ANNU WILENIUS

Nomadic Science Fiction: Experiencing Diversity And Alterity Through Urbanising Mongolia

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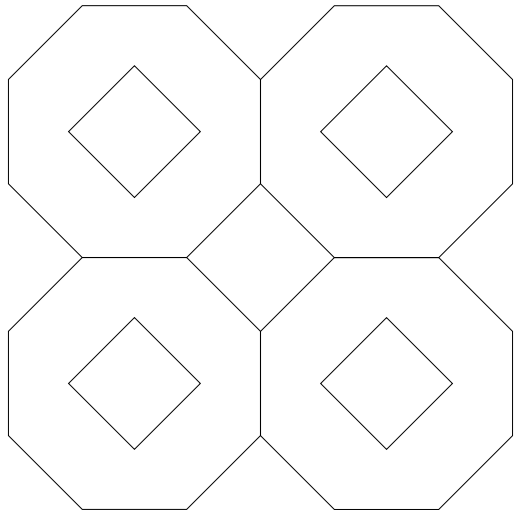

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Editors' note: This book is based on the manuscript of Annu Wilenius's doctoral thesis, which she submitted for the pre-examination in June 2019. The second pre-examination was accepted in August 2020. Since then, the manuscript has undergone minor editing and proofreading. Due to Annu Wilenius's untimely death in December 2020 the thesis was never publicly defended.

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Annu on the train to Mongolia, 2005

Editors' preface

Annu Wilenius' untimely death in December 2020 left her family, friends and colleagues speechless. What was about to mark the end of a long artistic research process was suddenly replaced by a silence. Annu's passing is still difficult to face. However, as her colleagues, teachers and friends, we felt that her artistic doctoral thesis needed to be brought to completion. It documents pioneering work involving numerous Mongolian and European artists, and it summarises fifteen years of Annu's thinking and practice.

Annu Wilenius (1974–2020) grew up in Laajasalo, Helsinki. The house and environment of her youth became a significant influence for her works, as is apparent in the stories and artistic works included in this book. Annu's mother Tuula Wilenius was a steady support and influence in her life and she was also involved in many of the meetings and residencies Annu organized for the Mongolian project. From an early age Annu was interested in the arts. At age 19 she was admitted to study photography at the University of Art and Design Helsinki. After finishing her MA in photography, she moved to Stockholm where she earned a BA in history of ideas, and also did curatorial studies. Along the way she participated in various artist-in-residence programs, especially in Iceland and the Netherlands; she was fascinated by the nature of those two countries. Upon her return to Finland, she completed an MA in history of ideas at the University of Oulu. However, at this point it had already become clear to her that she was first and foremost an artist.

Her doctoral thesis takes its departure from the mid-2000s, when Annu together with a small group of artists set off for a travel and exhibition project in Mongolia. Getting on the Trans-Siberian was in many ways momentous: Mongolia became central for Annu for the following years. It also took her to the limits.

What started as a personal adventure with few friends developed during the years into an extensive series of cultural encounters, art-works, exhibitions, publications, residencies, travels and transdisciplinary exchanges. The traveling and exhibition project brought forth an organiser and curator in Annu, someone inviting people to various projects where the exchange of ideas could be nurtured in different cultural environments.

In 2006 professor Harri Laakso – whose path had years before only incidentally crossed with Annu's at the photography department – saw a newspaper article about Annu's exhibition in Hippolyte Gallery, Helsinki, and encouraged her to apply for doctoral studies at the Pori Department of Art and Media of UIAH (later Pori unit of Department of Art of Aalto University). Annu applied with her Mongolia project, was accepted, and started doctoral studies in 2007.

Annu was one of the first doctoral students in the Pori department, where a master's programme in visual culture had already been running for a few years. It was a community which brought together artists, philosophers, social scientists and students from a variety of backgrounds, becoming known as the "Pori School". Its fundamental characteristic was open curiosity and transdisciplinary experimentation. Pori School took university teaching and art out of the academy and galleries, sustaining collaboration with diverse local actors. Annu fitted into this community with gusto. She invited people from her Mongolia project to come and do residencies, to participate in teaching courses and do local exhibitions. Annu extended her collaborations also to teaching joint courses with landscape studies, studying local histories and doing site-specific works of her own. The stories and experiences of the Pori period make a visible part of this book too, attesting to the fact that while Annu had a great impact on the development of that community, Pori also changed her.

Looking at Annu's project from the Mongolian perspective,curator, PhD Tsendpurev Tsegmid, who translated the texts in Annu's projects into Mongolian describes: "Annu was the only non-Mongolian I know of, if I look back at the last thirty years, who has done so much for the development of contemporary art in this country. Her green Bare House book is still the only credible book on contemporary art of Mongolia in both English and Mongolian. Annu truly cared, made a mountain of an effort and we are able to enjoy the results in many different ways."

Artistic doctoral projects are never alike. Finding supervisors within academia can be challenging – in Annu's case her research project was so extensive no one supervisor could cover it. The people who influenced her dissertation included officially appointed advisors from the fields of photography, landscape studies and visual culture like professors David Bate, Päivi Granö and Harri Laakso. Just as important were the comments from An-

nu's close colleagues, who included doctors Saara Hacklin and Taina Rajanti, from the fields of aesthetics and urban studies. Annu always discussed her work with numerous people who also helped her project in its different stages.

The Nomadic Science Fiction manuscript has been pre-examined in 2019 by professors Pauline von Bonsdorff and Jeremy Lecomte, and for the second time in 2020. We are very grateful that professor von Bonsdorff, who was Annu's intended opponent, kindly offered to write her remarks to be published along with the manuscript. At the time of her death Annu was about to work the manuscript into a publication. She had made the selection of image materials and decisions on their placement, and much of the manuscript had been proofread by Gregory Cowan. Some final proofreading corrections are made by the editors. As editors we have wanted to respect the author's voice. Whenever it came to matters beyond mere language correction, we have mostly left Annu's original versions into the text. In the end, the story is hers, told from her vantage point.

We thank the departments of Art and Media in Aalto University and Aalto ARTS Books' Sanna Tyyri for her efforts in carrying out the project. Our warm thanks to the insightful graphic designer Camilla Pentti for creating a beautiful look for the publication.

◆

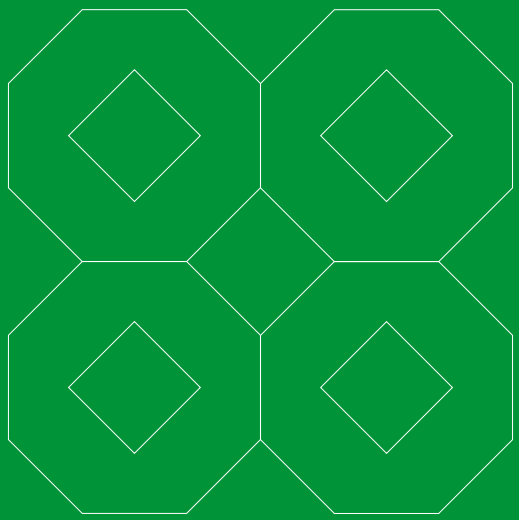
Annu Wilenius was not just a colleague but our friend. We knew her as someone who was committed to seeing through her extensive projects, capable of detailed planning but simultaneously driven by a sense of curiosity and adventure. One telling anecdote: When the group of artists for the first time took the train to Mongolia in 2005, they met another Finn at Moscow station. The Finn was perplexed: "How come you do not have a watch and a proper timetable with you?" Yet somehow they managed. Few years later Mongolia became central for Annu's artistic doctoral thesis, the place where she kept returning for years.

One of Annu's idols was Snufkin, from Moomins, this very independent and free wanderer, philosopher character, who leaves when he wishes. But as Annu pointed out, also Snufkin changes when he learns to know the Moomin family. Being social and having a community counts as well. Along with departure, there is also return.

Who travels without a watch? We all do. In December 2020 Annu's time ran out, all too early.

Saara Hacklin
Harri Laakso
Taina Rajanti

Nomadic Science Fiction: Experiencing Diversity and Alterity Through Urbanising Mongolia



"I'll make my report as if I told a story, for I was taught as a child on my own homeworld that Truth is a matter of the imagination. The soundest fact may fail or prevail in the style of its telling: like that singular organic jewel of our seas, which grows brighter as one woman wears it and, worn by another, dulls and goes to dust. Facts are no more solid, coherent, round, and real than pearls are. But both are sensitive.

The story is not all mine, nor told by me alone. Indeed, I am not sure whose story it is; you can judge better. But it is all one, and if at moments the facts seem to alter with an altered voice, why then you can choose the fact you like best; yet none of them are false, and it is all one story."

– URSULA K. LE GUIN: *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969)[1]

1 Ursula K. Le Guin: *The Left Hand of Darkness*, SFBC Science Fiction Printing Waller and Company, NY, 2004, (original in 1969), p.1

Abstract

Nomadic Science Fiction: Experiencing Diversity and Alterity through Urbanising Mongolia is my dissertation submitted as partial fulfilment of a doctoral degree for Aalto University, the doctoral work also including a production part. The dissertation has been conducted at Aalto University, Department of Art (Visual Culture) with the starting point in mind to experiment art and curating as research practices and travelling and narrative writing as ways of collecting and conveying 'experience'.

Nomadic Science Fiction is a project I have based on exhibition exchanges, travels, residencies and publications realised by visual artists, architects and curators between Western countries and Mongolia from 2005 to 2014. The main exhibitions were *Mongolia: Perception and Utopia*, 2008 (curated by Saara Hacklin, Pirkko Siitari and Annu Wilenius), *Bare house. Pori-Rotterdam-Ulaanbaatar*, 2010 (curated by Annu Wilenius) and *Bare house. Ulaanbaatar*, 2011 (curated by Annu Wilenius). In context with the exhibitions there were publications: *Mongolia: Perception and Utopia*, (edited by Saara Hacklin and Annu Wilenius), 2008, *Bare house. Pori-Rotterdam Ulaanbaatar,* (edited by Annu Wilenius), 2011, *Bare house. Ulaanbaatar – At the Building Site* (edited by Annu Wilenius), 2014. The exhibitions and publications are the production part of this doctoral work.

There have been a number of articles – both within and about – this project. Some of the texts in this dissertation have been published before. The essays in the exhibition publications are separately indicated. Also the essay *Nomadic Urbanism and Other Oxymorons to Learn from* was published in a Viennese *Libertine Magazine*, 2010, and the article *Neighbours and Gardens: Social and Environmental Change in the Ulaanbaatar Ger District of Bayanzurkh*, written in collaboration with Melitta Kuglitsch was published in the conference publication *The Great Wall – Architecture and Identity in China and Mongolia* (Vienna Technical University, 2010).

I call this research project nomadic science fiction because it has been travelling in space, time and intensity. I see it as science fiction because I believe science fiction to be trying to reach out to what seems impossible and then acting as if it were possible. The impossible may be the utmost adventure.

This dissertation and the productions are my proposal for Aalto University for the Degree of Doctor of Art.

Acknowledgements

This project has been very generously funded by Kone Foundation, Kordelin Foundation, Finnish Cultural Foundation, Swedish Cultural Foundation in Finland and, of course, by Aalto University. The residencies in Rotterdam for the Mongolian artists S. Ganzug and T. Enkhbold at Stichting Kaus Australis were funded by the Soros Foundation. The residency periods at Pori AiR were funded by Janne Ojanen and Aalto University and in Mongolia arranged by Blue Sun Contemporary Art Centre and partly funded by Ulaanbaatar Open Academy/ Prins Claus Fund. Most of the Western artists had supporting grants from their native or residential countries.

Without this support nothing of this would have happened. A great number of people, including myself, are immensely grateful for this. For the exhibition opportunities, I would like to thank the museums in Kerava, Pärnu, Rovaniemi, Pori and Ulaanbaatar. For gallery exhibitions, I wish to thank HIAP in Helsinki, 3H+K in Pori and Xanadu and UMA Galleries in Ulaanbaatar. The publications were funded by the Finnish Ministry of Education, Aalto University and Pori Art Museum, and the last one by Kordelin Foundation and Frame Exhibition Exchange Fund Finland.

For commenting on the dissertation manuscript I would like to thank my supervisors Research Fellow Päivi Granö, University of Turku, Dr. David Bate, University of Westminster, Professors Harri Laakso and Taina Rajanti at Aalto University as well as my Mongolian commentators, curators Gantuya Badamgarav and Uranchimeg Tsultem – and of course my Finnish and English editors Saara Hacklin and Gregory Cowan.

All of this would never have come to be without the amazing amount of interest and curiosity of all the artists, architects, curators and institutions having made it real. Thank you!

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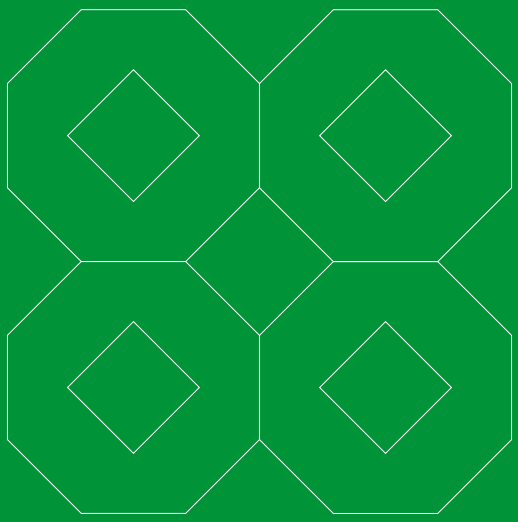
INTRODUCTION



Travelling as a Method

Nomadic Science Fiction is about travelling. It is about diversity and alterity – strangenesses of many kinds and redefinition of identity – experienced through travelling. Diversity as experienced in different roles of agency – artist, curator, author etc. – as well as changing cultural identities. This research set out to understand sameness and difference through experience. This thesis is about the experience of travelling in strange lands and cultures as well as travelling in different positions in the world of artistic production, producing singular art works as artist and group exhibitions as curator. It goes on to reflect on writing articles based on interviews and participatory observation, organizing travels and residencies for myself and for, and with, others. As background, I have been reading diverse related literature: Mongolian research, Mongolia-related fiction, and further afield, science fiction. Learning to write, as a curator and as a researcher, has also been a significant journey for me throughout this project. These modes of acting upon the world are described here as artistic and curatorial research.

This is an artistic/curatorial research project depicting a very personal journey through Mongolia and being an artist-curator. I am not an ethnographer or sociologist and I am not making that kind of science. My opinions and experiences are subjective. When writing about others, I have tried to be fair and honest. I have also sent the manuscript for reading to many of the people I write about and asked them to comment. Their notions I have honoured.

I am fully aware that this kind of reflective writing is challenging and difficult to find balance with, and to be just, fair and 'objective'… All that I write in this dissertation is my 'story', I am the narrator all the way, even

when telling the actions and expressed opinions of others, it is *I* who is speaking, all through and that is good to keep in mind. I experienced Mongolia and exhibition exchange like this.

The method of my work here is travelling. It is, of course, important to understand travelling, not only as tourist, as a 'traveller travelling', that is a week-end or constantly living abroad for a myriad of reasons, but as a way of thinking. This means that many travelling people turn their experiences into writing. This may be diaries or letters, published or not. Writing is an essential part of travelling, as is photography. I have personally photographed more than written, until this dissertation. There is also the aspect of travelling by reading, which is an essential point in this research. Many of the ideas and reflections herein come from travel books and legends. These are not all stories that I refer to directly in relation to Mongolia or my own works of art, but that exist there at the core of me from childhood, or as a historical perspective on Mongolia in a larger scale than my own experience. From these travel stories – and from science fiction – I have gained my own way of writing. I can write in an academic way if I really need to, I can also write poems, if there is an avariciously good moment. However, story-telling is my way of talking, and thus it is my way of writing. And so, narrative writing is my way of writing research.

