Fabrique d'Histoire

Peeter Linnap

« Man no longer has General History. He is surrounded by many different histories which are foreign to him and do not correspond to his wishes. Man proved to be outside of history at the beginning of the 19th century. This is but a superficial explanation of why people cling to themselves and to things in which they belive a small part of themselves still resides... they seek history(ies) which they can relate to. However — can history be anything else but an amalgam of different ages which would be foreign to him and to each other? Can man be anything but a modulation of living conditions? Something other than a reflection of a cultural type, changing economy, the evolution of language forms? » Foucault

« Fabrique » - fab'rik<L.fabrica, workshop, art, product of art. A vowen, felted or knitted cloth; texture or quality, esp. of textiles; mode of construction, structure or framework; petrog. the pattern formed by chrystal grains in a rock. « Factory » - fac'to.re, A building or collection of buildings used for the manufacture of goods; a trading establishment maintained in a foreign country by resident factors and merchants; colloq. an institution failing to encourage individual creativity, producing only uniformity.

« History » - his'to.re, his'tre (L.historia, a history, <Gr.historia, a learning by inquiry, <G.histor, knowing, learned; same root as E. wis, wit, to know. Story is a short form of this.) That branch of knowledge which deals with events that have already taken place; the study or investigation of the past; a narrative or account, usu. chronological, of past events in the life of a nation, community, institution, or the like; the sum total of past happenings; anything that happened in the past; any past filled with unusual or memorable happenings; a drama dealing with past events; a story or tale. (New Webster's Dictionary of the English Language, 4-th edition, 1988)

We live in an age characterized by constant bickering over world views, tools for comprehension and viewpoints. We seek confirmation for any variety of viewpoints from history, which has become a warehouse of arguments used by any number of people to support any and all opinions. Minorities maintain that history has so far been white, Euromale-centred and find, upon reviewing chronicles, that history needs so many corrections, rewrites and revisions that it is easier to simply write new histories. Peripheral cultures, in turn, consider hitherto existing « general histories » too metropolis centered, artists too academic, academicians too artistic, etc. Experiences with so called « primitive cultures » indicate that neither history nor historical institutions are self-evident or obligatory. Jay Ruby describes an incident where a film crew making a documentary about Indians was confronted by the Indians with the following fact — if the act of filming is not « good » or « bad » for their sheep, then there is no point in documenting them¹.

Dutch researcher Gosewyn van Beek states that indigenous Papuans, for example, are unable to distinguish between exhibited objects and the exhibition's display cases in their own national museum².

Even the Finno-Ugric languages lack the direct future tense. The passing of time is expressed by the wheel rather than the line vector of progressive cultures. In agrarian cultures, the farmeres had but one system of chronology based on the seasons: spring, summer, autumn, winter. Who needs to headlong adopt such « historical units » as the year, the century, the decade? Or dates like 1922, 1923, 1924 as well as society formation

theories, which operate with concepts like the Antique Age, the Middles Ages and the Modern Age? Is it science, statistics, politics or indiscriminate power? « Empire has created the time of history. Empire has located its existence not in the smooth recurrent spinning time of the cycle of the seasons, but in the jagged time of rise and fall, of beginning and end, of catastrophe. Empire dooms itself to live in history and plot against history. One thought alone preoccupies the submerged mind of Empire: how not to die, how prolong its era »³.

« History » is, alongside geography and nature/natural history, a third way to view the world, a diachronically expressed concept of the progression of time. History is a mean of gravitation and a temporal configuration of empirical chaos, just as geography, topography and topology are spatial configurations.

History is the application of human proportions to the entire world, an attribute and institution of power, a perpetual need to refer to secondary issues, inability to cope with oneself; the operational environment of the humanities. History has always served the « grand schemes » of certain social structures and justified the status quo of the present and will continue to do so. History is the tool of perspective planning through extrapolation, « science of the future », the touchstone for the patent purity of « novelty ». History is nothing more than a construction office for our picture of the world. History is a composition in which the mutual configuration of events is determined by economic and political interests. Part of history is « compressed », other parts, on the other hand, are stretched out and complemented with a great deal of necessary events, which are given special importance. The composition of history is similar to the « temporal arts » in the editing and plot arrangement of films, theatre, television programmes, etc., in which the author of the chronicle as a manufacturer is the analogy of a film director, writer or composer.

