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Real Perverse

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REAL PERVERSE

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This text was presented as a lecture, accompanied by a 35mm slide show, during the storytelling panel of the symposium “No Strings Attached: Exploring the Relationship between Ethnography and Contemporary Arts,” organised by SoundImageCulture (SIC), Brussels on the 28th and 29th of October 2015.

*

“The dose makes the poison.”

Paracelsus

We Horrorists have no authority. We are led only by our curiosity, which, like most human endeavours, is ultimately unjustifiable.

We Horrorists do not seek the facts. What we say is false. But, like both our grandmothers used to say (which is curious since they were born on two different continents and never met each other), “just because it’s false doesn’t mean it’s not true.”

We repeat: We have no authority. Teachers, scientists, priests, accountants, and judges have authority. The police have authority.

We Horrorists are peddlers of deception. We live in the world. We use a clever mechanical device to create long sequences of images that refer, albeit in the most indexical manner, to things in the world. Through the mechanical orchestration of perceptual trickery, when projected, these images appear to move. This illusion is known to have very powerful effects. For more than a century, people have chosen to come together to partake in these rituals of collective deception.

We Horrorists are comfortable in this realm of illusion.



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Now, depending on the particular grouping of people, and the context in which we all find ourselves, a selection of these moving illusions will be given a name. It will be called a documentary, or it will be called a narrative, or an essay. Sometimes it will be called an experiment or it will be called ethnography. Recently, more often than not, it will be called a hybrid and the names will be compounded and there will be hyphens involved (e.g. docu-fiction, ethno-fiction, ethno-narrative, or docu-ethno-senso-sci-fi-psycho-experimental¹).

We have not found a solid reason for all this name-calling. It could be the nature of the illusion and the power that it holds. Fear and trepidation are known to accompany awe and wonder. The giving of names might be a way to ward off the threat of the unknown. We have, however, found that all these names do very little to assist the illusion's intended effect. In fact, they usually work against what we are trying to do, which is to set the stage for a particular kind of communication.

You could also call it a type of communion, since it is not really us who are communicating.

We mean it. We have no authority. We cannot speak for anyone. We can only speak for ourselves and even then others are speaking for us. Our other selves are always speaking.² We have found that our other selves have a lot more to say than we do.

We suspect that your other selves also have a lot to say. We suspect that our other selves and your other selves are communicating right now. Or at least that they are trying to. It might be hard for them here. It could be that they are nervous or tense. It might be that they do not feel at ease in this environment.

From our experience, we have found that a dark room with a screen provides a setting much more conducive to a conversation between other selves.

We have also found that images running through a projector provide a good social lubricant for this type of communication. Like a good cocktail, they can help disinhibit the spirit and assist the flow of conversation.

Now, as Horrorists, we have decided to focus our energy on making the optimal cocktail for the social gathering of other selves. How this cocktail is mixed is of the utmost importance. Other selves can only be summoned with a well-balanced potion.

For our cocktail, we have found that one must be especially careful with one ingredient: reality.

Too much of it can cause many horrible side-effects, including objectivity, certainty and a propensity towards judgment, among the most unpleasant.

Not to mention that it also turns away other selves in droves.

Recently we moved to a new apartment in Berlin. Our new home is next to the metro station called Paracelsus Bad. Paracelsus, among many other accomplishments,

1 We admit we have never seen this last one but we would like to submit it as a challenge to all our fellow peddlers of illusion.

2 Also described as the unconscious, the subconscious or as that part of our selves that is always functioning below or beyond our waking awareness.

founded the discipline of toxicology in the 15th century. He is credited with the saying that “the dose makes the poison.”

We subscribe to the notion that good hosts should try not to poison their guests, so following Paracelsus, for our cocktail we have tried to be watchful of our dose of the Real. However, to do this is no easy matter and for a time it seemed beyond our grasp.

To our delight, we also learned that Paracelsus was a renowned alchemist. In one of his alchemical treatises we found a text that helped us find a solution to our conundrum.

He writes:

Realities are miniature servants created by the mind. They are weak combatants but make effective spies, messengers, and scouts. A reality’s creator determines its precise features; some are more refined looking, but most creators do not bother to improve the reality’s appearance beyond the minimum necessary for functioning. Realities are little more than tools designed to carry out assigned tasks. They are extensions of their creators, sharing the same alignment and basic nature. A reality never willingly travels more than a mile from its master, though it can be removed forcibly. If this occurs, it does everything in its power to return to this range, as it cannot communicate with its master beyond this distance. If the reality’s master is slain, the reality goes insane and generally claims the immediate surroundings as its domain, mindlessly attacking any who intrude upon its lair. In some cases, a reality might even come to see itself as the rightful heir to its master’s legacy, or even the reincarnated spirit of the master himself.³

And so, we understood that we were not dealing with one but with multitudes of treacherous little things. We realised that to survive, a reality likes to pass itself off as a one-of-a-kind creature, bigger and stronger than all others. This creature likes to proclaim that it can never tell a lie. What is worse, like a parasite, this creature will invade any other selves in its surroundings and feed off them until there is nothing left but their rotting shells. For us, looking to create a space for the gathering of other selves this, of course, causes quite a problem.

How then does one deal with this malady? Paracelsus suggests that Reality can be treated by perversion. How do you pervert Reality? You go where Reality pronounces itself as true and authentic. There you will find the creature telling stories. It never tires of telling stories. We have learned that these stories can be used against it. If you repeat them back to it in a very particular tone, it will crumble into pieces.⁴

If one succeeds, realities crawl out like insects from under a stone. When they are out, visible and small and weak, then the other selves can be summoned. Only then will the other selves—by nature lonely creatures longing to interact with others of their

3 While preparing this text for publication we were asked to determine the source of this quote. We could not find the text by Paracelsus but found a similar text on this role-playing game site: <http://www.d20pfsrd.com/bestiary/monster-listings/constructs/homunculus>. That text describes the construction of a homunculus. Much like the creation of a homunculus requires the ritualistic mixing of organic materials, our writing ritual required us to conflate sources to conjure the truth in the present fiction.