This dissertation is about travelling to the strangest place I could think of, Mongolia/ the 'self'. In the initial trip to Mongolia, and having an exhibition there, I wanted to see who 'we' are, as much as I wanted to see who 'they' are. Possibly I was even more interested in my own reactions to the difference, than in what the different really was. I didn't actually believe in difference. A key idea was that as a professional I could do all the things there were to be done: art or philosophy, production or curating as well as all the other ones in the group. I also believed that all artists were somehow similar, even in Mongolia. I learned a great deal concerning these matters. But to start with, I was just curious.

I started this project as one of a group of five: Tiina Mielonen, Vesa Vehviläinen (Pink Twins, together with Juha Vehviläinen), Saara Hacklin, Rasmus Kjellberg, and me. Tiina is a painter, Vesa with his brother Juha forming the Pink Twins make electronic alternative music with video projections generated by a program created by Juha Vehviläinen, so that they create magnificent digital landscapes. Then our group became many more, and changed in 'combinations and permutations' over the years. Details of these group relations will unfold in what follows.

The question remains: why do it? What did we expect to gain from the experience? What did I expect, going back again and again? I think of two of my favourite adventurers' 'stories'. Namely T.E. Lawrence and Sir Edmund Hillary. When Hillary had managed to reach the top of Mount Everest, as

the first Westerner to do so, he was asked in an interview why had he done it. His answer was very compact and all consuming: "Because it was there."[2] What better reason for anything?

The other story which grips my mind as to why we do painful, difficult things is the story of T.E. Lawrence on his Arabian expedition.[3] T. E. Lawrence, (1888 – 1935) was a British archaeologist, army officer, diplomat, and writer. He was renowned for his liaison role during the Sinai and Palestine Campaign and the Arab Revolt against the Ottoman Empire during the First World War. One could say many things here about 'foreign cultures' and desert expeditions, but what haunts my mind is a scene in the beginning of the film *Lawrence of Arabia*, where Lawrence extinguishes a match with his fingers. A younger officer looks at him in awe and asks: "Doesn't that hurt?" Lawrence answers: "Yes, of course it does. The point is not to mind it."[4] To me, that is the point of travelling.

Nomadism and Urbanisation

The urge to go to Mongolia sprang from a need to do something different in our 'art world' of that day. We discussed what would trigger our curiosity, our need to take things to the limit…or some such thing. And Mongolia was the answer. Of course, saying we didn't know anything about Mongolia would be wrong. We knew a lot through literature and anecdotes. That's the form of knowledge this dissertation partly bases itself on as well besides first-hand experience.

Urbanisation in Mongolia is quite different to the history of urbanisation in Europe. It had hardly happened until the Communist Rule broke in 1990. This is a long story and hardly the place to go though it here. Urbanisation in Mongolia is very different from the West. It has much to do with cattle, mining and water, matters which I cannot properly comment on. Urbanisation in Mongolia – as I have seen it – is related to poor people, who

2 This quote of Hillary's is an urban legend. Another matter to remember in this context is the case of George Mallory and Sandy Irvine's almost certainly successful conquest of the mountain in 1924. They died on the way back. http://www.wou.edu/las/physci/poston/everest/. Accessed 16.06.2019

3 As in the case of sir Hillary, Lawrence was not the first Brit to be seduced by the Bedouin culture. Many think that Sir Richard Francis Burton (1821 – 1890) was much more to praise for his ways of assimilation to those of Lawrence. Sir Francis was a British explorer, geographer, translator, writer, soldier, orientalist, cartographer, ethnologist, spy, linguist, poet, fencer, and diplomat. He was famed for his travels and explorations in Asia, Africa and the Americas, as well as his extraordinary knowledge of languages and cultures. According to one count, he spoke 29 European, Asian and African languages. See Mary S. Lovell: *A Rage to Live: A Biography of Richard & Isabel Burton*, 1998

4 David Lean (director): *Lawrence of Arabia*, 1962

had somewhat good lives in the steppes, moving to cities where there is no work or housing for them. I am no politician here. I don't know or think that I know what is for the better: the city or the nomadic countryside. I am just telling the stories of the people I have met and discussed with – and what I have seen for myself.

Travelling in Mongolia made me think very differently of urbanisation, being used to the European history of it. I had travelled a lot in the USSR in the 1980s and 1990s, so that kind of reality was well known to me. But combined with the Mongolian traditional aesthetics it became something quite different. There was the old belief of 'no dirt in the world' against the 'white world' of clean and new. One of the artists in the project, Batzorig Dugarsuuren, commented this poignantly in his work *My Home* (2008), where he painted his own *ger* (yurt) all white inside. Among the traditional, now white-painted, structures of the *ger*, there are 'modern' cooking utensils, a mini bike – a TV-set, etc. These may seem trivial observations, but having travelled through many homes in Mongolia I do think that these traditions contribute greatly to how we experience the world. Even when in urban Ulaanbaatar these things apply: absolute generosity – absolute ignorance of what privacy means, for example.

Nomadism and urbanisation are discussed throughout the thesis. There are many aspects to this and they are dealt with both through art works and as theoretical references. Mongolia has only very recently urbanised to any considerable degree. Ulaanbaatar is no 'common' urban environment, but half-nomadic; many people are living in *gers* and self-built houses without infrastructure. Still, at the same time, glass-walled skyscrapers are being built in the centre. These two phenomena live side by side, as they do in many other parts of the world, of course. In Mongolia the change is just very fast and very drastic, so one has to, not only see it – but to feel it.

In Mongolia, for me, the conceptions of nomadism and urbanism collided and came together in a mind-shattering way. These things that were supposed to be opposites, lived quite happily mixed-up together – and created wonderful practical and aesthetic compositions. Mongolia is changing so fast that all that I write is probably outdated as I set my fingers to the keyboard - but then again, also so much will always and forever remain the same there.

The nomad, traditionally and intellectually understood, has a very specific relation to space, place, possession and time. Moving, changing, and remaining the same, even when changing by the second. Nomadism creates life patterns where things stay the same – apparently at least – for thousands of years. Life patterns are fluid in thought as anything can associate itself with another and go on. Science fiction literature has the infinite universe and infinite time to form permutations and make anything possible, thus we have only ourselves to recon where the limits and possibilities of 'us',

are. These are not the same thing, but they are the two sides of a coin. Thus, my use of the term 'nomadic science fiction'; it brings together two forms of thinking about the 'world's' possibilities and the 'self's' possibilities.

Mongolia as Perspective

We ended up in Mongolia as a group of artists and a philosopher in 2005. We knew hardly anything about Mongolia. I had never even seen a *ger* (yurt) and I definitely did not know that about 40% of Ulaanbaatar's population still dwell in them, and of course mostly in the countryside.[5] It was, however, not only this kind of exoticism I was seeking, but to do primary research through lived experience – not secondary research through academic knowledge. The idea of my research project was not to know by reading and learning everything possible about Mongolia, or about curating, but to throw myself into the midst of something strange. Thus, also the artistic projects realised in this Mongolia-project were fundamentally based on the idea of doing things that I did not know how to do. A good example is my collaborative work with Oula Salokannel, *The Raft, the River and the Plum-tree* (2010). We, who knew nothing about raft building, built a raft out of 21 spruce logs with a little cabin on it, with birch pillars and bamboo curtains. Then we sailed down the Kokemäki River[6] in Finland with it for 4 days. It was a great experience! This, and another creative work produced in collaboration with Salokannel, *St. Isak's, Pori* were inspired by the haphazard architecture of informal *ger* districts in Ulaanbaatar. I spent a lot of time in these *ger* district areas, interviewing people and photographing spaces and materials.[7] I showed a slideshow of my photographs to a conference in Vienna in 2009, and many architects came to talk to me afterwards. Their reaction can be summed up in the words of one of them: We always just think of these areas as problems to be solved, but you showed what a strong aesthetics of their own they have![8]

St. Isak's (Isakinkirkko) was a wooden house near where I lived in Pori. The building was built by a carpenter called Isak Mäkelä, starting in the 1920s. He added a room whenever somebody new needed a cheap place to live. Some say that 80 people lived there.[9] I first became interested in it as

5 https://www.nationalgeographic.org/encyclopedia/yurt/. Accessed 19.05.2019.

6 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kokem%C3%A4enjoki. Accessed 19.05.2019.

7 List of interviews at the end of the document.

8 *Along The Great Wall: Architecture and Identity in China and Mongolia*, Vienna University of Technology, 2009.

9 See i.e. Iisakin kirkko, Wanha Pori, from the archives of the Satakunta Museum: https://www.facebook.com/789371447742925/photos/a.789376697742400/1212933545386711/?

I was told that part of the old Charlotta-bridge might have ended up there. I had a very romantic notion of finding parts of that bridge there. I didn't, but I found many other intriguing things. Stories of how building/ tearing down buildings had been, the way of carelessness of taking down, for example ceramic ovens, the alcohol policies and the destruction of all the material. But while discussing these matters I also heard that there was a scale-model maker having his pensioner-workshop upstairs. I should ask him. I did. I asked him to build a scale-model in 1:40. He hesitated and wanted to think about it. Then he found a friend of his, Ari, who was into architecture and they pondered together about the drawings of the place, that didn't of course quite exist. Ari, however, found some documents in Turku, and recreated the building from those. So, when Pauli, the model maker, started he had a perfect building plan as a basis.

This quite long story is a good example of Mongolia-inspired work. Others in the group had their own interpretations, too, that started from Mongolia, but in the end didn't directly deal with Mongolia. For example, Ana Rewakowicz's *SR-Hab (Socially Responsible Habitat Prototype)* (2010) or Christine Saalfeld's felt tapestry works (2010) to name just two. I think this is an important aspect in thinking about artistic working processes, curating and the importance of the duration of a project.

So, Mongolia as perspective means, to me, that I have experienced a thoroughly different rural and urban environment to anything I had encountered before, and that experience has made me think differently about all that I had experienced before and would experience after. Not only concerning architecture, but also the 'self' and societies. I am not saying that Mongolia is a model for anything, I am saying that difference makes a difference.

Literature and Research

The entire Mongolia project was inspired by literature: adventures in Siberia I had read in childhood, such as *Dersu Uzala* and the *Hunters of the Taiga*, and later I had read about Finnish explorers (scientists and spies) such as J.G. Granö, G.J. Ramstedt and Sakari Pälsi – and I was also inspired by C.G.E. Mannerheim.[10] Fascinated by these 'stories', I set out to experience my own Central Asian expedition and adventure. This same structure or

type=1&theater. Accessed 25.06.2019. https://www.facebook.com/789371447742925/photos/a.789376697742400/1089741137705953/? type=1&theater. Accessed 25.06.2019.

10 C.G.E. Mannerheim was a Marshal and president of Finland, and many many other things such as a spy for Tsarist Russia in the early 1900s, travelling across Northern China on horseback for two years. https://www.mannerheim-museo.fi/gustaf-mannerheim-3/. Accessed 06.07.2019

idea is the base for many separate works of art in this project[11] for example the already mentioned raft work, which was inspired by shared fantasies of *Kon-Tiki* and a little bit of *Fizzcarraldo* – and of course always and forever by Dersu Uzala.[12] Log rafts and rivers… these just needed to be made into our own real and lived experience, in our own world, creating our own time. I also read a lot of older travel stories from Mongolia like Giovanni da Pian del Carpine's and William of Rubruck's reports to the Pope in the 13th century as well as several recounts of Baron Ungern-Sternberg and his exploitations as Mongolia's emperor in the early 1920s.[13]

In Mongolia, this adventure developed a very strong science fiction aspect, in my mind, because everything was so totally different and alien to me: urban *gers* and countryside *gers* in the midst of infinite steppes, but equipped with solar panels, wind propellers for electricity and satellite antennae for TV and mobile phones. For me, it definitely felt like walking into a sci-fi film. Later, as Taina Rajanti had recommended that I read Ursula K. Le Guin, it felt like I had walked into one of Le Guin's novels. Possibly it could be called retro-futurism of a kind. Actually, I had not read much sci fi before that. I mainly knew sci-fi from films. Classic films like *Planet of the Apes*, *Bladerunner*, *Solaris*, *Silent Running*, *Soylent Green*.[14] Most of these have been made in many versions with decades in between. These films all deal with nature-human relations and experience of reality. I have used all of

11 Such as my urban exploration of the ger districts of Ulaanbaatar, and referencing it to my own childhood environment of Helsinki in the 1970s, well documented in the work *Of the House I Grew Up* in… *Helsinki, Ulaanbaatar,* 2008. See subchapter *Prologue Projects*, and for the video work in appendix 2.

12 Arsenyev, Vladimir: *Dersu Uzala*, Tammi, Helsinki, 1923, Kozak, Jan: *Taigan metsästäjät* (*Hunters of the Taiga*, in Finnish, original in Czech), Kirjayhtymä, Helsinki, 1979 Granö, J.G.: *Puhdas maantiede*, WSOY, Helsinki, 1930, *Pure Geography* , The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997, (the first publication was in German in 1929), Ossendowski, Ferdinand: *Beasts, Men and Gods*, Create Space Independent Publishing Platform, South Carolina, USA, 2005, (original (presumably in Russian, 1922), Pälsi, Sakari: *Mongolian matkalta* (*From Travels in Mongolia*, in Finnish), Otava, Helsinki, 1911, Mannerheim, Carl Gustaf Emil : *Ratsain halki Aasian 1906–1908*, (in Finnish), Otava, Helsinki, 2008, Heyerdahl, Thor: *Kon-Tiki. Lautalla yli Tyynenmeren*,(in Finnish), Tammi, Helsinki, 1951, (original in Norwegian in 1949), Werner Herzog (director): *Fitzcarraldo*, 1982.

13 De Plano Carpini, Johannes: *Mongolien historia*, (1240s) (in Finnish, *History of the Mongols*), Gaudeamus, Helsinki, 2015, Rubruk, Vilhelm: *Matka Mongoliaan 1253-1255*(*Journey to Mongolia 1253-1255*, in Finnish), Faros-kustannus, Turku, Finland, 2010, Ossendowski, Ferdinand: *Beasts, Men and Gods*, , Create Space Independent Publishing Platform, South Carolina, USA, 2005, (original (presumably in Russian, 1922), Rönnqvist, Ronny: *Baron Ungern, Mongoliets härskare* (*Baron Ungern: Emperor of Mongolia*, in Swedish), Litorale, Helsinki, 2006.

14 Franklin J. Schaffner: *Planet of the Apes*, 1968, Tim Burton: *Planet of the Apes*, 2001, Ridley Scott: *Bladerunner*, 1982, Denis Villeneuve: *Blade Runner 2049*, 2017, Andrej Tarkovsky: *Solaris*, 1972, Steven Soderbergh: *Solaris*, 2002, Michel Gondry: *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, 2004, Douglas Trumbull: *Silent Running*, 1972, Richard Fleischer: *Soylent Green*, 1973

them in my teaching, in as many versions as possible, as far as my audiences could endure.

It may seem unaccounted for to use characters and figures of thought from children's literature and sci-fi as theoretical 'tools', but I consider Snufkin, Falk-Ramarren, and Genly Ai and Estraven, as much theoretical figures as Dersu Uzala or Nietzsche. They represent ways of reacting with the world – and self – and ways of communication and understanding.