This project treats the concept of « history » as a (post)industrial manufacturing process, which has division of labor between its units and which has supply, production, marketing, advertising and other such departments. Several questions can be posed regarding this connection. Which branch of industry does the production of history belong in : are we dealing with light or heavy industry, or rather with the strategic military-industrial complex? Comparison with the tourism business is also not out of place. Most history books can be compared to museums in that they are little more than « guided reading » which offer engrossing and didactic « historical excursions » where we are obliged to follow well-marked routes from point A to point B.

One cannot stray from the path because no opportunities for diversions are provided. If « disturbing » information were to reach us, the narrative direction of the history book (like with every fairy tale) would be interrupted, the story line and mise-en-scenes would no longer work and doubt would be cast on whether the train of history will ever reach the proverbial light at the end of the tunnel. What, though, is going on in the hidden rooms, cellars and burial chambers of the « house of history »? Who is sitting there scheming? Are those who compile histories the absolute masters of the situation or do they, too, defer to chance? Or are both true simultaneously? Do analogies exist de facto to the institutions which are brilliantly listed by Estonian writer Olev Remsu in his novel « Doleful Game in Babel »: The Central Office for Determination of the Allowable Degree of Deviation from Correct Attitudes, the Calendar Government, the Mythology Creation Sector of the Cosmogony Institute and the Dynamic System of Peaceful and Nonpeaceful Change?

The number of different « history factories » seems to unerringly correlate with the number of different spheres of life — a phenomenon which lacks its own history is as good as non-existent. The level of technology, the professional level and rigor of « technical control », sources of raw materials and methods of obtaining them, product advertising and

marketing and other « industrial » indicators of historical enterprises are definately varied. There are as many different « histories » as there are spheres of activity — we can speak of inquisitive history, evil history, forbidden history and foolish history among others. These stories relate how theater of war and espionage is perfected, apparitions diversify, skin, venerial and mental diseases evolve, punishment of children changes to fit their advancement in age, the arts of cooking and black magic improve continuously, positive changes occur in the struggle against alcohol, opportunism and foreign enemies, human folly becomes part of history, time measurement devices and histories of histories progress linearly upward. What unites all these Great Follies?

From Point A to Point B

Marc Bloch: « Christianity is the religion of historians — christianity exists throughout the ages of humanity. The destiny of humanity, located somewhere between the fall from grace and the last judgement, is like a long excursion during which each fate, each individual « pilgrimage » is, in turn, a reflection; the central axis of christian meditation, the great drama of sin and redemption unfolds in time and, therefore, in history. Our art, our literary remembrances are filled with the echos of the past... »⁴

Our perception of the world is thus formed with the aid of this one dimensional line vector, which leads « from ancient magicians to modern illusionists », « from gatherers' paths to highways », « from the abacus to the computer », and « from the polka to rock ». Bridges structures, roads, all rush onward in books one after the other « through the ages », as if time were some sort of freeway and history but a travel article on speeding in which all the past prepared the way for the present and, in general, everything that once was existed solely for today. Consequently history begins, proceeds, ends, to become « current », in order to lay the foundation for the prosperous « Present ».

I have singled out a series of authentic examples from the history books of various spheres of life, these « centre forwards of history », selecting beginning and end sentences, points A and B, between which history occurred, moving from point A to point B at a certain known speed and acceleration like the shots and carts of classic physics experiments. One age is succeeded by the next, battle follows battle, state follows state, theory follows theory, memoir follows memoir, lies follow others of their own kind. The starting point of history A begins with humankind, hairy and stupid, living in caves, making music using single notes, counting on three fingers and using beheading to treat mental diseases. Point B, the present, is the embodiment of human perfection, enjoying all advantages and ruling the world.

