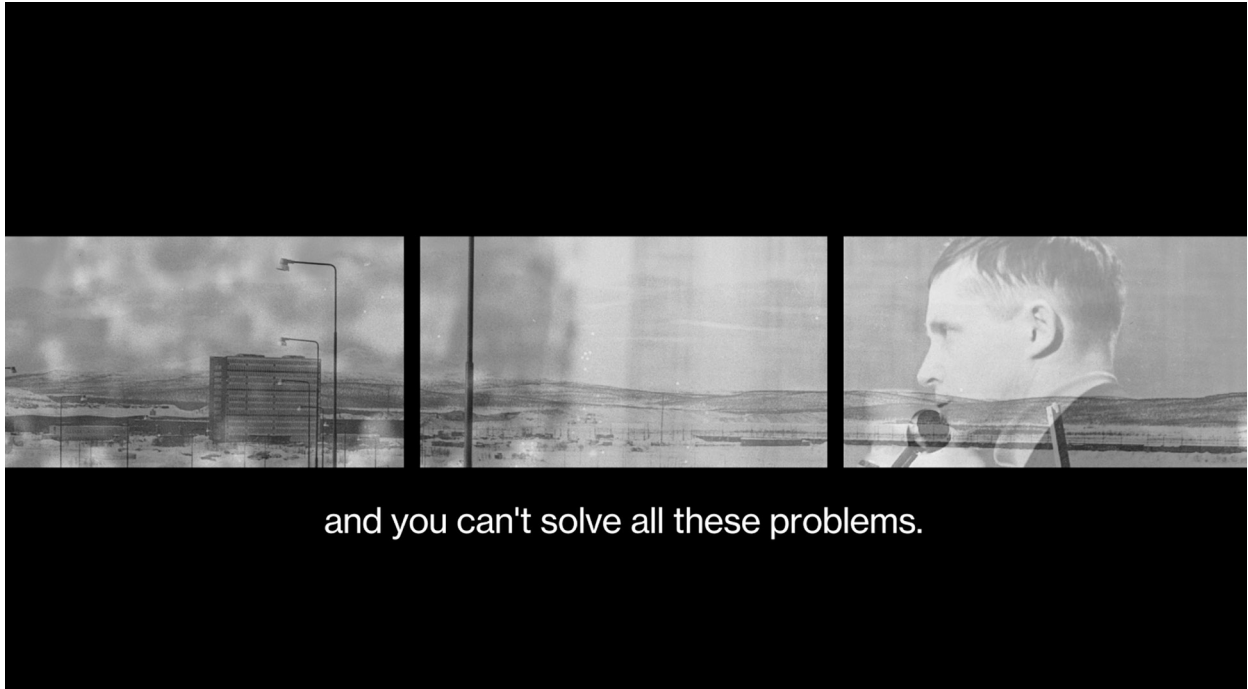
2. Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at The Collège de France 1978-1979*, trans. Graham Burchell (Houndmills/New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 33.

3. Michel Foucault, *Qu'est-ce que la critique? suivi de La culture de soirméneutique du sujet*, (Paris: Vrin, 2001), 39.

4. Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the subject: Lectures at The Collège de France 1981-1982*, trans. Graham Burchell (Houndmills/New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 237-38.

---

→ *Silver tongue, an archive montage*  
Ingela Johansson



Still image from *Silver tongue – The Great Miners Strike 1969–70*, Ingela Johansson, 2020

18 *Ture Rantatalo, I understand that many want to say what they have been up to. There is an old saying that goes: silence is gold and speech is silver. We must be content with the silver. You can not silence all problems.*

/Ture Rantatalo

On December 9, 1969, the great miners' strike broke out in the Ore Fields in Norrbotten. It engaged 4,800 miners at LKAB's mines in Svappavaara, Kiruna and Malmberget.

*Silver tongue – The Great Miners Strike 1969–70 (2020)* is a montage piece with historical material from the mining strikes based on forgotten press photos and private archives. The work was produced for the exhibition Kiruna Forever at ArkDes and was also part of the 2020 edition of the Luleå Biennial.

In addition to the great interest in the miner's strike that attracted researchers, social workers, journalists and cultural workers, the Ore Fields, especially Kiruna, were invaded by press photographers. In photographs, journalists gather around the miners as if they were courted celebrities of today. Flashing cameras and microphones pushed under the nose of the strike committee's spokesman Hilding Lindström. But there are also several moments where nothing remarkable is happening. While waiting for the

18 results of the negotiations, press representatives sit and chat along the corridors, or read the newspapers, probably exchanging analyses with each other. The photos reveal how courted the miners were by the press corps consisting of young journalists who also belonged to the 68-generation. It's easy to forget about the deep commitment anonymous press photographers showed at the time.