I did encounter other kinds of literature as well, of a more theoretical kind. I had no declared theoretical starting point to set out from. Instead the whole idea was to research something of which there is no existing record of experience or knowledge – or at least I did not have it. This goes for my artistic and curatorial projects as well as for my writing and research. The literature to which I am referring in this dissertation was in part known to me for decades (Susan Sontag, Roland Barthes, Friedrich Nietzsche, Julia Kristeva), in part totally new acquaintances, literature I discovered along the way, while actually concentrating on 'doing things' (Victor Segalen, Rosi Braidotti, Jean Baudrillard). I did not set out, so to say, with a suitcase packed with concepts and methods concerning urban research and curating, but rather, I set out empty handed – or empty headed.

This is in no way to state that I was approaching either Mongolia or curating from a 'clean slate' as the saying goes. Of course I had a lot of opinions and 'knowledge' of both, just not very definite or personal, or otherwise well-grounded.

The new thoughts of others that I found most intriguing and rewarding during this project were from, as said, Segalen, Braidotti and Baudrillard. Victor Segalen (1878–1919) was a French naval doctor, ethnographer, archaeologist, writer, poet, explorer, art-theorist, linguist and literary critic. I found Segalen's *Essay on Exoticism* (written as notes during his time in Asia in the early 20th century, posthumously, first published in 1955) all by myself in Stedelijk Museum's bookshop in Amsterdam. At first I couldn't figure him out at all. Then as the years went by, and I read bits and pieces of it again, and – I just found myself kissing the book!

I did not find him in Baudrillard because I had not found Baudrillard as yet. Jean Baudrillard (1929 – 2007) was a French sociologist, philosopher, cultural theorist, political commentator and photographer. He is best known for his concepts of simulacra and hyperreality. He writes a lot on Segalen's ideas on alterity, especially in the publication *Radical Alterity*.[15] He also writes a lot about photography and the photographer.

15 Jean Baudrillard, & Marc Guillaume: *Radical Alterity*, (original Les Éditions Descartes & Cie, 1994, 1998), Semiotext(e), 2008

Baudrillard I discovered in an antiquarian bookshop, in the form of *America*. He wrote so poignantly and in a lively way about things like why we were (in the 1980s) wearing pyjamas in the city and why we go jogging on running mats, and so on. It was so clear – and so much fun – that I fell in love immediately – and then fell in love again reading his other publications. I think that, during the 25 years I was in university, not many talked about him, because he was thought to be so 'postmodern' – and now we are of course at least post-post-modern – or re-modern; however one wants to see it. Or "having never been modern at all", as Bruno Latour puts it.[16] First we were premodern, then posthuman… or 'globally contemporary'. It is a changing world.

Rosi Braidotti (1954–) is an Italian-Australian philosopher and feminist theoretician. I immersed myself in reading theoretical books with the word nomadic in the title and I came across Braidotti's *Nomadic Subjects* at Tate Museum's bookshop. Braidotti started her philosophical career as a student of Deleuze's in Paris, then turned to her own feminist theories. She is most known for her theories on nomadic theory and posthumanism.[17]

Like many things in my own art works in this project, also curating, and public writing in connection with curating, was almost unknown to me. This research was a journey, an expedition. Once 'home' again, I would start to reflect on all the things and thoughts that grasped my mind and being whilst 'abroad'. While one is in the midst of everything happening, one takes so much of one's experience for granted. The real meaning, in depth, only sinks in later on – at least for me. As one then thinks and reflects upon these experiences, one also becomes interested in how others have thought about and experienced similar situations. I recognized similarities to my own experience, and I recognised thought and perceptual structures of experiencing, interpreting and understanding.

As I started with this project I thought it was just about getting to Mongolia with someone funding it. Most of my adventurous fantasies were based on childhood literature. I (we, the original group of four) did not travel to Mongolia to do research of any kind. We even joked about it the night before leaving that if one would want to do a 'doctorate' about Mongolia, one would have to learn Russian and Chinese on top of Mongolian. Which goes to show

16 Bruno Latour: *We Were Never Modern*, Harvard University Press, 1993, p. 10-12.

17 I may have come across her publications before but not paid attention, for example at my colleague Gregory Cowan's bookshelf as he has been writing on nomadology, too, long before me. The same can be said about Segalen as when I took up my Richard Clifford's *The Predicament of Culture* (Harvard University Press,1988), that I had bought in 2012 by recommendation of Dr. David Bate, I noticed, to my great surprise that there was a whole chapter on Segalen. I do not remember having noticed these at the time and did not go looking for them from the bookshops. This goes to prove my point in stating that when you have not at least in some way thought the thoughts through yourself, you cannot recognize their importance.

very well how little we really knew of the place. There was very scarcely material to read relating to issues that we were interested in: Contemporary art, landscape studies and urban planning. This was 2005.[18] We came again and again and as I persisted being interested in the urban I made contacts and then interviews – with an interpreter. I thought I was making research into Mongolian/Ulanbaatar urban landscape. Even in the interviews I videoed with the participant artists in 2007 I mostly asked questions of their backgrounds as in relation to land, rural and urban.[19] Did you grow up in the countryside? Did you grow up in the city? How was it? Did you have water/electricity/toilets? Did you go to school? How did you feel about moving so often? Things like that drizzled between questions like: How did you experience working for the State? "Oh boy, were we not free then?!" This was Bat-Erdene who used to do large scale murals for the State. How was your first ever solo exhibition in Mongolia received? – "Oh, I had great fun, I had a studio in Beijing for six months. I left my husband and children and spent my time painting huge penises. Of course everybody was really shocked back home." This was Sarantsatsralt Ser-Odin. "Why did you start your own art school instead of working at the Academy?" This was a long story about the first free art school, the Green Horse, founded in 1990 by Yo. Dalkh Ochir.[20]

All this was very interesting. As were the interviews/meetings with residents of different residential areas that we started visiting with a colleague, architect Michael Fürst in 2007. We went to *ger* districts, to planning offices, to city planning places of all kinds: development offices, the traffic office… everywhere and every place we could think of. We were so happy with sharing same interests and getting along so well that we felt we could go anywhere. We did, but did not gain much. We were shown one great plan after the other and both the presenters and we knew that it was all just a waste of ink.

I did a lot of these kinds of interviews and visits from 2006 to 2011. I interviewed persons responsible for or living in diverse residential areas. I photographed what had been there, as best I could, and what was emerging in the best way I could. Stories tended to be the ones that lived, meaning

18 I don't really know how it is now but I imagine it to be different. When we published the first Bare house book, the translator Tsendpurev Tsegmid said that there were only three books about contemporary art in Mongolian before that, but that I at least know to have changed.

19 While working on these interviews we kept on remembering reading J.G. Granö's experiences of interviews in Mongolia, some made us smirk, it was all so similar. Besides Granö we had of course also acquainted ourselves with Taneli Eskola's photographic publication *Sininen Altai: J. G. Granö Siperian valokuvaajana 1902-1916 (The Blue Altai: J. G. Granö as a photographer in Siberia, 1902–1916)*, Mustataide, Helsinki, 2002. Especially for Saara this had been the first time she saw photographs of Mongolia.

20 These artist interviews are included in the video materials attached to *Mongolia: Perception and Utopia*, Kerava Art Museum, Tampere, 2008.

that the old way of life, either nomadic or Soviet restricted, was nowhere anymore and the planned future would never be there. There was just a weird limbo of in between – the AKA now.

Changes usually happened in such a way that no one could see them coming nor document what had been there nor what actually happened. People came home from countryside summers and their world had been altered. They had no power over the changes, no warning. These are just small glimpses of Mongolian reality. Anything can happen, whenever. And even if you ask questions, you will never get an answer. Nobody will be responsible. It just happened.[21]

I have spent a lot of time in Mongolia since 2005. I just counted that I have passed through Siberia by train 9 times – then there are the flights through Beijing every now and then. The train is uncomfortable, takes a week and you get bad food. When you get to Mongolia it's either too hot or too cold, you just eat mutton and wheat and drink vodka. You take cold showers in the morning, not because of a hangover, which hasn't come yet, but either because there is no hot water in the city for the summer, pipes are being cleaned, or you are in the countryside and the only option for water of any kind is the very cold river with heavy streams that definitely will give you diarrhoea and is possibly carrying bird flu.[22]

For me and my colleagues from the Western world (I say it like this as we participating these exhibition exchanges were not only Europeans) all these dangerous things may have been exotic. We were in a pure world not only of art, but of how one should be. I wanted to be as wild and free as one can be! So I bathed in an icy cold lake, where I spent two hours teaching one of the young Mongolian men to swim. Then we went forest horseback riding in hectic sun… and the next morning I had burning fever. Horse, lake and sun… or birds. I was sick for a week in an uncomfortable car. But in the end it was fine with me.

Curating and Participation

Curating in such a sense that we give it now in 2010s has a very short history. Paul O'Neill gives the year 1987 as the strategic point of change when curators cease to be carers of collections and become active mediators and

21 There is a more detailed description of this in the essay *Nomadic Urbanism and Other 21 Oxymorons to Learn from* in Chapter 1. This is based on an interview with a Finnish journalist who had then lived in Ulaanbaatar for twenty years.

22 Bird flu also called avian influenza, which is a viral infection that can infect not only birds, but also humans and other animals https://www.healthline.com/health/avian-influenza. Accessed 25.06.2019.

producers of art. Still, to begin with curators were mostly choosing works already existing to form their own "new truths" by connecting works and creating meta-stories through these thematic connections and theoretical stories. This, however, soon evolved both from the artists as well as from the curators' side: curator-artists and artist-curators emerged.[23] Both giving snide remarks on the other. Curators thought they were artists picking up works, creating connections between works, participating in the production and planning processes together with artists. And why not? Many artists felt they were used to illustrate somebody else's ideas and not representing their own… Artists then again became more and more interested in museum educational and information-related issues in exhibition making and considering exhibition design: physical as well as media-related as part of their artistic practice, as well as being curators themselves independently.[24] This snivelling between artists, curators etc., institutions and artist-run galleries, I would at least say, is history by now.

Besides artists using curatorial elements as part of their own practice, curating group shows – separate or in support of their own work – also collective curating has become an increasing phenomenon. This means that a group of artists or writers/other cultural professionals together form groups that start galleries, magazines, happenings, exhibitions. A diversity of roles is more and more acceptable, and good so.

Another trend of our times has been that of 'participation', which is not the same as a collective. Much of participatory art or participation art aims at activating groups of people outside the artist group –AKA the locals. There has been great enthusiasm for this, especially among residency programs world over. Of course for organisations it feels easier to think they are really delivering something to the local community if the people get to do 'something' themselves. (Pity that that something can't be thought of as being thinking/experiencing art.) In many residencies that I've heard of the locals feel more exploited than serviced. Too much just becomes too much.

Never minding these critical tones participation has been a big issue of late, especially through an anthology edited by Claire Bishop called *Participation*, a reader from 2006. This is a volume combining theoretical texts from Umberto Eco's 'open work' to Nicholas Bourriard's 'relational aesthetics' as well as project descriptions. There are many interesting stories, descriptions of interesting projects like Jeremy Deller's *Battle of Orangrave* (2002), a project of re-enacting the miners' riots of the 1980s and activat-

23 Paul O'Neill: *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachussets, USA, 2012, p. 1-5 and Beatrice von Bismarck: *Cultures of the Curatorial*, Sternberg Press, Berlin, 2012, p.12

24 Bishop, O'Neill.

ing locals to re-act their own history, or Eda Cufer's *Transnational/A Journey from the East to the West* (1996).[25]

In recent years in the discussions on curating the term 'curatorial' has become very central. With this term it is meant that curating is not just exhibition-making: it is so much more and in many ways relating to research. Paul O'Neill writes in his publication *Curating Research* that "the 'curatorial' is most often expressed with reference to modes of becoming – research-based, dialogical practices in which the processual and serendipitous overlap with speculative actions and open ended forms of production"[26]. In the same introductory text O'Neill quotes a blog by H.F. Skerritt, taking a stand as to the multiple roles persons working in the art scene take nowadays. He writes:" It seems that no one in the art world is just one thing anymore. We are all some hybrid variation of hyphenated multiplex artist-curator-critic-theorist-activist historian-model-actor".[27]

Although there feels to be some sarcasm in what Skerritt calls 'hyphenated identities', I would still understand that Skerritt/O'Neill are seeing this change of the art historian, narrative curator mode coming to an end as a positive turn. *Curating Research* wants to see the 'curatorial' as something beyond curating. It is doing everything – in an "extended field".[28] The chapter ends with a vision:

> Imagine curating as a way of thinking in terms of interconnections linking objects, images, processes, people, locations, histories and discourses in physical space like active catalyst, generating twists, turns and tensions.[29]

This vision is surely making 'the curator' a power source in a new fashion indeed. This kind of activating cannot, of course, go without activism. A recent publication by Maura Reilly is taking this question under reflection. *Curatorial Activism – Towards an Ethics of Curating* speaks for a Talmudic, Wikipedia-like approach that "would enable innumerable voices to comment, debate and shape tradition". Reilly also speaks for the innumerable possibilities of the group exhibition.[30]

25 Claire Bishop: *Participation*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachussetts, USA, 2006.

26 Paul O'Neill & Mick Wilson (Ed:s): *Curating Research*, Open Editions, 2015, p. 12, this publication as the title suggests is about curating research, not exhibitions.

27 Ibidem

28 Ibidem, p. 14

29 Ibidem

30 Maura Reilly: *Curatorial Activism. Towards an Ethics of Curating*, Thems and Hudson, USA, 2018, p. 15

All these mentioned aspects play a part in my own Mongolia project, though not in very obvious ways. It's about travelling and doing together, but not that we would make works together as artists. So, what kind of curating did we – I – do? To begin with we were a group of artists and a philosopher just having finished her MA in 2003 when we started planning the project. We as a group decided the philosopher would be the curator although that did not mean choosing the works or being the one, alone, to do the writing. She was our representative, and a very good one, too. When we started with *Mongolia: Perception and Utopia* for Kerava Art Museum we were a curatorial team of three: museum director Pirkko Siitari, Saara Hacklin and I. Saara Hacklin felt that it meant a great deal for her having been the curator the first time. From the Mongolian artists that participated in this exhibition we chose already existing works that we at least somehow could think of linking to our interests on urban and environmental issues. The Western artists all came to Mongolia and produced new works. For the next project *Bare house* both in Pori and in Ulaanbaatar I was the curator/producer/editor on my own. For these exhibitions everybody was expected to make new works.

As curator I wanted to be part of the production and, at least observing, the formation of meaning the best I could. And of course it can be said that even if I didn't use the artists and architects in this project directly as material for my art work, I exploited them for my research all along. I get asked about this a lot: isn't it exploitation? The question arises, I am sure, because of thinking Mongolia a 3rd World country (now it is called Global South, but this feels very inappropriate for Mongolia). In a sense as said, of course I exploited them – and yes, of course, they exploited me and my curiosity. These matters can be so very vacillating.

As a curatorial aim in the Mongolia-project I – we as a group in the beginning – had to think about curating. We were not curators. We wanted to think about it. As said later on we didn't commission works from the Mongolian artists in the beginning. We were interested in the works they had to show us. Of course, a lot of it was like walking into a fairy-tale, for us. But it became a show of heartbeat and excrement.[31]

Curating the work of the Mongolian artists felt difficult at times. We wanted our ecological, phenomenological points of view to come through, but along the way we found other approaches. This is much due to our growing 'knowledge' about Mongolian culture and art scene. There were never problems in exhibiting the produced work – only the Rovaniemi Art Museum didn't want to have the toilet installation in their version of the *Mongolia:*

31 See publication Saara Hacklin & Annu Wilenius [Ed:s]: *Mongolia: Perception and Utopia*, Kerava Art Museum, Tampere, 2008.