Steven Weinberg, « The First Three Minutes », 1977 :

A. « The origin of the universe is explained in « Edda the Younger », a collection of ancient Scandinavian myths recorded circa 1220 by Icelandic poet and historian Snorri Sturlson. According to « Edda », there was nothing in the beginning. »

B. « Let it be said as a warning that modern elementary particle physics and cosmology allow us to engage in serious discussion over the prehistoric universe but for now this does not necessarily correspond with reality. »

M. Iljin, J. Segal, « How Man Became A Giant », 1940 :

A. « There was a time, when man was not a giant but rather a dwarf; he was not master of nature but rather its obedient slave. »

B. « So man grows, and the bigger he gets, the broader his horizons become. »

Väino Einer, « From the Gatherer's Path to the Highway », 1988 :

A. « Our footprints accompany us everywhere we go since the time when mankind's primeval ancestors came down out of the trees and began living in caves. By going back

and forth between the cave and the spring and by gathering the yield of the forest, they created the oldest branch of the family tree of roads — the gatherer's path. »

B. « While an ever growing network continues to be built on the ground in our day, it appears that the 21st century will surpass that with a network of pipelines for the transportation of all manner of materials, including gaseous, liquid and solid, living and inanimate. »

Lancelot Hogben, « The Wonders of Numbers : 5 000 Years of Mathematics », 1964 : A. « The first humans similar to ourselves lived about 25 000 years ago. They pointed at a goat with one finger and at spear tips with three fingers when bartering reciprocally. » B. « Thus the progress of mathematics continues step by step. It is possible that the future holds even greater discoveries then those which have taken place from the first lunar calendar long ago until today. »

Chronology and Measuring History

Just as occurs in all variations of free market competition, so there is intense industrial espionage between different history factories, which includes illegal and institutional activity in its network — entire institutions devoted to the study of the opponent and his history. The life and death struggle between the two « world systems » of the recent past provided jobs and raw materials to highly politicized history factory owners — institutes and covert services. As is typical in competition, history industrial enterprises dream of and actively work towards the establishment of a monopoly.

The establishment of chronology and the definition of historical « units of measurement » is an expression of power, even if objectivity is appealed to. Hence the concept of « absolute time » which is based on natural processes, such as the half life of the carbon isotope C14 or astronomical processes. Thus the world metrology center, located in Paris, is like a symbol — Bureau International de l'Heure — « the International Bureau of Time ». It is a small step from here to the realm of literature and science fiction, for example Herbert Wells's « Time Machine », which focuses on the unlimited manipulation of history or Estonian writer Olev Remsu's « Institute for the Study of Actual History », where people are measured according to their « loyalty coefficient » and their « trustworthiness index ».

Tools and the Intuition

Historical science, while using a great many instruments, methodologies and associated sciences — archeography, source materials, archival science, genealogy, chronology, metrology, paleography, sfragistics and many others — is still forced claim to be dealing with « external history » after all and not with « internal history » — the history of thought and mentality.

Can today's « history » still be the creative work of fanatics, the ecstasy of chronicling, a confession of the conscience, the sincere expression of what has been experienced? Can art be linked with these objectives? As proto-science and theory, art poses questions which science cannot pose due to its conventional limits. Is art, then, altogether imaginary social assistence and an emotional reference to society's problems which will never be solved in reality? Creative works which deal with historical problems cannot at any rate be equated with historical science; rather it serves to make history's colors visible, history's scents discernable, history's sounds audible.

Scientific cognition uses astronomy, geography and topography for orientation in space; the main instrument for creating order in time, however, is history. Having established the limits discovered by the two different scientific groups, culture turns to thought models

which could free it from the spatial-temporal prison it has created for itself. The time machines and the return to prehistoric chronology serve to liberate it from obligatory progress and evolution, « teleportation » and communications systems help to ease geographical imprisionment.

The Struggle for Raw Materials

History as object of art is an age-old theme. It is said that historical science developed from historical drama, that both science and art called upon to embody (historical) truths etc. While the historian investigates « what » was, the artist asks « how » it was. National historical science – like other religions and Grand Narratives – promotes art as its factory advertising department, giving it illustrative status. The experience of the past shows that the fate of historical sources and documents has been about the same. « ...it has become clear that document is just disguised form of staging; that every attempt to capture the actual leads to artefactual » says Vilém Flusser⁵ and we can believe him – sources and documents can be limitlessly selected, deformed, forgotten and configured into scenarios according to one's aim. There are cases in which history and art are mixed together beyond recognition, the best examples of which are Sergei Eisenstein's 1925 film « The Armoured Ship Potjomkin » and the Persian Gulf television war. The latter is a multimedia masterpiece in which today's possibilities in digital art were demonstrated while information about the war itself is deficient to this day.