4 Paracelsus also explains that in order to animate perverted realities the alchemist must carry out an extended magical ritual that requires a specially prepared laboratory.

kind—lose their fear of the Creature of the Real and reveal themselves to each other in the space between the shadows and the flickering light.

We Horrorists are perverters of reality. Our images are not documents of the world. Our illusory images are our perverted realities. Our perverted realities are the parties where our other selves can meet and mingle. If our potion is mixed just right, with a measure of luck, our other selves will sing and dance, they will feast on the corpse of the Creature of the Real, they will forget their boundaries, they will share an ineffable bond, they will commune.

And now, we would like to present to you a series of images. In this context we will call it an ethnographic film. In all honesty, this is our favourite ethnographic film. It is called *Die Wissenschaft vom Leben* [The science of life].⁵



- 5 Due to space constraints we are only able to include a selection of the images we originally showed as slides. However, considering said limitation and the difference in medium, we feel the ones we have selected provide enough of an approximation to suit our intent.



Figure 2: Blühende Blume [Blooming flower]



Figure 3: Frische Erdbeeren [Fresh strawberries]



Figure 4: Fressendes Tier [Animal feeding]



Figure 5: Junger Baumbestand [Young tree population]



Figure 6: Mutter mit Neugeborenem [Mother with newborn]



Figure 7: Moderne Tierhaltungsanlage [Modern livestock facility]



Figure 8: Räucherwaren [Smoked products]

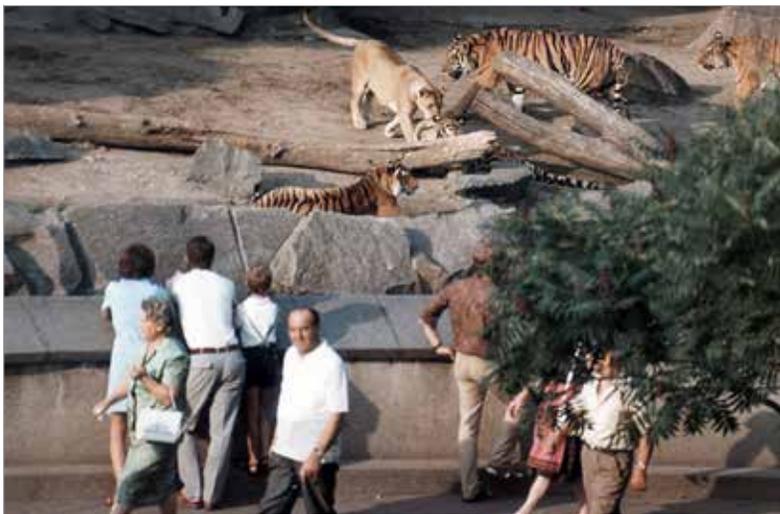


Figure 9: Beobachtung von Zootieren [Observing zoo animals]



Figure 10: Frische und verfaulte Erdbeeren [Fresh and rotten strawberries]

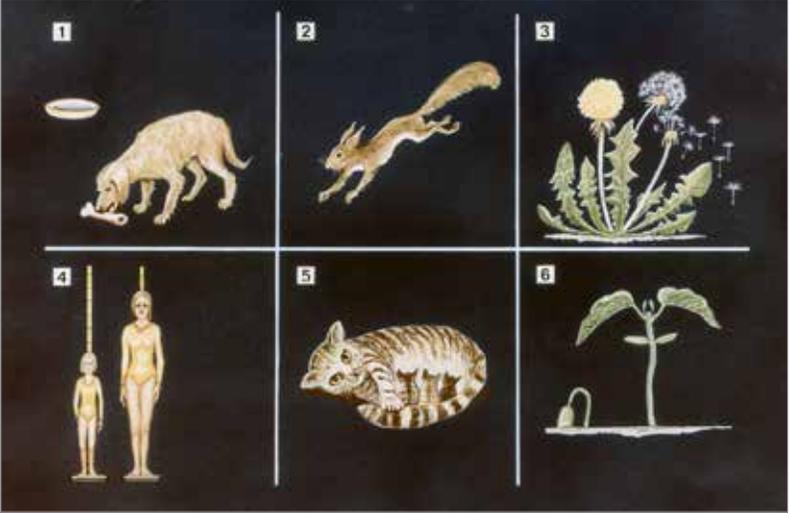


Figure 11: Merkmale des Lebens [Features of life]

Downloaded by [Juan David Gonzalez Monroy] at 09:29 08 November 2017



Figure 12: Kinder im Hygiene-Museum [Children in the Hygiene Museum]



Figure 13: Kariöses Gebiß [Teeth with cavities]



Figure 14: Rehkitz [Fawn]



Figure 15: Arzneimittelherstellung [Pharmaceutical manufacture]

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Figure 16: Moderne Wohnsiedlung [Modern housing complex]



Figure 17: Vietnamesische Kinder [Vietnamese children]



Figure 18: Findling [Boulder]



Figure 19: Eingeweckte Erdbeeren [Preserved strawberries]

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Figure 20: Verwelkte Blume [Wilted flower]

NOTE

Images were taken from the following slide series:

Die Wissenschaft vom Leben [The science of life]. n.d. Unterrichtsmittel des Ministeriums für Volksbildung, DDR. Berlin: Ministerium für Volksbildung.