Perception and Utopia exhibition. I also had a bit of a hard time in a Korean residency, writing an article for Ganzug's work that dealt with terminated pregnancies – the common Mongolian attitude to abortion is that 'every seamen is sacred'. I did write, but in a very general fashion.

Research Aims - Research Questions

To try out artistic work and curating as research methods was the initial point of the project and the topics of urban and rural landscapes the initial context. The project, obviously, grew out of these initial ideas to become more and more a study of how the current, global, art world works, as much for artists in different locations as for art professionals of different backgrounds, be they cultural or professional. The aim of the project can now retrospectively be said to be researching what can be reached by continuity and belief in an on-going project through several years. The aim was to try out something new, the achieved result was a lot of cultural exchange, in good and bad, and careers that evolved and changed due to that curiosity that enabled the whole project.

My concrete research questions could be said to have been what kind of a tool curating can be? What can be achieved with an expanded understanding of this practice, the so called 'curatorial'? And as part of that, what kind of effect, good or bad, can having multiple roles within a project have? How does understanding grow, change and turn around itself as experience accumulates? I also reflect on how things are agreed upon, how they are realised and what remains unrealised.

Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation is in two parts. Not only was I packing and unpacking suitcases – both physical and mental – throughout these years, I was first 'doing' and then 'reflecting'. I did not go out 'there' to do my Gadamer or my anyone else. I found my Nietzsche, again, and Baudrillard and Braidotti, instead.

Part I documents the whole Mongolia Project in word and image (2005 -2014). Besides describing the main exhibitions, *Mongolia: Perception and Utopia*, *Bare House. Pori-Rotterdam-Ulaanbaatar* and *Bare House. Ulaanbaatar*, the section is divided into Prologue, Intermediary and Epilogue Projects. These are there to analyse and bring the whole story to life. How I (and we) set out, how I (and we) continued: all the processes and interactions between cultures and individuals that finally created what the project became. The sub-

chapter 'Epilogue' also functions as a reflection on the result, the value of doing this. What remained in the hand, not only for me but also for the artists and the research community.

The chapter includes three published essays which I wrote for publications which accompanied the exhibitions.

Part II, *Self and the World*, approaches different ways of working: as an artist, a curator, writer, editor, researcher. Chapter 2, *Virtue of the Undefined?* discusses this relation through different kinds of 'doing things'. This is reflected upon through my own experiences as an artist – initially, a photographer. I go into detail about thinking the relation between the photographer and the world, and the apparatus of the camera in between. These issues are taken up, besides by my own thoughts, by those of Roland Barthes, Susan Sontag and Jean Baudrillard. In the end, the photographer disappears into a void or a desert and both the world and the camera are assumed to have had lives of their own according to Baudrillard.[32]

Discussing the disappearing role of the photographer in this dissertation, as the way I am in the world, how I perceive, observe, document and relate to it is the core question – and is ultimately at the heart of questions of diversity and alterity: how do we experience ourselves, how do we encounter the Other? Who and what am I? Who and what is the Other? How much happens inside and how much outside – can they be said to be differentiated?

After studying and practicing photography and installation art, I broadened my practice to include curating and organising exhibitions, residencies and travels. Through this shift in my own work, general discussions about curatorial practice became of greater interest to me, engaging with – among others – texts by Claire Bishop, Hal Foster and Paul O'Neill. Discussions about different kinds of curatorial positions, particularly those of artist-curator, participatory curating and the so called ethnographic turn (finding alterity from elsewhere) in art became important to me.[33] The latter, particularly, embodies the questions of self and other as essential points. In this Chapter 2, I consider my initial motivations behind the Mongolia project, as well as how I felt my own position changing through the process.

Chapter 3, *Nomadic Alterity?*, discusses conceptions of nomadic, nomadism and the posthuman. Rosi Braidotti's theory of nomadic existence is the sense that both the world and the supposed 'self' are in constant process of change and cannot be stated to exist 'as such'. Braidotti's views on diversity and alterity are complemented with Baudrillard's concept of radical

32 Baudrillard: *What They Looked like Photographed* in *Radical Alterity*, (original Les Éditions Descartes & Cie, 1994, 1998), Semiotext(e), 2008, p.162-164

33 Alex Coles [Ed]: *Site-Specificity: The Ethnographic Turn*, Volume 4, de-, dis-, ex-, 2000.

alterity, which he bases quite strongly on Victor Segalen's 1920s publication *Essay on Exoticism*[34] . In relation to these thoughts, I reflect on my own expectations and experiences of diversity and alterity – both cultural and professional – in regard to Mongolia.

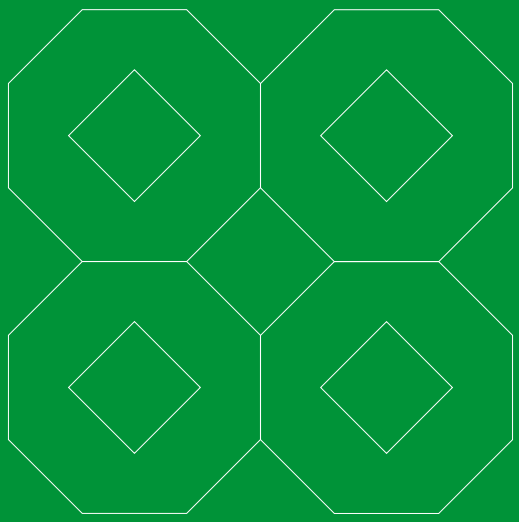
Chapter 4, *Nomadic Science Fiction?*, also addresses ways of working, this time in combination with talking about different ways of conveying experience and interpretation as observer, writer (author) and researcher. The basic ideas of the position and relation of a supposed author to a text is mentioned as the classic texts of Roland Barthes' *Death of the Author* (1962) and Michel Foucault's *What is an Author?* (1969). Foucault defines what is an author-function and how our thinking of this has changed through time. Barthes before him had already declared the disappearance and deletion of authority of any writer. What is, however, concentrated on is how Walter Benjamin thought of them through the history and practice of storytelling, long before the other two. From storytelling, the 'story' in this dissertation goes on to science fiction, mainly with reference to Ursula K. Le Guin, concluding, in relation to Hal Foster's views on art and ethnography and Baudrillard, with his thoughts on reality and fiction.

The chapter ends with reflections on my own writing both in the essays included to this dissertation as well as writing the dissertation. This is followed with surveying the conclusions of the entire project and with some reflections thereof.

34 Victor Segalen: *Essay on Exoticism: Aesthetics for Diversity*, Duke Universtiy Press, Durban & London, 2002, (written in the 1910s and 1920s, first published in French as *Essai sur l'exotisme* in 1955).

PART I

THE MONGOLIA PROJECT



The project started very innocently and then kept on growing, being the most central thing in my life from 2004 to 2014, and as this dissertation until now (2020). Much happened and much was said. In the following I have tried to map the essential about making the exhibitions and all the most important things in between. The exhibitions themselves, the art works and the artists' comments on their own works (or curator's comments if the artist has not commented) can be found from the publications in the appendices.

Chapter 1

Documentations and Reflections

Prologue Projects 2005-2007

2005

Here is Not There - Here You Always Bring with You
(Landscape as Perception and Utopia)

Background / Intentions

The initial idea to go to Mongolia formed as Tiina Mielonen and I sat drinking coffee at Wayne's Coffee in central Helsinki in 2003. We had graduated from art schools some years before and felt we needed to come up with a project. What had we always wanted to do? It didn't take too long to realise that the one thing, the absolute thing to do, was to go to Mongolia. For me this had been a childhood dream though quite mixed up with Siberia (Dersu Uzala) and Yukon, but still the stories of the closed up country – train windows covered during the communist era etc. – and the definite remoteness made Mongolia mysterious and desirable beyond anything we could think of. As we had identified what it was we wanted, the practical aspects of realising the plan fell into place amazingly easily. The first thing we did was to run to Kiasma, Museum of Contemporary Art Helsinki, where Saara Hacklin, a newly graduated philosophy student (later PhD in Aesthetics and curator at Kiasma Contemporary Art Museum) was working as a guide (as were Tiina and I as well at different times) and tell her we wanted her to be our curator and come to Mongolia with us. Saara was also well acquainted with Aino Rissanen (married Tolme), an Asian studies student who was currently doing an exchange in Mongolia. With slight hesitation Saara agreed and contacted Aino.

As we discussed how to organise the travel we all agreed that we could not go as tourists to a developing country with a very harsh decade behind

1 Rasmus Kjellberg, Saara Hacklin, Vesa Vehviläinen, Budbazarin Batbileg, Annu Wilenius and Tiina Mielonen in front of UMA gallery in Ulaanbaatar. The canvas above says: Finland, Sweden – Young Artists' Contemporary Art Exhibition. Photograph by unknown, probably gallery assistant Munkhjargal.

it. What we decided to do was to organise an exhibition and thus present our own artistic practise and hopefully be able to contact local artists. We delegated the job of finding a contemporary art gallery in Ulaanbaatar to Aino. At first her messages were not so positive. She claimed there was no contemporary art in Mongolia and there definitely were no galleries. Then one day she had passed the Zanabazaar Fine Art museum and noticed that there was a poster announcing a gallery, Red Ger, that was presenting contemporary Mongolian art. She went inside and had a talk with the gallerist who informed her of the Union of Mongolian Artists' gallery, UMA.

Checking the UMA homepage, we decided to apply for an exhibition there. The answer took a very long time to come. I don't remember exactly, but it could have been 3–4 months. At least so long that we were quite surprised when it finally came. We were welcome to have a one-week exhibition and pay 1000 US dollars for it. This was, of course, a lot of money for us, but as we had decided this was how we wanted it to be done, we agreed.

By this time the group had also increased by Pink Twins (Vesa and Juha Vehviläinen) and Rasmus Kjellberg. As this group we then started to apply for funding. By summer 2004 we still did not have anything to go by, but by autumn 2005 we had managed to get enough to set out. We had also decided that as the travelling in itself was of interest to us, we should travel by train all the way. The train trip from Helsinki to Ulaanbaatar takes closer to seven days in all and is approximately 7000 kilometres. We planned to entertain ourselves with a seminar on the way, but in the end the only 'lectures' that were realised were Saara's input on railway travel based on Wolfgang Schivelbuch's *Railway Journey: The Industrialisation and Perception of Time and Space* and a short introduction to J.G. Granö's 'pure geography' by myself.

J.G. Granö and his pioneering perceptual geography was a great inspiration to us planning the journey and the exhibition to begin with. Granö travelled in Siberia and Mongolia at the beginning of the 20th century. Based on his travels and observations thereof he created his ground-breaking views on geography, paving the way for cultural and human geography. His basic idea was that experiencing landscape is a mixture of subjective and objective matters: knowledge as well as perception. Distance and nearness, familiarity and strangeness are essential elements of a landscape: smells, sounds, people – and the lack of these – create different experiences at different distances, physical and cultural. Granö presented his theory of landscape in the publication *Pure Geography* in 1930 (published in English in 1997).

We used Granö's ideas as the starting point in assembling our exhibition for Mongolia. The title was *Landscape: Perception and Utopia* to begin with, but as we felt this was a little bit rigid we came up with a subtitle: *Here is*

Not There. Here You Always Bring with You[35]. This is a quote from a Swedish children's program from the 1970s, teaching the difference between here and there. The entire lyrics are: "Here is not there. There is where you are not. Here you always have with you." In a way this notion is very obvious, but also something, we thought, worth making a point about. We also discussed if there was a too negative a sound to declaring that there is such a difference' between where we are from and where we were then (Mongolia), but decided that was just the point and as we definitely did not mean it arrogantly, we should also not be too tentative about it.

So we packed our works in our suitcases together with loads of food and reading for the train – and set out. Along with loads of noodles, miso soups, tea and vodka the train travel went quite smoothly. Of course there were tensions, the four of us spending a week in a more or less confined nine cubic meters, especially when crossing the border between Russia and Mongolia. We were all slightly apprehensive about our artworks that we did not declare in the customs forms, but the culminating point of shared irritation was Rasmus Kjellberg's self-made slide projector device that definitely looked like a bomb. Nothing besides our own bickering happened, however, and we arrived in Ulaanbaatar having seen an amazing amount of birch trees and finally after the border a few *gers*. Aino had arranged an Australian guide, Sam Nixon, to take care of us, so arriving was nicely soft as he picked us up from the station and took us to his home to have a cup of coffee and to shower. As we walked through the courtyard of pink Soviet blocks of flats looking at everything eyes wide, I at least, realised for the first time how little we really knew where it was we had come to.

UMA Exhibition and Studio Visits

The UMA gallery is a relatively smooth white space of 370 square meters. As we entered the previous exhibition – *Mongolian Surrealism* – was still on. At first we felt quite taken aback: Surrealism? Contemporary surrealism, that is. But reflecting on the fact that such 'bourgeois-decadent' isms had, of course, been prohibited for seventy odd years and had not existed prior to that, there most likely was reason to celebrate the freedom of surrealism. The second issue of astonishment for us in the exhibition was the way it was hung. The 370 square meters housed hundreds of paintings, also vertically at least four to six on top of each other. As we set to hang our four works in

35 Program *Fem myror är fler än fyra elefanter, Här och där (Five ants is more than four elephants, Here and there*, https://www.musixmatch.com/lyrics/Fem-myror-%C3%A4r-fler- %C3%A4n-fyra-elefanter/H%C3%A4r-Och-D%C3%A4r. Accessed 14.02.2018.

2 Tiina Mielonen's paintings at UMA Gallery, 2005
3 Annu Wilenius: *Fir-tree Project*, photograph, also a book documenting the whole project in Reykjavík, Helsinki, Rotterdam 2004–2005, 2005.

the same space, it definitely felt very empty – and must have felt amazingly so for the local audience.

We were very kindly received and as we walked around the space and asked about technical things: is it possible to put nails/screws on the walls? Are there extension cables? Is it possible to paint straight on the wall? Everything was possible and we felt very comfortable. The story was, of course, very different a few days later as we arrived with the works and intended to start hammering and painting. Then nothing was possible any more. No nails, no screws, no paint. No extension cables. Just hanging works by wires and pedestals for sculptures. We were quite shocked and it took us a good while to come over the situation and find alternative solutions. For the video works we shopped a small artillery of extension cables from the State Department Store (an experience in itself). My photographs and books were quite possible to hang on wires and place on pedestals, but Tiina's paintings just needed to be nailed to the wall, there was no alternative. As well as Rasmus' slides just had to be projected on a dark green surface directly on the wall. These issues took a lot of negotiations and promises to repair all damage to the walls when the exhibition was over, and so finally we were given permission to do as we pleased.