Working with *Silver tongue*, I developed several hundred negatives preserved on various negative rolls. Today, the press photographers' material is owned by Norrbottens Media, which includes most newspapers such as Norrbotten Kuriren and NSD. Press photographers have the non-profit right. At the Archive Center in Luleå, only a few pictures were marked on the back or directly on the archive folder. I can only hope that the press photographers I did not get hold of, or named, would not object to me using their pictures. What would the alternatives be otherwise, that they remain in the archive undeveloped for another 25 years? My idea was that the images I digitized are made available and used in the archive for further research. The big motivation to make a film that operates as a meta-archive was that fifty years had passed since the strike that occurred in the winter months of the turn of 1969/1970. Don't you think it is worth remembering the strike that opened up the wild strikes of

the 1970s and contributed to important labour laws, such as LAS and MBL? These strikes were a united working class struggle, supported by thousands of industrial workers who eventually led LO' to decentralize its power and open up to local working class influence.

The strike is almost mythical. Much was at stake in the mining communities in Norrbotten, a self-igniting dynamite. It was about the struggle for influence in the workplace at the political level, which was in short, a conflict between Social Democrats and Communists. The mining strike threatened the Swedish model based on long term peace on the labour market. A miner was not to set an example and challenge the state. The centralized trade unions went against its own collective. Sara Lidman gave a fierce speech about the unfair treatment of workers in the larger machinery affected by excessive rationalization due to the introduction of Taylorist time management. Movement-time study systems were introduced where eye-tracking was recorded. Gunnar Köhler was reassigned after drinking water during working hours.

A placard reads:

I fell into the shaft. 1957  
Earnings SEK 17.22  
Relocated. 1969.  
Earnings SEK 11.20

The entire population of the country was on tenterhooks during Ekot's news broadcasts. The military was within reach, and IB<sup>2</sup> was revealed shortly afterwards. In the media reports, the strikers were often vilified. Still, with a sharp tongue, Harry Isaksson went on the defensive. It was just a matter of checking the facts by asking them directly so that suspicions would be dispelled. They had nothing to hide. The photographers were usually employed by the newspapers. Editorial work and the media narrative often stood outside the direct task of documenting the course of events.

Margareta Vinterheden and Alf Israelsson's film *The Mine Strike 1969–70* depicts a broader sociological perspective on the community and how people's everyday situation was affected by the strike. Silver tongue provides a similar outlook at society, architecture and small-town life. The press photos contextualize the strike based on everyday life and the reproduction of work—photographs from services in Kiruna's beautiful wooden church and pictures of switch-

board operators and business assistants. In a snow-white landscape with LKAB on the horizon, a poster can be seen at the roadside with the text "Return home, think of your co-workers!". Many photographs depict the places for negotiations at Hotell Ferrum and LKAB's company office and the café Brända tomten where they met more unofficially. Many mineral water bottles are documented on various meeting tables. The young press photographers probably experienced the mission of their lives documenting and interviewing the strike leaders that were challenging the welfare state, but from time to time everything was paused when the negotiations stalled, in these moments their attention turned to the town and everyday life.

I was searching closely for women and children in the pictures. The mining strike is mostly represented by almost iconic images of serious miners. On the benches from large meetings, children's faces can be seen peeking out. Happy, open faces. There are pictures of women going to the grocery store and shop, participating in the strike by providing housework support. The uncertainty with how long the strike fund would last, they had to shop with extra caution. Pictures like this pass by. Who is the woman with children standing in front of a well-known architect-designed house in white winter light?

The film should not be seen as a truthful historical document. Although I have worked carefully to position the visual material so that it corresponds with the audio recordings from meetings, I had to replace occasional gaps in the audio-visual material with equivalent material to piece together the narrative. The narrative follows the development of the strike, a 57-day strike resulted in a 57-minute piece.

The soundtrack comes from Kenny Karlsson's private recordings, mainly from the big meetings in Kiruna City Hall, but also from the meetings in Kiruna sports hall. The large meetings were open to the public. Strike meetings were also held in Malmberget's sports hall. Still, Kenny did not follow up there, and he was also unlucky enough to fail with the recordings. The sound consists mostly of a big murmur. He introduces the tapes by informing that a magnetic strip disrupted the recording. When I met Kenny in Kiruna ten years ago, he was quite terse. We talked about the recorded material that he donated to Kiruna Library. I asked if it was fine to use the recordings for my book and have the tapes digitized. I could do what I wanted, he replied, it was mostly a fun thing. Whatever did not

stick in Kenny's recordings from Malmberget, I supplemented with recordings found at Norrbottens Museum and Gällivare museum. All the image and sound material I used is authentic, even the guitar solo that ended up on one of the strike tapes. Why was that there?