If the CIA and CNN joint project was a global spectacle, then history is being redefined in modern art as well. Attitudes are adopted to distance art in relation to history, such as irony, analysis, provocation and rearticulation. History is made more sensual, it is personified and points of emphasis are changed. That which earlier seemed « of little importance », small, personal, local becomes important. ...Artists like Christian Boltanski, who « makes the insignificant significant », monumentalize backyards, the anonymous, the miserable, the ordinary... The movement from Bauhaus to « Our House » has lasted some time already: we value our own body instead of Greek sculptures. The personal contains our own experience, not the unfamiliar formulated principles of art history.

The personal historical experience is physical and fragmentary. Here the progression of time is not « historical », not linear, rather synchronous, cyclical, rendering unexpected meetings possible. The laws governing individual memory differ from those of Histoire Totale: « How... do we select images which will become the visual analogues of memory? Does our memory of places inevitably take the form of reductive, snapshot-like images, or is this a development which antedates the invention of the medium? Have photographs taught us how to remember places? Places which matter to us, as opposed to abstract symbols such as « New York », « Paris » or « Leningrad », are remembered not through a single, all-embracing symbol, but as an accretion of seemingly insignificant fragments... »⁶

Document and Monument

Photography and sculpture are featured at this exhibition not on the basis of a formal fashion principle, but rather because the given theme is best expressed in just these forms. In seeking an explanation for this common ground, the concepts document and monument come to mind — both are connected with « memory » and « commemoration » as essential building materials of historical science. While sculptures often take the form of public monuments or cult objects, documents/photos are their private value system counterparts. The photographs, objects and installations on display at the biennial are modulated with just the aforementioned aims in mind. They can be considered private memorial complexes, remembrances, genealogies and biographies. « Monument » in this context is not

connected with any national memorial principle, the obligatory collective remembrance of the victor, hero and martyr. It is rather a record of our own experiences.

Vytautas Stanionis's passport photographs, which dislocate the principles of « vintageprint », are but a « dry » statement in the physical sense — even so we need but to place them in a different context to make these authentic documents more eloquent than any history book. The same goes for Mati Karmin's « My Father », where the relatively passive configuration of personal effects renders a capacious visit to smells, colors and facts of the recent past possible. Jane Mulfinger's auto rear view mirrors are transformed into personal means for confession, made to visualize that which can be neither erased from nor mended in the memory — the tortures of conscience which await redemption until the grave.

Susan Trangmar's site-specific projections do not rhyme with locus out of sheer aesthetic convenience. Here the visual fit acheives an intricate harmony together with conceptual connections between the work and Genius Loci. Knights, witches, battles and historical spirits are coaxed out of the dormant recesses of the memory.

Before and After History

Some of the works on display at the « Fabrique d'Histoire » exhibition are as if striving to attain « prehistoric » cognition where time is not linear nor a construction framed in a linearly increasing function, but rather indefinite as in fairy tale categories — « once upon a time », « in the old days », « long ago in ancient times », as if confirming the tendentiousness or transitoriness of « historical time ».

It is difficult for those used to constructed meanings and visual overflow to explain **John Stathatos**'s simple black and white photos, which are called ákea and show burned/calcified trees on a Greek island. These somewhat uncomfortable photographs have the unusual ability to change the viewer into a continual rediscoverer of meanings. These quests do not reach a happy conclusion and if anything settles out of the solution at all, then it is just that process by which meanings emerge.

Such semantic genesis is apparent in **Anita Zabilevska**'s work, where the landscape as an object in itself becomes contextual in the observer's sense organs.

Jaan Toomik's aspirations are rather transcendental than narrative. They create an environment for history in the context of the exhibition where the essence of history is manifested through its denial and « end ». It is as if we are brought into the « backyard » of history, into a peaceful and dead (extinct) environment where battles have long since been held, where struggles have been won and lost and death is no longer feared, but instead all else is equalized before the supremely important end.