As the opening approached we ended in new disputes with the personnel as we wished to buy some sparkling wine and vodka to serve our guests whereas the personnel thought there should at least not be any vodka. They probably knew what they were talking about, but we got the wine and vodka – and the audience was quite happy with that. It is no secret that alcohol is a great problem in Mongolia and that vodka is included in most rituals and other social gatherings. Vodka is cheap, beer and wine are expensive, and

4 Dalai Lama & Joseph Beuys at Yo. Dalkh-Ochir's studio, Ulaanbaatar, 2005

people are not so used to drinking them. Currently they are getting more and more usual with people that can afford it. Later on for openings I bought beer. Quite often the Mongols bought a bottle of red wine, just for me. It was sweet and totally disgusting, but of course I had to drink it out of courtesy. There were also courtesy matters in relation to vodka. One should drink it when it was a ritual matter. There is a special way of drinking vodka in Mongolia: the host pours the drink into an (often silver) bowl which is offered to each guest in turn. You should dip your fore- and middle finger into the vodka, then touch your forehead, both shoulders and your heart, then you should sprinkle more vodka for the winds and the universe (this is if I remember correctly). Raðhildur, one of the artists with us in 2006, did not drink any alcohol, still she had to dip her fingers into the drink and at least touch her forehead. This was a constant joke with the Mongolians, saying that the only part of her that was drinking was her forehead. But of course it is also true that if you drink a lot of vodka, things start to get quite weird. And that the gallery personnel did not want that to happen in their premises. To be honest here this was also the reason why in our later openings there was just plenty of beer and candy.

The audience was plentiful and included journalists both from newspapers and TV channels. We were interviewed by all of them – and most importantly of all we met a lot of local artists who invited us to visit their studios during the coming days. The only unfortunate thing that happened the opening night was that my hand-bound book *Fir-tree Project* was stolen from its pedestal – as it was not nailed down. This made me very upset as I considered it the main piece of the works I had brought 7000 kilometres and paid quite a lot to exhibit.

The following days we then visited many studios, mainly some of UMA's members and the Blue Sun Contemporary Art Centre with its cellar-gallery. Some of the artists were making what we considered very traditional figurative work, which we did not find very interesting, but many were also making very intriguing installation works with urban and ecological issues. We became quite enthusiastic about this – as well as the repeated phrase: when you come next year… (Later I have realised this is what Mongolians say to everyone, but then we did not know that and took it personally.) We were also invited to visit a recently opened new film school – they had a library with one bookshelf –, a film production company and a Contemporary Nomads crafts workshop where they were busy building a Chinggis Khaan restaurant and resort just outside Ulaanbaatar, where we also visited.

All these visits were organised by Blue Sun Contemporary Art Centre, that also then became the main collaboration partner in the project. Now Blue Sun presents itself at the current homepage as follows:

> The Blue Sun Art Centre is a non-profit organization founded by contemporary artists, such as painters, sculptors and architects, in 2002 in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia with a goal for developing the Mongolian contemporary art in a new level.
>
> Since 2004, the centre has arranged programs, including the Art Camp[36] , the Open Academy and the Bare House, along with international contemporary art organizations, artists and curators. In a range of the above and other programs, the centre carries out activities to develop art knowledge of member artists by participating them in exhibitions and other events held with international artists in Sweden, Finland and Holland etc.[37]

When we started with this Mongolia project, and named Saara Hacklin as our curator, it was mostly a gentle joke. Curators were just then, in beginning of 2000s', so on the page. Besides sniping at that we did want to make a point on us all being in it together. Saara was not an artist like the rest of us, so she needed to be the curator. For the first exhibition Saara Hacklin did not choose the works or decide anything about the hanging. She was baffled about the artists (friends and spouses) making such a fight about it. To appear in TV representing us she was wearing Tiina's clothes from the suitcase where they had been softening the Siberian way for Tiina's paintings. As to curating in a more serious vein: Saara did not curate us, she represented us. Next time we were at the UMA gallery I was the curator and then I did decide. So in the beginning we thought the curator to be the thinker and presenter – not a part of the art works. When I curated later on, especially the next exhibition in Mongolia, I was very adamant about how the works were placed. As well as later on.

Travel to Khangai Mountains

The time in Ulaanbaatar had been hectic and wonderfully fascinating, but what really took our breath away and at least stole my heart was the trip we made to the Khangai Mountains in Central Mongolia. Our guide Sam Nixon arranged everything. We had a great Russian army UAZ bus and a bunch of tents and sleeping bags. Our route went through the townships of Khark-

36 For list of Blue Sun Art Camps relevant for Nomadic Science Fiction see List of Art Camps 36 and exhibitions at the end.

37 http://www.bluesuncontemporary.art/about- us--104110481044105310481049-105810591061104010 49.html. Accessed 11.07.2019.

5 Orkhon River in the evening, Arkhangai Province, Mongolia, 2005
6 Orkhon River Bank in the Morning, Arkhangai Province, Mongolia, 2005

horin and Tsetserleg, but mainly we kept to the countryside and visited nomads. The highlights of the trip were horseback riding along the Orkhon River and ending the evening cooking khorkhog (an entire freshly slaughtered sheep with a couple of onions and carrots) in an old milk canister and a lot of stones (for the heat) over an open fire. When it was finally cooked the canister was carefully opened and the stones fished out. The night had fallen by then and there we sat with the nomadic family around the fire tossing the hot stones from hand to hand for the warmth – and slurped on the soup and gnawed at the bones for the meat. It felt definitely archaic – and superbly great.

After that it was also great to visit a spa built around a natural hot spring, near Tsetserleg. Hot water and white ceramic tiles in a Japanese *onsen* style were ever so welcome after many days in the countryside. The warmth falling in the evening was very welcome as well. In Ulaanbaatar you didn't really notice the change in temperature between day and night so much, but in the countryside the switches between +35 Celsius and -5 Celsius were physically quite hard and slightly mind-boggling. This was September and in Mongolia that is already being on the verge of winter although whenever the sun shines it gets very warm.

The most magical moment for me, however, was the morning we spent on the banks of the River Orkhon. The place was roughly the same where Granö, Pälsi and Ramstedt (Finnish explorers) had accidentally met in 1906. As we woke up in the morning and started to prepare breakfast our camp was suddenly invaded by a hoard of eagles. They flew very close to our food remnants and seemed to be more than happy to share our breakfast. We called them bun-eagles[38]. After breakfast Sam took us a few hundred meters up toward the hillside and showed us stone circles that are believed to be the graves of ancient kings from 2 000–3 000 years ago. They were believed to have wanted the graves on the hillside facing the river so they could keep on looking out into their lands even in death. That moment with the eagles, the graves and the thousands of years… made me feel very much there, and alive.

All in all, the countryside was amazing. Even Vesa, who had declared five days in the countryside definitely too much before setting out, was taken with it as much as the rest of us. The following year he even went to visit a nomad family, dressed up in deel and sash, all on his own and ended up giving steam-breathing to a pair of small yaks with the sniffles. He loved every moment of it.

38 This is referring to a Finnish concept 'pullasorsa' bun-duck, meaning people who have never really needed to take care of anything by themselves.

2006

Transitory Operations / Perception and Utopia

The first Mongolian journey left us feeling like we had had a great adventure and we were definitely coming back for more. What we set out to do – as already discussed with the Mongolian artists we had found most interesting, namely Yo. Dalkh-Ochir, B. Chinbat, S. Sarantsatsralt – was to start a collaboration exhibition exchange project. We agreed to call this (remembering our initial exhibition title) *Mongolia: Perception and Utopia*. We felt we needed more European artists to join the project and thus sent out a project profile email to all such artists in our acquaintance that we thought could be interested in Mongolia. There was no funding to offer, so anyone wishing to join would do it in his or her own expense.

This method got us a group of twelve artists. Contacting the Mongolian artists, we agreed that some of us would participate on Blue Sun's Art Camp and then the whole group would spend time in Ulaanbaatar and the countryside – and there would be a group show with all of us together at the UMA gallery. As it felt at this point that this is really going to be something, we also thought we should get us a place for the coming exhibition in Finland. The only museum director that we (I) had any contacts with was Pirkko Siitari who had previously been curator at the Finnish Museum of Photography. In 2005 she was the director of Kerava Art Museum. As I approached her with our Mongolia project she was very interested – and after the first

7 Sarantsatsralt Ser-Odin, Raðhildur Ingadóttir, Pirkko Siitari, Bat-Erdene and Budbazarin Batbileg (Bilge) at a studio visit.

proper meeting she confirmed that Kerava Art Museum would house the exhibition in 2008. She also decided to travel to Mongolia with us in 2006.

We had some difficulties with the negotiations regarding the Kerava exhibitions with the Mongolian artists. We could not quite understand what was wrong until we managed to get Dalkha (the one speaking English) to tell us that Bilge (our Finnish Mongolian translator) had said to them that no museum exhibition would happen. We were of course appalled as museum director Siitari was just then sitting in the airplane on her way to Ulaanbaatar. When this was cleared Bilge shrugged his shoulders and said: "Yea, well, Kerava…"[39]

Blue Sun Art Camp

In the end it was just Tiina and myself that decided to participate in the Blue Sun Art Camp. This was told to be a ten-day journey together with Mongolian and international artists. The cost was 600 US dollars, which included accommodation for some days in Ulaanbaatar, meals and the trip to the South of Mongolia in tents. It felt like a lot of money on top of the flight costs from Helsinki to Ulaanbaatar via Beijing. It also meant that combining the art camp and the exhibition project later in the summer we would have to stay in Mongolia slightly over two months. I had nothing against this as I felt I had finally found something that really made me feel alive – a home away from home. Tiina was quite a bit more apprehensive about it all.

As we landed from the flight from Beijing we were met by the new manager for Blue Sun, Zoloo. He was not an artist but had a hotel and a casino and a number of other businesses going on. He took us to his hotel Soyombo, right next to the Fine Art Institute. Later as we had had a few electric shocks in the bathroom, he decided it was safer to accommodate us in his children's bedroom at home. The boys were at the countryside for the summer and so we were quite snugly sleeping under the Mickey Mouse lamps.

Also other aspects of the plan concerning the art camp did not quite turn out as announced. Dalkha (Yo. Dalkh-Ochir), the director of Blue Sun, had been commissioned on a work in Samyn-uud at the Southern border and thus could not participate. Chinbat was assisting him and would join the camp at a later time. Other Blue Sun members had somehow disappeared to the countryside. Dennis Evans, a Canadian sculptor, Tiina and myself represented the international artists. Luckily Zoloo had hired his very good child-

39 I didn't actually remember this. Tiina reminded me of it as we were reminiscing about the 'early years'. "Yea, well…", in Finnish "Niin, noh…", with a hmph and a shrough of the shoulders.

8 Blue Sun Art Camp in the Gobi: Chinbat, Tiina and Annu playing 'horse hoofs' on a riverbank somewhere near Choir, 2006. Photograph: Dennis Evans, Canadian artist.
9 Blue Sun Art Camp in the Gobi: The UAZ as the Camp Base, Ganaa, Bayraa (the drivers), Zoloo, Tiina and Dennis, near Choir, 2006.

10 Sketching for a sculpture in the Gobi, mostly with horse bones and skulls, 2006.

hood friend Ganaa and his assistant Bayraa to be the drivers in our (this time yellow) UAZ. So with this gang we set out towards the Gobi.

Besides just roaming around the Gobi there was a plan (in the original schedule, that we had printed to have with us) to visit the site where Dalkha's major sculptural project, the *Wolf City*, would be built. In the program it said that we would be there to witness the laying of the foundation stone by Dalkha and some very important people. As Dalkha had presented the project to us the year before and very convincingly told that the building would start the following year, we kept on asking Zoloo when we would come to the spot. I can't remember how long we continued asking before it really and truly dawned on us that there was no Wolf City being built. It had been a plan, an intention, a wish, but not all such things come to pass.

Instead we witnessed Ganaa and Bayraa shooting game and had wonderful fresh liver and onion supper of it. I also got lost in the Gobi for 2–3 hours all alone and was just about to panic when I managed to find my own footprints again.

We also played a lot of 'yatzy' with the drivers. I learned to count in Mongolian doing this. Besides 'yatzy' we gambled with betting about all sorts of things. My worst loss was a twenty litre canister of petrol and best gain was one litre bottle of vodka. For the Naadam festival (Mongolian "Olympics", Nadaam, consisting of archery, wrestling and horse riding) we came

11 Tiina Mielonen: *Green Hills*,
12 Annu Wilenius: *Beautiful Nothing*

up with a game of our own, which was throwing horse hooves into a circle. There were amazing amounts of animal bones everywhere in the Gobi. On our way back towards Ulaanbaatar, near the town of Choir, it only took me about half an hour to pick a set of seven horse hooves around our campsite.

The Gobi adventure finished with a hail storm with hales the size of strawberries, which was quite a contrast to the +40 degrees' heat that was on. The art camp as such finished with an exhibition at the Zanabazaar Fine Arts Museum in Ulaanbaatar. For this occasion, very many of the Blue Sun artists found their way back from the countryside and it was participated by at least ten Mongolian artists besides the three of us foreigners. Tiina showed an installation of green hills made of sandpaper and I a video I made out in the Gobi in which I 'plant' myself on the steppe. Dennis screened a video of Zoloo walking in the desert in his (Dennis') shoes. These were the works created during the art camp. The rest of the participating artists showed works from before, some of which had quite intriguing views to land art and the countryside.

UMA Exhibition

The exhibition we did together with our collaboration partners from Mongolia and Europe we originally called simply *Perception and Utopia*. It could hardly be said there was any curating going on with this project. Many of the European artists had just come to Mongolia for the first time and most opted to show old work on video.

Rádhildur Ingadóttir from Iceland made a painting installation she called the *Colours of Mongolia*. There had been approximately half an hour time for her to choose the paints at the construction market. Agnes Domke and Christian Richter built a ger out of newspapers and decorated it with fab-

ric and other paraphernalia from the Naran Tuul market. They also made a performance discussing with people in the opening while they served tea. I combined a photo-book work juxtaposing Iceland and Mongolia together with a new performance/installation work *Keep UB Green* in which I had been donating grass seeds at the Sukhbaatar Square earlier in the week.

Most of the Mongolians who had participated in the Art Camp exhibition the week before showed the same works again, this included Dalkha and Chinbat. This was something we Europeans found very strange. Ulaanbaatar has a very small art scene and even if the exhibitions tend to be from three days to a week, would one not suppose all interested had already seen these works? The only curator decision I remember making was to decide that Dalkha's ger roof installation should take its place on the back wall where it could be seen through the whole space – instead of Rasmus Kjellberg's small wooden box that emitted a quiet sound of a dog sniffing.

The purpose of this exhibition was more bonding than curating. Then again of course 'bonding' can be seen as an important mode of curating. In this Mongolia project it has definitely been so. Creating a group of people that react to each other and exchange and share experience – and then make works and texts about it. Nobody really minded too much that the selection of works was quite a jumble. Besides getting the works done there were quite some 'organisational' glitches in getting the whole thing together. These started by trying to plan things with the Blue Sun artists. We, Tiina and I – as we were in the country and the others weren't – went to the Blue Sun gallery daily for over a week and invariably found Dalkha there, but busy with something else (or drunk) and telling us to come 'tomorrow two o'clock'. We heard this phrase so many times that it became my first Mongolian (besides the numbers): 'Margaash khoir zag'. I'm sure Tiina still remembers it too. It became quite a joke in the end.

Another language difficulty I encountered, as I wanted to make copies of the press release and the list of artists for the gallery window happened as I asked Chinbat to meet me and told him I needed to find a copy shop. He said: Yes, yes, I know 'Kopi shop'. He took me to at least five different cafés and recommended their coffee highly before I understood that we were looking for a coffee shop (Mongolian doesn't have the letter f, so a p is mostly used instead, as in Pinland for Finland). When we finally understood each other we had a good laugh, and I learned two more Mongolian words: 'canon' for a copy (Xerox copy) and 'ongot' for colour. (I needed to make colour copies…)[40]

40 In cyrillic копи онгот канон. The Mongolian Latin script (Монгол Латин үсэг…The letters f, h, p, v were rarely used except in Russian loanwords, and q, w, and x were almost never used. See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ Mongolian_Latin_alphabet,s. Accessed 16.08.2019.