*Silver tounge* is a subjective interpretation of historical development, a montage, or a kind of cut-out from the large assemblies and the surrounding environment. The film provides a coherent picture and overall understanding of the strike events. However, it is with a certain humility that I make that claim. The 68-generation of filmmakers, Lena Ewert and Lars Westman, portrayed the strike truthfully, objectively. They shared the miners' experiences of the strike process since they documented the closed rooms and followed the strike committee's work from within. *Comrades the enemy is well-organized* edited by a post-production committee elected by the miners. I neither want nor can compare my archival work with the fantastic filmmakers of the 68-generation who with their excellent report books and report films wanted to overthrow structures and power relations. What I contribute with is simple, but still important in the contemporary context, I want to convey these speeches to a new audience.

The film was made as a three-channel installation for the exhibition at ArkDes. Parts of the demolished town hall in Kiruna were temporarily rebuilt. The pulpit with the beautiful wooden railings was installed. The idea, which emerged together with the curator Carlos Mínguez Carrasco, was that the audience would take the podium and from there be able to take part in the fantastic speeches given in the town hall by Elof Luspa, Martin Gustavsson, Harry Isaksson and Ture Rantatalo and others.

One by one, they stood on the podium and spoke from within the collective experience. The only one who deviates is Ebba Köhler, the only woman to take the podium. Instead of giving a speech, she reads a long poem. Afterwards, the applause never seem to stop.

We felt the anger thrive  
so deep deep within us  
They earn more than double because  
they are called the boss  
Here we are to go and wear out  
conform to everything  
From the mine we will dig tons  
never feel it is cold

We should not feel gases  
nor stone dust or moisture  
but beware of the rockfalls  
and work hard with discipline  
(...)  
/ Ebba Köhler

The strike occupied large parts of the political conversation in public, and in the rostrum, the self becomes larger than itself and amounts to all the possibilities that the assembly presents. The City Hall in Kiruna was one of the democratic places where large meetings were held. The gathering strengthened the community and minor identity. The assembly as such constituted a we but nevertheless fragmented in its heterogeneity. To speak for a large audience is an art form. Unlike the "human microphone", which is used as a tactic when microphones are not allowed in demonstrations, where everyone joins in reproducing a message, the strikers wanted to give individual testimonies to articulate demands.

No dissatisfied person can go to the workplace and perform a good job that provides results. We are indignant when nothing is done. Now it has been said that everyone who earns 130,000 today is a social case, which is also an inhibition. Suppose you go and work in the mine and it makes you think that I'm still no less than a social case as they uses to be called in poor care. In that case, you feel inferior, you hold back, you think should I work pennies and then have to go to social care and request extra subsidies. No, we must raise the wage to the extent that we can exist with the wage that we deserve, and from time to time, if not now then every month, save a penny so that one can use it when suitable, for healthcare and the like...

/ Ture Rantatalo

At the general assemblies, the workplace's misconduct was discussed, the goal was self-determination and withdrawal of power. Some of the speakers spoke from a lifelong experience of practical political struggle. The opponent's arguments were dismissed with satire elicits wild applause. But what does to speak with your own voice entail? There are many intense moments of work experience accounts of humiliation on a profoundly personal level. Shared life experiences about human dignity form the basis of solidarity and class composition among industrial workers. For me, the speeches surpass the political,



organizational reality of 1969 and approach levels of poetic utterances and dreams of a world beyond the prevailing one. The assembly, which was a real force at the time, reinforces dreams and imagination of possible alternatives futures.

*Silver tongue, the great mining strike 1969–70 was made possible thanks to the collaboration with Norrbottens Media together with its press photographers, freelancing for various newspapers in Norrbotten, documenting the strike: Duff Deutgen, Rolf Eriksson, Jacob Forsell, Lennart Norman, Lars Öqvist and many more whose names are not mentioned with the photos. Kiruna municipality and LKAB has supported the work through Börje Rönberg's photographic body of work. Thanks to Arkivcentrum-Norrbottens museum and ArkDes.*

Notes:

1. LO stands for The Swedish Trade Union Federation.
  2. IB stands for Informationsbyrå, the Information Bureau, and was a secret service agency with direct links to the social democratic party since the 1940ies. The IB conducted intelligence operations on citizens targeting unionised communists.
-