Archaeology of the Present

We find works in the « Fabrique d'Histoire » which are in harmony or discord with the methodology of historical science itself, imitating, parodying and dislocating the instruments and current truths of the latter. Many « exhibits » refer to a Foucault style application of archeological methods in relation to the present. Mart Viljus's installation is presented as the act of dislocation of the standard historical interior/environment, or museum. By « investing antiquities » which do not belong there directly into this permanent exposition — articles of modern mass consumption — he takes a standpoint critical of the source and signals to the observer that there is something questionable in these depositories, these warehouses of material antiques and rich mausoleums. The target of Viljus's questions is the definer of history and the master of chronology as the decisive link in the institution of the museum. This, as Maria Lind says about Museion, « Being mythically the home of the muses... it harbours the privileged memory. In this

context it is not unimportant that the museum was once termed « theatre of memory », when its main purpose was to show weird species and strange objects in a « cabinet of curiosities. Furthermore it was an ambulating enterprise which like the circus moved from place to place. »⁷

If Viljus poses questions to the study of historical sources, then **Johanna Vuoksenmaa**'s « archeology museum » is the adaptation of the priviledged status of material antiquities to the present, which is viewed in imaginary retrospective. Here objects whose meaning is determined for us by their everyday function are placed in a conserved, poetic role with the help of a journey into the future or a time machine, resulting in a series of quite unexpected discoveries.

The Family, Private Ownership and the State

1. The Family

In the work « The Bride », Vibeke Tandberg, a girl from the end of the 20th century; gets married exactly 25 times a day. She experiences a great many adventures for her soul and derives provocative pleasure from the successful swindling of both the public and the Almighty. Of course, Tandberg deceives future historians especially impudently, who will set about studying the formation of society's primary units in our times. By documenting each of her some twenty matings with studio photographs and newspaper advertisements, she makes the activities of historians studying source material difficult and makes her trial at the Last Judgement a mere formality.

Maria Miesenberger's works come across as a visual block scheme of family vacation scenes and apparently refer to the importance the family once had, as well as to the curious connection between the family, the album photograph and the monument. Miesenberger studies the psychology of perception and mechanisms for « remembering better ». The productions of Anne Testut ascribe the qualities of the dead to the living, the static to the moving, the secondary to the primary and the photographic apparatus to objects. We see affluent people in static theatrical poses who have stiffened into pillars of salt or embalmed museum wax figures. Life in its bustle, motion and sound is as if momentarily interrupted under mysterious circumstances, allowing us to examine that which otherwise remains hidden at first glance. Testut in her abstraction and symbolization does not confiscate textures from the models she has plucked for her sculptures like Miesenberger does, rather she freezes processes in which the characters participate. Thus we get an inkling of a series of family canons, codes, connections and rules, of which at least one characteristic, conservativism, is named here with severe frankness.

2. Private Ownership

Waltrud Palme's work « 10 Persons » can be considered an inventory. The title emphasises anonymity and the ten « portrayed » form a monotonous, even dry statistical human card index which could be of interest to the statistics office/secret police sooner than to art enthusiasts. The « impersonal verb » of private property, the gangue of mass society and biographies outside of history are dealt with here in both the grammatical and social sense.

Mati Karmin, born and raised in a totalitarian regime, uses a genealogical strategy studiously and in detail in his work « My Father ». He creates a portrait of an absurd person who has devoted his entire mortal life to the study of seeds. Weed control as a life goal is not accidental in this case. Much like the computer viruses of today and the opportunism of the recent « red » past, it infuses itself into us as an element which is harmful to the system, as a destabilizing factor in our association which must be made harmless in the interest of the faultless functioning of the « regime ». The work also cites

the necessary connection for the « future researchers of the past » — relationships between the family, private ownership and the state.

3. The State

Vytautas Stanionis displays photographs taken with the visible purpose of issuing passports, but also with the wider purpose of the formation of a soviet identity by the state. The millisecond-long moment captured in these photographs is a border zone for all chronology up to that point and sets up a front like a cutting edge between the statuses of new/old, freedom/slavery, personality/marionette. In that moment during which the photographer thanked his clients for their « patience », slavery became official with the authority of the laws of the new state.

The discrimination by the state expressed in **Sandra Moss**'s installation is apparently the opposite. Stanionis's photo subjects are coerced into citizenship by force, Moss's subjects, on the other hand, are forcibly prevented from obtaining it. What we in fact see here is the reflected image of one and the same thing, or what essential difference is there in legally sanctioned inferiority and failure to legally sanction full equality?