13 Yo. Dalkh-Ochir: *Ger Roof*, 2006
14 Annu Wilenius: *Keep UB Green*, 2006

The above kinds of problems are just the sort that should be there. What turned out to be the truly challenging issue was that just as UMA had very kindly offered the gallery space for our use for free this time, they had simultaneously promised it to another group of foreigners at the same time. This group was five German artists and Marc Schmitz managed their project, called *Transitory Operations*. We had met him and his girlfriend Dolgor Ser-Odin earlier and liked them a lot. So as we stood there in the 370 square metres of UMA gallery, we felt that there was enough space to share and our projects were not so alien to each other that we could not combine the exhibitions to be one. So our *Perception and Utopia* became also a *Transitory Operation* as we took over their title for the exhibition. So far so good.

The situation changed remarkably as the scope of this new plan reached the Mongolian artists that Schmitz and his company were working together with. They had travelled to the Gobi for a week to make land art and there had been a plan to make an exhibition of these works in a minor gallery later on. However, when they heard that our group was having a joint exhibition together with 'our' Mongolians, they also wanted to be included at the UMA exhibition. So all of a sudden we were not sharing the gallery with five German painters, but with them and about fifteen Mongolians who had done land art for a week.

At this point we did not feel we could share the project anymore, but that we would have to split the gallery space quite strictly in two. There was a lot of hassle and a lot of shouting from all participating. I remember still vividly standing in a corridor with five people shouting at me what I should decide about the situation. Of course we were quite nervous not to create difficult situations for 'our' Mongolians by ending up in a fight with the others. We tried to be reasonable and so the building of the exhibition went on. I had 40 degrees' fever and had to go home. As I lay there in bed shivering, Tiina came home to tell me that Schmitz had installed his own work, a big black box for a video projection, diagonally in the space so that over half of it was in our side. Everybody was very upset about this, but as I felt I could not muster the energy I sent Tiina to take care of it. The end result was that the booth had been pushed back – a little.

For the opening there were many speeches and a very nice dinner afterwards. These both were shared with the *Transitory Operations* artists. Making a speech at the dinner one of them, Chimmedorj, if I remember correctly, hoped that we would manage to disassemble this 'wall' we had created between the projects ('we' sat on one side of the long table and 'they' on the other) and to find friendship in art, or something to that effect. We all toasted to that. As nervous as I had been causing trouble between the different groupings of Mongolians, I needn't have worried. As we returned the following year they had founded a new society together, Mongolian Modern

Art Association[41] . Likewise, although Marc Schmitz and I had our disagreements both professionally as well as privately, we are on speaking terms and see each other whenever we happen to be in the same city.

Following the opening we set out the next morning for a five-day trip to the Khangai organised again by Sam Nixon. On the way back our car broke down, but as we were just forty kilometres from Ulaanbaatar we called in two taxis to take us home. On the way the other taxi also broke down – and it was close to 6 am in the morning before we actually reached our beds. I woke everybody up at 8 am to take a cold shower (in Mongolia in the summertime you can be without hot water for weeks on end) because we had scheduled a seminar at the gallery starting 9.30 am. Sarantsatsralt's daughter was working at a TV station and they had organised her to come with her team to film the seminar and interview us. So we just had to be there. I remember moderating the seminar, and I remember that there were two quite good interpreters, but that is really all I can recall of the happening.

The following week Pink Twins had two concerts with a local death metal band ZugeerL at the Chameleon Disco Club. The idea was to improvise music together, but despite many afternoons spent trying to convey the idea of this, ZugeerL were not quite participating in it but rather just playing their own stuff and letting Pink Twins make the best of it. Which they later on did as a superb video work called *Sketches of Pain* (2008).

Travels

As mentioned above, we did a second journey to the Khangai Mountains with Sam. It was in many ways a version of the trip we had made the year before. We visited Kharkhorin and Tsetserleg, the spa and the monastery. We also visited the same family and did horseback riding and khorkhog with them. Of course for most of the group all this as well as the spectacular Mongolian countryside were totally new experiences. Experiences that were new for us 'veterans' were an intestine breakfast we were served at one *ger*. The intestines included all that a sheep keeps inside including blood sausage and stomach slices. The sun was burning hot and we had run out of water. It was quite a tough morning. As a result, even though skipping the intestines, being a vegetarian, Saara ended up with a heat stroke that kept her on vomiting and shivering for hours and hours.

41 The concepts of Modern and Contemporary art are quite shifting in Mongolia. Mongolian art history having been very different from the Western world. Blue Sun calls itself a contemporary art centre. This idea of Modern Art Association was, I think, just an attempt to value their own importance without quite understanding the meaning of the word. I don't know if it still exists, probably not, and as probably as there are a dozen other new art associations.

Our Mongolian friends were quite hurt about the fact that we were exploring their country with a foreign guide. To amend this, we spent two days at the Blue Sun land, Undur Ulaan, sixty kilometres from Ulaanbaatar grilling goat and offering milk and vodka for their private ovoo (heap of sticks and stones as well as offerings of all kinds to pay respect to the Great Sky). Besides this our translator Bilge, (Finnish Mongolian), organised a horse riding trip for us to his family in the Orkhon Valley in Arkhangai.

The beginning of this trip did not go so well. Bilge had never organised a tourist trip and had no idea what he should be thinking of in preparation. Thus we were packing ourselves to a Korean mini bus early in the morning to find out that he had not thought of the food supplies at all. (Sam always took care of all that kind of thing the day before and certainly did not worry us about it.) Instead Saara and I went to Mercury Market and bought as quick as we could what we could imagine would keep ten people fed for five days. The assembly was quite weird and so were many of the dishes we ended up cooking.

The next difficulty arose as we came to the Orkhon area where we were supposed to camp in *gers*. We were hours later than we were supposed to be. It must have been closer to 3 am when we came to the ger camp. It had been raining for hours by then, which is a very rare thing to happen in Mongolia. Due to this fact Mongolian tourists occupied all the *gers*. We kept on driving around the camp looking for the office *ger* and then the one *ger* they said we could have. It must have been over half an hour that we kept on circling around in the camp. It felt utterly absurd and Sonia acclaimed finally, laughing: "This is just like from a really good movie!"

When we finally found our *ger* there were only four beds and so we shared them, two to each bed and Bilge and the driver slept in the car. It was a very cold night and the ger was without felt as it was just there for the summer. At this point I was very angry with Bilge and told him that when you organise a trip like this you need to do some planning, too! I may have shouted at him a bit as well. Then again the morning was sunny and beautiful and we continued to another *ger* camp where we got three very comfortable *gers* to accommodate us.

The following days we went horseback riding. The first day I had the most wonderful grey horse. Although I knew nothing about riding it felt like it was not necessary as the horse galloped flowingly up and down the green hills. It was totally exhilarating and I rode a long way ahead of everyone else and felt ever so free. Then in the evening there were fireworks in a nearby tourist resort disco and as it was the first time for the horses to have witnessed anything like that, they all took to the mountains. In the morning they had not yet been found and we had to get horses from another herder. This time my horse just wanted to turn back home and I was losing my nerves with it for hours that day.

15 Christian Mayer, local nomads, Christian Richter, Ráðhildur Ingadóttir, Annu Wilenius, Rasmus Kjellberg, Saara Hacklin at a Deer stone, Arkhangai province, Mongolia. Photograph: probably Budbazarin Batbileg (Bilge), 2006

Many people coming to Mongolia are doing so for fascination for either Buddhism or Shamanism – and on occasion for the wonderful blend of the two. I had always thought it was great that the Mongolians had retained both their 'religions' through communism and kept on practicing with ever-growing devotion, but I had never had any personal enthusiasm for experiences from the beyond or of losing myself to all comprehending nothing (my rude misconceptions of the two 'religions', I am sure.)

On this horse trek we stopped by a small hill of rocks and small woods behind it to make lunch. While the soup was cooking I sneaked into the woods for a pee – and nearly peed on myself as I almost walked into an old tree decorated with a throng of animal skulls and pieces of fabric, all swinging slightly in the wind. It was one of the scariest moments I can think of experiencing. It was so sudden and so strong. I returned to the camp and told what I had encountered. Bilge told us that, yes, this is a very magical place. People come here to meet the Dark…and themselves. He offered to put us in contact with a local shaman if we wanted a session in this location. We chose not to want to see ourselves in this way. Still this was a sight that made – I was about to say Shamanism, but that is far too academic to convey anything – a parallel wild spiritual world feel real for me for the first time ever. This was not for awe of animal carcasses and bones, for by this time I had seen any amount of those.

16 Shamanistic tree with animal skulls and khadaks, Arkhangai province, Mongolia, 2006
17 Vesa Vehviläinen at Danzanravjaa's Khamryn Khiid Monastery grounds, Dornogovi, 2006

We also made a trip with Sam Nixon to Dornogovi province to visit Sainshand town and Khamryn Khiid Monastery in the desert. The monastery was founded by Danzanravjaa, a lama and reincarnation, in the 16th century. This is also a very magical place and said to be one of the energy centres on earth.[42] Here we also encountered dinosaur bones and a petrified forest. Quite magical.

42 Khamryn Khiid and energy, see: https://www.china-and-beyond.co.uk/en/ destinations_mongolia/world_energy_centre_in_the_gobi.html. Accessed 19.08.2019.

2007

Returning home in the autumn of 2006 I was certain that I wanted to work with Mongolia for a longer time and in a more fundamental way than just the exhibition project we had started. So as professor Harri Laakso approached me from the Aalto University, Department of Art and Media Pori in order to recommend me to apply for the doctoral programme, I was delighted to have found a frame for what I wanted. I applied with a research plan called *Semi-detached Ger with a Garden: Experiencing Self, Community and Environment through Urbanising Mongolia* (the title has varied somewhat throughout the years) and started as a doctoral student in the autumn of 2007. Prior to that I made one more trip to Mongolia. This time I came through Japan (two months) and China (two weeks) and stayed in Mongolia nearly three months.

Works in Progress and the Art Camp

In 2007 only Sonia Leimer and Christian Mayer of the *Mongolia: Perception and Utopia* group came to Mongolia. They came for two weeks in order to work on their projects and to participate in the Art Camp organised again by the Blue Sun. Besides them Blue Sun was hosting an Irish artist, Carol Kavanagh, for four months – and my colleague Karin Suter came for ten days from China. Together with Karin, Carol and a bunch of Blue Sun artists we made a countryside trip to the Northern Khuvsgol Lake. Save for that and the Art Camp I stayed in Ulaanbaatar interviewing people about *ger* districts and urban development in general.

Sonia and Christian had made very particular plans for their projects. Christian's idea was to attach a small 'spy camera' on a stray dog and let the dog document Ulaanbaatar life instead of him. The problem was, of course, to find a stray dog that you could trust to find again. We were following for several days a yellow dog that liked to hang around the Blue Sun studios, but in the end Christian decided it was not reliable enough to show up every day – and as he only had one camera there was no leeway to try. Instead one of the Blue Sun artists, Bilge (a different Bilge than the 'Finnish' Bilge), offered Christian his uncle's dog for the job. This dog lived with the uncle in the *ger* districts, but roamed the streets entirely free, returning home most evenings. It was this dog that then documented Ulaanbaatar for Christian's work: *Another City, Not My Own*.

Sonia, in her turn, had noticed the year before near the Blue Sun Art Camp location in Undur Ulaan a film set parading as a section of the Chinese wall.

She had done research on it and found out that there had been a BBC film group making a fiction documentary on Chinggis Khaan the year before. She had also managed to find and download the film itself. What made the site especially fascinating was that since the wall had been left there in the middle of the steppe with no claim to it, a herding family had taken advantage of the wind cover it afforded and pitched up their ger behind it.

What needed to be done was to find a camera and a cameraman for her as she wanted to make a film of her own of the site and she wanted to film it on proper 16mm film. I set out to find these for her. My first 'find' was a Korean cameraman working at the UBS TV channel. He was quite expensive, had tight schedules and definitely recommended to film on video. Sonia was not happy with the UBS solution, so what I came up with was to write to Mark Soosaar, the director of Pärnu New Art museum.

We had visited him in Pärnu earlier in the year with Pirkko Siitari and Saara Hacklin in order to negotiate the museum to house our exhibition as well. It turned out that Soosaar had a half-Mongolian family (ex-(common-law) wife and two children) and that he not only would house the exhibition, he also wished to participate in it. He had studied film in Moscow in the 1970s and I thought he might have ideas and/or contacts in Ulaanbaatar in the film field. And so he did. He put me in contact with an old times colleague who was a film director, had been the Cultural Minister of Mongolia and had a film company of his own. He came to visit me at home together with his son and daughter who both worked for the company. He was very interested in Sonia's project, especially as it turned out that it was his company and his film crew that had been working together with the BBC project. The only poser was that Sonia's budget was 500 euros in total. I told this and it was waved away as not a problem at all. Sonia got the same film crew that had worked for the BBC with dollies, sound system, lights and a van.

The crew came with us for the Art Camp for three days and filmed for Sonia. They had very different ideas about how to film than Sonia. So even though she made very specific storyboards they mostly did a lot of zooming and close ups – only to do something remotely as she wanted as the last version of each shot. Sonia contacted the herder, too, and they agreed on a small payment for him to steer his herd past the wall at a certain time. When the filming was done we invited all the local people, some ten of them showed up, and all the Art Camp participants to watch the original BBC 'fiction-documentary' on a screen (white sheet) stretched across the surface of the wall. It was quite a moment: showing BBC Mongolian history to Mongolians. We even offered popcorn to boost the cinema experience.

Christian's and Sonia's works were, however, meant for the Kerava exhibition the following year and were not part of the Art Camp exhibition

18 The Chinese wall film-set at Undur Ulaan, Mongolia, 2007

that took place in July. This time in the exhibition the only work made during the camp, if I remember correctly, was my *Portable Landscapes* series. Dalkha showed a rather nice installation of communist 'Reader's Digest' pages surmounted in plaster. He said that although he is the last person to want those times to come back, we should not forget. Chinbat in his turn had a solo exhibition in the Blue Sun gallery earlier in June. He showed a documentation of the performance he did then together with the painting that had resulted. The work was called *Ulaanbaatar ECG*. Chinbat's inspiration for this had come from working as an assistant for a group of medical researchers in the countryside looking into the health problems caused by coal heating for people living in *gers*. This work became later also part of *Mongolia: Perception and Utopia* exhibition in Kerava.

Interviews: Artists, Architects and the Ger Districts

During the two years I had come to Mongolia previously my interest had focused on the urban development in Ulaanbaatar besides the original interest in landscape and environmental issues. In my first version of a research plan I put emphasis on studying the green planning and landscaping in Mongolia together with environmental / landscape topics related to tourism and the countryside. Besides furthering my own interest in these topics we had decided that we should have artist interviews for the exhibition in Kerava the coming year. I set up meetings for interviews with all the seven Mongolian artists that were asked to participate in *Mongolia: Perception and Utopia*. In these interviews I asked them about their artistic background and practice, especially how it had changed when the country shifted from communism to market economy. I also enquired about their views on the role of the artist in society. Moreover, I used the opportunity (of their time and having an interpreter present) to inquire about their relation to the city and the countryside: where they had been born, grown up, living now and how they had felt about it before and felt about it now. Some of the interviews became several hours long with all the translating going on. One, with Batlai, was very short; only twenty minutes with interpretations and all. Nonetheless he manages to say very interesting things during those few moments. He had been a monumental artist making murals for the state before the 'liberation'. He said, laughing quite ironically, that then the artists had been so free, and now with the market economy… well, free to please the tourists. This last one was my interpretation of his vocal three dots.