## → *The Secret Museum of the Workers Movement* Aleksi Borisionok

We tried several times to get into the museum of the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus, located in one of Minsk's main squares inside the Palace of Trade Unions. Operated by the official trade unions, the museum remains unknown and inaccessible to the general public: ostensibly a secret. We tried to enter it directly from the street and corresponded with the Palace of Trade Unions' management. This organization is in charge of many other facilities besides the museum. It is simply impossible to enter it as one would a regular institution as it lies within the Palace, which one cannot enter without permission. Also, one cannot visit the museum as an individual; you have to organize a group. Though we know it exists, we could never see this hall that narrates the history of Belarus' union and labour movement. The administrator of the museum (perhaps, the only worker there) said that the management of the Palace is responsible for granting admission and, after a series of long conversations, stopped picking up the phone. "You need to make an application for organizing a visit for your group," "you need to gather a group of at least ten people," "you need to get permission from the director of the Palace," "you need to pay five rubles each," "you will be contacted."

*I kindly ask for permission to arrange a visit to the "Museum of the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus" for a group of eight to ten people on October 22, 2020, at 11:00. The group includes cultural workers who would like to get acquainted with the union's history and workers movement in Belarus.*

The administrator never contacted us. Later, over the phone, it turned out that she had contracted coronavirus and did not want to talk about it publicly. She wanted to keep this secret, so she didn't call us back. The museum got disinfected. My mother, the former deputy chairwoman of the trade union committee, learned that there never was a virus during a phone call and that they simply did not want to take groups "from the street." The museum belongs to the Federation, "so you will need a certificate from the union committee to get in." The next

evening, it turned out that the head of the Federation was organizing Lukashenko's biggest rally after two and a half months of mass protests before the day of the general strike. The latter was announced as the primary tool to dismiss the president, free political prisoners, and stop police and state violence. Probably, the museum staff were afraid of civil disobedience. But how can a visit to a museum, in which there would probably be no one besides us, be considered a provocation? What were they hiding from us? At the end of the day, the pro-government rally was cancelled.

What would the objects and documents in the museum tell us? What would the shelves and the guide's narrative present to us? Perhaps some objects would be critical of the factories' directorship and capitalists, of the exploitation of labour. They would then show us solidarity and make other alliances with the body of the worker and other material bodies. They would be comrades who have won back their time. The secret museum would compel us, following Saidiya Hartman<sup>1</sup>, to "critically fabulate" the local stories of struggle: as for example of Rakov women-smugglers or the Narach fishermen on strike.

We can only see this museum in a few poor-quality photographs that are available on the Internet. Both in Zhodino and Soligorsk, we were not allowed to enter the factories' museums – they are protected by security; you cannot get in to see them "from the street." Not only is the representation of production hidden from us, but also the history of its struggle. Official displays of ceremonial history – awards, gifts, and portraits – would hide faults, experiences, and organizations. We thought it would be the history of socialism, the story of the poor and hungry, of those working for pleasure and giving up work, striking and standing in solidarity, doing invisible work, hating power, and offering one's comrade a helping hand. Such a museum would be flickering: present to all within any given moment but be able to disappear when necessary, becoming secret.

The strike was not cancelled. On Saturday, there was a women's march of professions, on Monday a general strike is announced. "A woman's work is never done." But what if it ends on Monday?<sup>2</sup>

## Notes:

1. Saidiya Hartman, *Venus in Two Acts*, Small Axe Journal, Indiana University Press, Number 26 (Volume 12, Number 2), June 2008. pp. 1-14.

2. This text was written after the failed visit to the Museum of Trade Union and Workers Movement in Minsk, Belarus in October 2020 and published in Russian at TransitoryWhite.

Since August people in Belarus have revolted against unfair elections, state and police violence, besides many other forms of protest, strikes at major industrial and cultural companies were among the most powerful tools of civic unrest. Now, in February 2021 workers start to receive prison terms for these forms of resistance. For example, Igor Povarov, Aleksandr Bobrov and Yevgeny Govor, workers of Belarusian Metalworks Factory in Zhlobin were imprisoned for three and two and a half years for the street blockage that culminated in the shutdown of three production ovens on August 17, 2020.

In February 2021, the title of this text piece will also be the title of an exhibition at Hoast, Vienna curated by Aleksei Borisionok with participation by Gleb Amankulov, Uladzimir Hramovich, Marina Naprushkina, Olya Sosnovskaya and a special contribution by Valentin Duduk. The exhibition embodies the notion of the secret museum of the worker's movement. It presents a fragmented narration of workers heritage, historical strikes and contemporary forms of labour unrest in Belarus and beyond. It will open on February 26, 2021 and will end on March 21, 2021.