Sven Westerlund's « history machine » works « for the good of the people », as is stated in the title. The enormous wall mural is divided into exactly two fields of equal territory. On one we see a monument to missionaries or those who enlightened the people, whose origin is betrayed by their petrified clothing and the document of the written word on their knees. The other half of the picture represents the context in the literal sense, which is materialized here in the form of cables, hoses and wires. Its form reminds one of a neglected trash heap, root system or cancerous tumor and if we long to approach the truth, we are provided with plentiful widely cultivated subject names, all of which are associated with consciousness and its building materials.

With the discovery that hitherto untouchable taboo zones and political sacred cows are, without exception, constructive soap operas, artists from the former eastern Europe appear to be possessed by a colossal ecstasy of « disclosure » and artistic hooliganism. Gods are brought down to the ground one after the other from the sky without parachutes, where they become the victims of a rather severe revenge in return for their previous arrogance. The form taken by this revenge can be seen in the political satire of **Peeter Laurits/Heikki Merila** and **Klaus Elle**.

The relationship of postsocialist artists with military affairs is altogether more colorful and multilayered. Wojciech Prazmowski's « Little War Dictionary » and especially « War Machines » provide a grotesque and apocalyptic vision. The latter work shows lists/documents bundled together and provided with wheels, the curious constructions serving as metaphors for both war and historical science which serves it.

Igor Savchenko also uses anonymous photographs as raw material for his « linguistic » compositions. The motifs are from leisure time pursuits of the former Soviet army — coloring them with the local jargon, the concepts « Samovolka », « Guljanie » and « Perkur » come to mind, all of which are connected with the good life in the serviceman's fantasy. The work is transformed into a didactic means and it seems as if these young Russian soldiers are being offered to their former enemy as goods, emphasizing the high quality of wares. By combining « pictures of our guys » in pairs with « the words of the enemy », Savchenko stimulates poignant allusions on the theme « Wir Sprechen Deustch ».

Aleksei Shulgin's action can be considered « archaeology of state industry ». We see an enourmous expanse of industrial territory and the author's background allows us to assume that it is a part of the Utopia of the recent past, of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Pontoos, iron slabs, original pipes and fantasy people look at us, now through

the distance of time. This entire lively and metaphysical pulse of activity recedes from us thanks to the archival characteristics of photographic materials: scratches, countless specs of dust and the empire's specifically set light from its false sun. These small documents by anonymous authors contain something similar to Russian avantgarde art of the turn of the century. The formulas are the same as they were for Tatlin or Malevits, except that this here is not the mere fantasy of the constructionist, but rather a serious, wide-ranging case of application.

Henrik Duncker's & Yrjö Tuunanen's pictures operate ambivalently with the experiences of the observer. Modern day people from the country are artificially placed in a half « natural » setting, half of which is loaded down with « cultural » implications. As a photo of primary importance in the history of mediums, it brings to mind the mannerism of

19th century studio stagements. Concentrating, however, on what is depicted, we see an in-between social position: Finno-Ugric scepticism regarding the future empire, the EEC, but also an expression of distrust in technical progress as a whole and a perpetual fear of losing contact with nature.

This work is especially symbolic in the framework of our theme since the most direct path towards liberation from our nightmares and the preservation of a feeling of gravitation appears to go from right here. Is it not finally time to consider it entirely rational to maintain a regular need to reinterpret absolutely all absolutes, including gods, natures and histories?

¹ Jay Ruby, Sharing the Power: A Multivocal Documentary, Perspektief, 1991, Nr.41, Rotterdam.

² Gosewyn van Beek, The Museal Gaze and Neutral Space, Oppositions, Rotterdam, 1990.

J.M. Coetzee, Waiting for the Barbarians, Penguin Books, 1982, p.133; Tsit. M. Rippatti, Hay on the Highway, Index, 1993, Nr. 4, p.23.

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Vilém Flusser, quated from European Photography Award 1992 catalogue, Göttingen, European Photography, 1992.

John Stathatos, Photosynkyria'93, catalogue, Thessaloniki, Camera Obscura, 1993, p.35.

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