19 Yo. Dalkh-Ochir: *State Office – General Reader*, 2007
20 B. Chinbat: *Ulaanbaatar ECG*, 2007

Quite a few of the artists had grown up in the ger districts of Ulaanbaatar and as I was particularly interested in these, I also made what I called 'photo-walk' interviews with them. This meant that we went to the areas they had grown up in and they would show me important places and tell what they thought and felt about them, then and now. I spent an amazingly hot day (+47 Celsius) in Yarmag with Chinbat. His childhood home house was still there as well as the two schools he had attended. With Dolgor we visited many different areas. Her memories of living in the *ger* districts were very warm and she concentrated in depicting them in her paintings. As we walked around I photographed and she got copies for detail inspiration for her paintings. Later in the autumn we had a small exhibition together at the UMA gallery, called *Hot Wind*.

Additionally to the artist interviews, I made interviews with professionals in the fields of architecture and urban planning. I met Narangerel from the Urban Development Research Institute. He had been an architect and urban planner for the past thirty years. He commented on the new urban plans he was showing me that: "Surely it was easy to plan back then (in the Communist time). You just made a plan and it was realised. Now you can plan all you like but since the land has been sold to private owners, hardly anything of all the plans can be implemented"[43] . Then I met an architectural historian who showed me around in the Ulaanbaatar City Museum and told, based on old paintings, how the city had developed. He said that it was probably moving from *ger* to an apartment that had made him an academic. "When you live in a *ger* all your time goes into fetching water and wood and keeping the heating going. In an apartment there was nothing to do, so I started reading".[44]

Then at a dinner party organised by a German industrial designer, Steffi Zöller, I met with an Austrian anthropology student Melitta Kuglitsch and architectural student Michael Fürst. They were in Mongolia with a project organised by the Vienna University and Technological University, run by architect Martin Sumner. They were making interviews in the *ger* districts. Michael invited me to join them the following day to the Bayanzurkh area and I was more than happy to do so. As we had found our way through numerous dusty roads up the Dar-Ekh mountain, interviewed people at the water kiosk and wondered at the electricity pole at the top of the mountain, we detected a lush looking garden behind a high fence.

43 Interview with city planner Naragerel, Urban Development Research Institute, Ulaanbaatar, 27.07.2007, documented on video.

44 Interview with B. Daajav, architectural historian, Ulaanbaatar, 29.07.2007, documented on video.

21 Annu Wilenius: *Portable Landscapes (version I)* at Zanabazaar Art Museum, Ulaanbaatar, 2007

Knocking on the gate and waking a hoard of dogs, we were finally greeted by the owner, Dolgor. At first she was wary of us and as Michael asked some routine questions (interpreted by translator Otgoo), I kept on peeking over her shoulder to see more of the garden. Planting and growing anything is very rare in Mongolia, so I was fascinated. As the situation didn't seem to be going anywhere I thought it would not harm too much if I intervened. So I started asking her about her plants and very quickly we were invited to the garden. As we kept on asking her things about the garden, she got quite enthusiastic and after a while she told us all about a neighbourhood project they had started to make better roads, plant trees to create shadows and a co-operative to take care of the litter. These were all things that the state used to take care of, but no more. In the end she even invited us into the house and offered us homemade jam and bread. We even got saplings of her pot plants to take with us. (I returned to interview her the following year (and the following) and brought her all sorts of seeds from Finland.)

The artist interviews became later a work titled *Stories of Artistic Practice in Mongolia* and the ger district photographs part of the work *Of the House I Grew Up in…Helsinki-Ulaanbaatar,* both shown at the *Mongolia: Perception and Utopia* exhibition in Kerava in Finland in 2008. Neither of these works were designed as art works as much as information, and became art only in the making. Having mutual urban interests with architect Michael Fürst we visited a number of state offices for urban planning and traffic as well as many offices and building sites for new housing projects. Michael used this material (photos included) for his MA thesis for TU Vienna, which he had printed in Ulaanbaatar and when it finally arrived per post to Pori during his residency there, he came home to me crying his eyes out. It wasn't all that bad, but of course not quite what he had expected.[45]

45 See also my experiences on printed matter realised in Ulaanbaatar in the Publications section.

22 Interview with city planner S. Narangerel, Urban Development Research Institute, Ulaanbaatar, 2007

Besides the interviews as said I went around with Ser-Odin Dolgor and B. Chinbat to wander around the ger districts they lived in as children, Bayangol, Chingeltei and Yarmag. They told me childhood memories and I photographed. As we lingered around I had a very eerie feeling like I was back in my own childhood suburb, Laajasalo in Helsinki. The half organized, but really quite chaotic surroundings, 'nature' being where and how it liked… Later I made a work of this combination, *Of the House I Grew Up in… Helsinki-Ulaanbaatar* (2008), in which there is a slide projection of images from the *ger* districts with a voice-over describing my suburb changing from the 1970's to 2000's.[46]

Tuya and the Old UB project

Another aspect, besides the *ger* districts I got by meeting Tuya. I had already spent a lot of time photographing the 'Soviet' Ulaanbaatar. Then as Tuya was working as an interpreter for Dolgor Ser-Odin we got to discussing her experience of Ulaanbaatar in the 'old times'. She had grown up in the centre of Ulaanbaatar in the 1960s and her remembrances of those times were filled with fresh air, green parks and safe, comfortable housing in a good humane society. She wanted us to make a book together. We walked and drove around Ulaanbaatar for several days photographing the old buildings – now most of them in quite bad repair.

Mostly Mongolians that I had met were very critical of Communist times and overly nostalgic of anything traditionally Mongolian. In this context it was interesting and quite refreshing to listen to Tuya. One day, for exam-

46 This work is included in the video material of *Bare house. Ulaanbaatar* (2014) both in English and Mongolian.

23 Dolgor explaining the neighbourhood project to Michael, Otgoo (interpreter), Melitta and me in Bayanzurkh ger district, Ulaanbaatar

ple, she stated that the truth about Buddhist temples in the old times was that there were so many monks and no toilets in the whole of Khuree (Ulaanbaatar). They all walked with bare feet and used the streets as toilet, and then they walked in the excrement. "The Revolution maybe killed all the monks and destroyed the temples, but it also gave Mongolia a totally different life style. It brought soap…and people started to brush their teeth."[47]

Nothing came of this project. I asked her to help me with some translation and administrative matters, and to pay what I could for her services. She made an offer to take care of everything for the project concerned and wanted in exchange a thousand US dollars for it. As I told her I had no such money, she took offence and we hardly had anything to do with each other later on.

Mongolian Studies

I had a genuine wish to learn more Mongolian than I had by then: numbers and days and to do shopping at the grocery store. So I enrolled to a course in Mongolian studies at the University of Ulaanbaatar. Instead of learning Mongolian it mostly just made me angry. It did give some insights into Mon-

47 Tuya in a discussion during a walking interview around in Ulaanbaatar, 07.08.2007.

golian ways of doing things, though. The first exasperating issue was how the language was taught. Most of the group were Koreans who had already studied Mongolian for one year. Besides them there were three Checks, a Pole and I, and none of us had any idea of the language, really. The teacher, Halunaa, knew no English at all so what she did was simply to talk Mongolian to us. As the Koreans could not get what she was saying, let alone the rest of us, she decided to take a more practical approach to the matter: she took us out and started pointing at things like grass, saying 'ovs', etc. This didn't really get us very far either. As I told about this to people back in Ulaanbaatar I was told that this is how everybody is taught languages in Mongolia: not starting by using a language you know to explain another one, but like children, learning from the beginning a totally new way of expressing yourself. Another thing that the University experience made very clear was that although they had learned/copied very meticulously how university websites should look like and what courses should say they are about (the Mongolian language course, for example, was to be taught by English speaking teachers etc. etc.) this had no correspondence to what was actually happening.[48]

The issue of language is quite central to many aspects of this project. First one being obviously communicating with people. I am pretty good at understanding bad English and even if I haven't learned to speak Mongolian more than a little, I understand. Mostly I felt that this was not a major problem. Of course at times it was a total catastrophe. Another major issue concerning language is literature and texts in general. I was not able to read the little of literature there was in Mongolian on urbanism and contemporary art – so I ended up doing interviews, mainly with interpreters – and became friends, especially with the interpreters. The first of the Mongolia project publications was only in English, the other two were translated into Mongolian (and Mongolian into English) word for word. It is difficult to say if this had much meaning to the Mongolian artists involved – at least many had read the second one when it came out, and many bought it in the opening. Of the other two I have no idea.

In ethnographic/anthropological studies almost the first thing mentioned is to learn the language. The idea is that without language one cannot understand a culture.[49] I would like to counter this view. I have learned a lot of Mongolian culture and ways of life by intense presence and patience.

48 The current summer program page is from 2015, http://www.num.edu.mn/en/content.htm?mid=3513. Accessed 13.06.2019. It is not at all as it was in 2007, but the style is still there. What these programs are in fact is only to be found out by participating.

49 i.e. Jan Van Maanen: Tales of the Field. Writing Ethnography, (1988), 2011

Khuvsgol

End of July my Swiss colleague Karin Suter came from Beijing where she had spent six months in residency. (I'd visited her for two weeks on my way to Mongolia.) We had long trauma-filled discussions on 'being alone with Asians'. We also arranged a trip to the Khuvsgol Lake up north. We were joined in this by Karin's friend Nadia, also from Switzerland, and Carol Kavanagh from Ireland, and Enkhbold, Chinbat and at the last moment Bilge as Dalkha cancelled the morning we were leaving. He was the only one of the Mongols that really spoke English so I was not very happy about this. Bilge speaks fluent German as, of course, do the Swiss, so that was our language web.

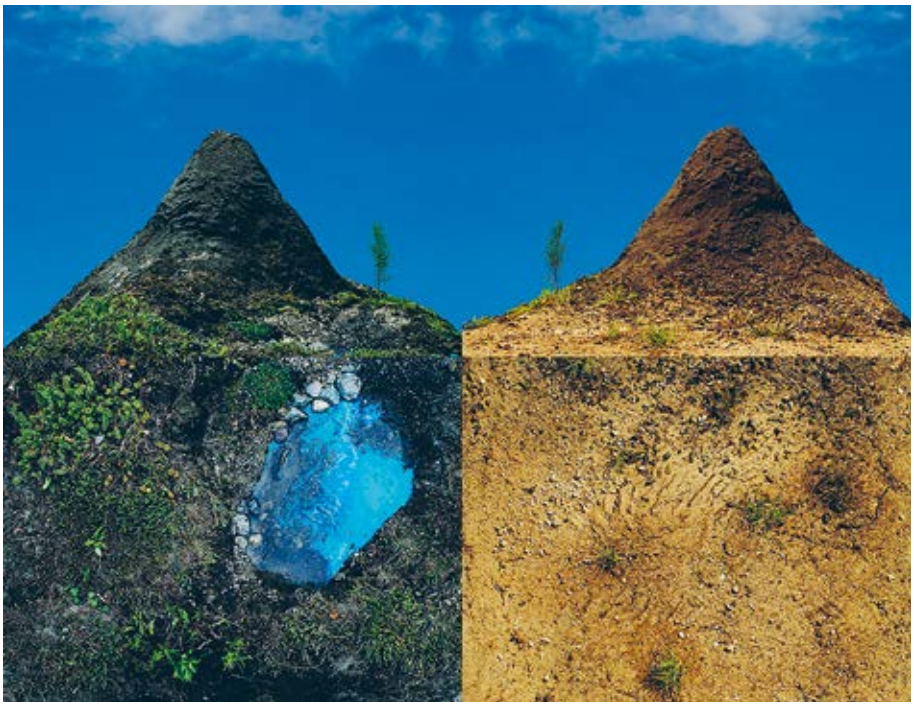
We travelled for days in our (again grey) UAZ bus through Kharkhorin and Mörön to reach Khuvsgol on the fourth day of travel. We stayed in a *ger* by the lake for two nights and then headed back as Karin and Nadia had to catch the train to Moscow. The highlights of the trip were horseback riding in the forest and spending two very freezing cold hours trying to teach Boldo to swim in the lake. Mostly Mongolians don't know how to swim. The rivers have too strong currents and the lakes are mostly far in between. Boldo sang a lot of Danzanravjaa songs and Carol made pancakes. We played volleyball with the family and went fishing very early in the morning, but didn't catch anything. Chinbat was on a boat for the first time in his life.

The landscapes of Northern Mongolia took us by surprise. I felt very homey in the fir tree forests although the trees were larch and not spruce, as mainly in Finland and Karin was feeling as much at home with the mountains, meadows and turquoise blue lakes. This experience got us to make a work later in the year for a book project in Switzerland where an artist pair was to make four pages each. We decided to make four pages of a landscape, in literal sense. We built the 'pages' out of plywood and put them on a cart. The idea was to walk around with it, but in the end the construction was too fragile. We photographed the two sides of our 'lake-mountain-steppe' landscape and made them into four pages for the book. Our own version of the book was made of plywood and was shown at *Art of Inhabitation* exhibition in Dordrecht in 2008. We also continued the project the following year, turning the old landscape upside down and landscaping it with the very Dutch solution of ready-made grass lawn carpets. This version we also managed to take for a walk and thus the work became called *Landscape on a Drift*.

These works never became part of the Mongolia exhibitions, but they show quite immaculately thoughts of finding the familiar in the very alien as well as the thoughts of one thing changing to another: belonging and leaving.

As I returned home I moved to Pori to start my doctoral studies and the organisation of *Mongolia: Perception and Utopia* with all its financing and communication problems.

24 Teaching Boldo to swim at Lake Khuvsgol, 2007. Photograph probably by Carol Kavanagh or Karin Suter.
25 Our ger at the ger camp at Khuvsgol, 2007
26 *4-Page Landscape* in process at Stitching Kaus Australis in collaboration with Karin Suter, Rotterdam, the Netherlands, 2007



27 *4-Page Landscape*, flattened out, installation, 2007
28 *Landscape on a Drift*, video, photograph, 2008

2008

Mongolia: Perception and Utopia

We had contacted Kerava Art museum / Pirkko Siitari, its director at the time, straight after our first journey to Mongolia. I had known her for some time from the Finnish Museum of Photography and we were on good terms, so she was very willing to hear about our Mongolia project. And she liked it. So much so that she decided they would have an exhibition out of it at the museum and she would come to Mongolia with us 2006. During that trip we made a lot of studio visits and discussed among ourselves, Pirkko Siitari, Saara Hacklin and I, what would be the theme, the title, the perspective of the show. This was not always uncomplicated, Mongolian traditions in art being very different from our own. As we first landed in Ulaanbaatar there was a big show of Mongolian surrealist painting, that was not from the 20ies but a current one. We wrinkled our brows and decided we needed to think a few things again. Basically the idea was anyhow that from the Mongolian artists we selected already existing works, whereas the European artists would create new works based on experience in Mongolia. This worked well in the end. Many of the Mongolian works were reproduced in Finland instead of being transported. There was no money for transportation and no wish to engage with customs through Russia. The few works that were brought from Mongolia were taken by the artists themselves by train or airplane. There were no difficulties with this, except that on return one painting was forgotten at the airport, never to be seen again.