*Translation by Steven Cuzner.*

---

## Biographies:

*Bini Adamczak is a Berlin-based author and artist. Her work focuses on political theory, queer politics, and the past and future of revolutions.*

*Aleksei Borisionok is a curator, writer and organizer who currently lives and works in Minsk and Vienna. He is a member of the artistic research group Problem Collective and the art collective Work Hard! Play Hard! His writings have been published in Partisan, L'Internationale Online, Moscow Art Magazine, Springerin, Hjärnstorm, Paletten, and syg.ma, among others. His current research is focused on the temporalities of post-socialism.*

*Sezgin Boynik is a writer and independent researcher working in Helsinki, he is the founding editor of Rab-Rab Press.*

*Emelie Conrad has an education in art history and is doing an internship at Mint konstell spring 2021.*

*Steven Cuzner is the other half of the radio-fanzine SLUTET and works as a substitute teacher and healthcare worker. Artist, musician, writer and translator.*

*Jonas Enander is a physicist, writer and editor of the new Swedish translation of Karl Marx Capital.*

*Athena Farrokhzad is a poet and communist.*

*Andria Nyberg Forshage is a theoretician and poet. She/they are part of the editorial board of Paletten and has previously published poetry in among others Datableed magazine, lectured at international conferences on transstudies, posthumanism and queer death studies, as well as worked with the public program for the Public Art Agency Sweden. Initiator of the exhibition together with the artist Duraud for the exhibition /last sunset for today/ (Stockholm 2020).*

*Maya Nagano Holm is a writer, curator and master student in art history at Södertörn University.*

*Ingela Johansson is an artist living and working in Stockholm. Since 2010 Ingela Johansson has researched The Great Miners' strike 1969–70 and its relation to the general radicalisation of the cultural landscape through several exhibitions, witness seminars and a publication.*

*Aron Kullander-Östling is a graphic designer. Together with designer and illustrator Stina Löfgren he is responsible for the visual communication for the Luleå Biennial.*

*Karl Lydén is a critic and PhD student in philosophy based in Stockholm. He is writing a thesis on critique, truth telling and subjectivation in Michel Foucault's later works. Karl is editor for Found Review.*

*Michele Masucci is an artist, researcher and writer.*

*Katarina Pirak Sikku is an artist based in Jåhkåmåhkke. Katarina has through different means methodically laid bare the Swedish heritage of racial biology and undercurrents of personal and collective grief which has affected the Sami self-esteem. At the Centre for Gender Research at Uppsala University Katarina Pirak has conducted the research project Att ge mitt perspektiv – Rasbiologernas spår i det samiska folkhemmet (To give my perspective – Traces of the Racebiologists in the sami welfare state.)*

*Iris Smeds is an artist based in Stockholm. She works with the perception of herself as a commodity and entertainment unit. Smeds project often takes the form of installations, video works and performances. Iris Smeds is one of the participants of the 2020 edition of the Luleåbiennial with the artwork 0-9 Bye (a bugs life).*

*Ruth Åkerman (1927–2018).*



## Lulu-journalen

Lulu is how Luleå first appeared in writing in **1327**, a name of Sami origin that can be translated as “Eastern Water”. This is the title of the Luleå Biennial’s journal, first published in conjunction with the Luleå Biennial **2018**. For this years edition of the biennial readers are offered different points of entry to the biennial’s overall theme: realism today. The Lulu journal is made by the biennial’s artistic and invited guest editors. It is published here on the biennial’s website and can be downloaded for printing.

## Colophon

Lulu-journal Nr.9:  
”Towards a Weak Realism”  
February, Luleå Biennial **2021**  
ISSN: **2003-1254**

Editor:  
Michele Masucci  
Design:  
Aron Kullander-Östling & Stina Löfgren

Translation of Bini Adamczaks *The Gender of the Revolution* is from the book *Relational Revolutions – 1917, 1968 and Revolutions to Come*. Translation from German into Swedish by Jonas Enander.

Translation of Sezgin Boyniks text *A Short History of the Marxist Philosophy of Language* is from the preface of *Coiled Verbal Spring Devices of Lenings Language*, Helsingfors: Rab-Rab press, **2018**. Translation into Swedish by Steven Cuzner.

Transcription and editing of the interview by Iris Smeds by Maya Nagano Holm. Translation the interview by Emelie Conrad.

The poem Portrait session by Andria Nyberg Forshage is from November **2020**.

The fragment from Ruth Åkermans diary was translated by Michele Masucci. Courtesy of Karl Sjölund.

Thank you to the curatorial team of the Luleå Biennial **2020**: Asrin Haidari, Emily Fahlén, Karin Bähler Lavér and designer Aron Kullander-Östling.