We had lots of difficulties with finances as the Kerava museum was as poor as we were. So many somewhat strange solutions were made. For the travel it was agreed that the Mongolians would pay themselves to Moscow and we would pay the travel from there to Helsinki. This worked fine one way. They arrived in Moscow, got on the train to Helsinki buying tickets with the money we had sent them. When they reached the border the border officer called me that he has five Mongolians there without return visas. Oh no! I thought, what were they thinking of, but managed to convince the officer that this would be taken care of. So they arrived and it was truly magnificent to have 'our' Mongolians suddenly at the Helsinki Railway station.

I had hired an old villa nearby to my childhood home for them for 2 weeks. It was a bit musty and dusty, but there were many rooms, bathrooms and a kitchen. And it is a beautiful place. They were happy. We made dinner and watched the artist interviews I had made with them the year before. We had also hired two cars to take everybody around, as we did not have money to

29 *Mongolia: Perception and Utopia*, poster, 2008. Photograph: Annu Wilenius, Graphic Design: Vesa Vehviläinen

buy bus/train tickets for everyone. So the project of the exhibition set on. Sonia and Christian came from Austria, stayed at a friend's house, Rauðhildur came from Iceland, Steffi and Agnes from Germany…Steffi, the industrial designer that I had made friends with in 2007 just wanted to come to be with the 'gang'. Also the current Blue Sun manager Enkhjagal flew to Helsinki for a few weeks.

Everything went smoothly with the building of the exhibition. We felt trusted, respected and understood. The scarcity of money came of course up with everything. For me personally the hardest was that we had no agreement with the museum about who was to pay for accommodation, the cars, the food… Probably because the museum didn't have funds they could be certain about. Saara Hacklin and I were paying all this from our own money without knowing if we would get it back from anywhere. Of course we did in the end get reimbursed by the museum, but as we were paying we didn't know that. The saddest result of the tough budget I remember was that I refused to buy more cheese as I knew that there were three already started cheeses in the fridge. This is something I am still very ashamed of.

After the exhibition was up, and was great, we had a few nice days of outings; experiencing Finland beyond the 'work camp' of the museum. Pirkko Siitari invited us to her home in Karkkila for dinner and sauna. We also rented the sauna at the Stansvik manor where the artists were staying and

Enkhjargal made us a super-Eastern dinner of Mongolian buuz and khusuur. Some of the Mongolian artists had their first ever dip in the sea, and although it was quite icy they were very taken with the experience. This was March. So all seemed to be good and in control – except for the visa issue.

We went to the Russian embassy to apply for new visas to get them back to Mongolia. They were turned down three times without explanations. The Eastern holidays were coming on and we were starting to get really stressed. I was already checking for flights to China. From China you can get to Mongolia without a visa, but you do not want to end up in Russia without one. So on Thursday before Good Friday we went to the embassy for the fourth time, this time accompanied by Enkhjargal who speaks fluent Russian. The application was turned down again, but then Enhkjargal requested to talk to the officer making the decision, for explanation. It came out that the reason was really and truly silly. There is no Finnish embassy in Mongolia. Finland is represented by Germany. So the visas they had were issued by German embassy for Schengen. All good and well. But the Russian official looked at it and asked himself: Why do they have German visas but are not travelling to Germany? Must be something fishy here! Being explained the fact of the embassy situation he succumbed and gave the visas 10 minutes before the embassy closed for Eastern. Phew!

Then started the next horror show. I was so happy with the visas and thought now all was actually well and they could travel home with ease and good memories of Finland. I went to the railway station with them to see them off. We sat at the café and I started to fill in their customs coupons to be helpful to the end. But after the basic personal info there came the question of money. "How much money do you have?" No answer. "How much?" I had to go on with this for a good half an hour, also explaining that they would not be admitted to Russia if they had no money at all. In the end it came out, after I had become really frustrated, that one had about 100 dollars, another about 20…the rest nothing at all. It took me a good while to take this in. Then I managed to ask: "And how were you going to get home from Moscow without any money?" More silence. And still more silence. Again a very peeved Annu – and a very subdued answer that they had thought that maybe they would have found some Mongolian people in Moscow who would have helped… but they had not wanted to bother me with this.

I have seldom been so infuriated in my life. Here I had managed all this for them, thought I had done it well enough and that all were at ease and happy and all that time they had lived with the insecurity of not knowing how to get back home! I left the café and went into the park behind the station and raged and cried for about a half hour. Then I went back and took out 500 euros from the cash dispenser and gave them that. So it was OK.

Saara and Jonne, Tiina and Vesa came to say good-bye, too. Saara bought them a 6- pack of Lapin Kulta beer (she's from up North) and leipäjuusto (a typical Northern cheese) and a book on female artists to accompany them through Siberia. So in the end all was well and they went through all customs and visa controls. Later they told me that in Moscow they had bought a 5 litre bottle of vodka which they had been partying with back home in Ulaanbaatar with friends and colleagues, having survived Finland.

This may seem an odd account of an exhibition, but the actual exhibition with art works and ideas around them, are documented in the catalogue *Mongolia: Perception and Utopia* which is attached to this thesis. These were the practical issues that were of topmost interest to us when working with the project. Trust, respect and money. Borders, visas, customs.

What came after the actual exhibition building was of course the public and the press – and our publication. The exhibition was well covered in the media. Many, many articles in diverse newspapers and magazines, even a short spot on TV. We were happy, but we were also very distressed as our own publication had not been ready for the opening. Vesa Vehviläinen was doing the graphic work and he had just had a baby, so we tried to be very understanding. In the end it took only 3 months until it came out from the printing press. It was neat and had a nice DVD to go with it, also with a documentary section which included 10 photos from each of the artists and a video of making khorkhog, a Mongolian traditional one sheep and one carrot plus one onion dish in a milk tank on open fire. Lots of fun. And of course the slaughtering of the sheep… We had an interesting discussion of this with Pirkko Siitari. Not the slaughtering, but the documentary section. At first she was of the opinion that it was very unprofessional to have your personal photos, pictures of ourselves included, in a catalogue, but we insisted and, I think, in the end she was happy with it too.

After Kerava the exhibition travelled also to Rovaniemi Art Museum and Pärnu Uue Kunsti Museum in Estonia, both arranged by Pirkko Siitari. In Rovaniemi a few works were left out, like the toilet seats of Sarantsatsralt's work. In Pärnu some artists, like Agnes Domke, made new versions. All in all, after setting the show up three times we agreed that the third one in Pärnu was the best. I suppose that having been installing these works many times, in very different spaces, one gets to know how they work as works, but also how they work in relation to each other. It was great also to have some of the artists coming along to the new places and thinking of their own works anew. In Pärnu for example we could not find a solution for Raðhildur's video projection – until we decided to project it on a transportation box. It became totally great. Also in Pärnu we at first could not imagine that the grand piano could remain in the exhibition hall, but as it was out of the question to remove it – it was quite fine in the end.

In Search of the City / Nomad / Understanding / Freedom

Essay I, publication Mongolia: Perception and Utopia, 2008

IN SEARCH OF...

My preconception of Mongolia was based on two books, read in childhood, that only obliquely have to do with Mongolia, namely Vladimir Arsenyev's *Dersu Uzala*[50] and Robert Shea's *Shike*.[51]

Dersu Uzala is a true story of the friendship between a Russian Imperial Army officer and explorer, Vladimir Arsenyev, and a Siberian hunter who was Arsenyev's guide on his many travels in the Ussuri in 1902–1907. While mapping the lands of Siberian wildernesses Arsenyev learns from Dersu what it means to be at home in nature. Still as Dersu grows old and is becoming blind Arsenyev takes him home into town. Dersu however cannot 'live in a box' and returns to the taiga – and dies. Dersu was the favourite book of my brother and me and it was read to us at least five times – and for years we played Dersu and the Hunters of the Taiga in the forests of Laajasalo.[52] When we reached the age of starting school our parents had a hard time getting us to go, because we wanted to be 'wild and free'.

Shike is something quite different: its author, one-time Playboy employee and expert on conspiracy theories and anarchy, swishes together a few hundred years of Japanese medieval history to serve as the background of the story of Jebu, a warrior monk, and Taniko, the wife and concubine of many an influential man. At one point the story takes them to Mongolia, where Jebu fights in Khubilai Khan's army and Taniko is, what else, one of the Khan's women. Jebu, however, asks to have Taniko for himself and so they ride together over the vast, frosty steppe while snowflakes slowly descend. I imagined this scene with reverence in my 9-year old mind, and was very surprised rereading the scene over twenty years later only to find that the snowflakes were not there.

Although these early associations of the hunter and the warrior were in later years replaced with reading the Finnish explorers' stories of Mongolia

50 Vladimir Arsenyev: *Dersu Uzala*, Tammi, Helsinki, 1946, (original in Russian 1923, first published in Finland 1946 as '*Lumen ja palmujen ihmemaassa*', in English 1939 as '*Dersu the Trapper*'. Dersu was also made into a film by Akira Kurosawa in 1975.)

51 Robert Shea: *Shike*, Kirjasampo, (in Finnish) 1983, (original in English 1981).

52 Jan Kozak: *Taigan metsästäjät (Hunters of the Taiga)*, Kirja-yhtymä, Helsinki, 1979. Laajasalo is the South-eastern suburb of Helsinki where I grew up.

in the early 20th century[53] and following what was happening in Mongolia in the 1990s, they resurfaced when I finally travelled to Mongolia. In our first travels in 2005-2006 it was great to hang out with the 'locals' for fishing, slaughtering sheep and poaching, or to ride through the steppe and sleep in gers – and to visit the vicinity of upstream river Orkhon and to 'playact' the meeting of Pälsi, Granö and Ramstedt – these were things we just had to do.

When I returned for the third time in 2007 I was no longer chasing after childhood visions of freedom, but had come in order to understand what was happening in the city of Ulaanbaatar: How the planning and practice of the city's becoming were rushing and barging over each other and how the city's inhabitants experienced living in the midst of it. I interviewed expert and non-expert people about the city and the areas they lived in and had grown up in – and there in the middle of the 'peri urban' / 'built without planning' ger districts of Ulaanbaatar I realized that I had indeed found a childhood ideal of freedom. Not that of a free wanderer without attachments, but that of the free formation of a society on a patch of land. This was the environment where we played Dersu and the hunters of the taiga, before it was all cleaned up, paved and landscaped to look like any (middle class) suburb anywhere in the world.

THE CITY

The city of Ulaanbaatar[54] became Ulaanbaatar when Mongolia declared itself a People's Republic in 1924. The name means 'red hero'. Before the city became Ulaanbaatar it had been known by many names and had wandered the banks of the three rivers Tuul, Selenge and Orkhon since 1639, at which time it was called Örgöö or in its Russian form Urga. Örgöö settled where the city is now in 1778 and was mostly known as Ikh Khüree. Örgöö means a residence and Khüree a camp, ikh large or great - the city was little else than a tent conglomeration around the main Buddhist temple. Just before Mongolia became communist it was a Buddhist theocracy ruled by living Buddha-King Bogd Gegen. Upon independence in 1911, with both the secular

53 In the late 19th century it was thought that the roots of the Finnish language could be found in the Altai. The first explorer was the linguist M.A. Castrén who coined the term and theory of the Altaic languages, of which it has later been proven Finnish is not part. Many explorers, both archaeologists and linguists followed, however, to do research on the languages, archaeological finds and landscapes of Mongolia. In 1906 three such travellers, Ramstedt, Granö and Pälsi, happened to cross paths by the river Orkhon. Homepage of the Finnish-Mongolian Society, 10.02.2007, http://www.suomi-mongolia-seura.fi/page.php?pp=0&page=49.

54 The spelling Ulan Bator derives from the Russian form. Nowadays in the vernacular the city is mostly referred to as UB.

government and the Bogd Khan's palace present, the city's name changed to Niislel Khüree, meaning 'capital'.[55]

In the 1920s when Örgöö became Ulaanbaatar it had 6 000 inhabitants and took up an area of 2.3 km2. Besides the temple it had a power station and a printing house. Most people lived in gers. The town was dominated by foreign capital with about 100 companies owned by Germans, Americans, Russians and the Chinese. In the 1930s a branch of the Trans-Siberian railway was built to pass Ulaanbaatar, which changed the city greatly, and in 1935 the population was slightly over 10 000. It was in the 1940s that both official and residential buildings, in a Greek Revival style by the Russians, first started to be built. The following decade saw a lot of construction, but the first master plan was not made until 1954. It introduced systems for heating, sewage, electrical power, telephone and water supply. The 1950s was a Chinese construction period. The next big city plan came ten years later. The pink blocks that can still be found in the city centre were built between 1965–1975 by the Russians. The 1986 plan envisioned eleven new residential districts and the elimination of all the ger districts by 2010.[56] As a part of the democratic liberation and ever since the country gained independence in 1990 it has been suggested that the city should resume one of its older names or, simply, be renamed Chinggis City.

Today the population of Ulaanbaatar is about one million, which is 38% of the Mongolian population. The city is spread over 4 000 km2 of land. 70 000 people move to the city and its surroundings every year. 41% live in apartments with running water, sewage and heating. 26% live in gers and 31% in self-built houses in ger districts without sewage, getting the water from water kiosks. In the winters the heating in ger districts is mainly conducted by coal burning, which causes a lot of air pollution.[57] The city boasts of over 250 hairdressing salons; about 100 cosmetics retailers; 60 tailor's shops; more than 130 cobblers; over 30 launderettes and dry cleaners; 700 car repair workshops; and about 800 pawn shops; as well as 214 streets; 3100 private business premises; 1 566 apartment blocks; 67 000 fenced households; and 76,5 km of road, of a total of 418,6 km, is tarmac-covered.[58]

55 Http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ulan_Bator. 03.03.2007.

56 Rolf Gilberg and Jan-Olof Svantesson: *The Mongols, Their Land and History* in Bruun & Odgaard: *Mongolia in Transition. Old Patterns, New Challenges*, Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 1996. p.21f

57 According to Zulgerel from Ulaanbaatar Mayor's Office, lecture at the Mongolian National University, July 2007.

58 Official Tourism Website of Mongolia: Ulaanbaatar. 07.02.2008. http:// www.mongoliatourism.gov.mn/index.php? action=menudata&id=5&PHPSESSID=8b2155a160800b657d05b4b8944bd617

NOMAD

According to the Oxford Dictionary a nomad is "a member of a people continually moving to find fresh pasture for its animals and having no permanent home" or "a wanderer".[59] These imply two kinds of relations: firstly, to a group of people and secondly to a place. What is problematic about this definition is that it presupposes 'home' as a constant place. Contrary to this in defining 'home', for example, Karin Johannisson summarizes that "it is not primarily an attachment to a geographical place, not even to a culture, but home is inner familiarity with people, that is togetherness".[60]

To claim nomads as homeless seems to reflect an outside view on nomadism. It has also traditionally been thought that nomadic peoples do not own their land, a view that has not been shared by the nomadic peoples themselves.[61] To understand 'nomad' as homelessness and landlessness is to construct 'nomad' as the other to the settled people and the culture that staying put creates. In modernity the image of the nomad was taken to symbolize being liberated from the land both in the meaning of freeing oneself from agriculture as tying one to land (industrialization) and of the small community of an agrarian village (urbanization). This new freedom was celebrated in notions such as: "The enlightened modern man is an intellectual nomad, emancipated from rootedness in civilisation" and "[modern man] is again wholly microcosmic, wholly homeless as free intellectually as the hunter and the herdsman is free sensually".[62]

The modernist project both in the east and the west tried to free people of the old systems by creating new systems. Today the 'nomad freedom' is, however, thought to be possible only by keeping outside 'the system'. We speak now of urban nomads, technomads and perpetual tourists. In his essay on nomadic thought Gilles Deleuze writes on nomadism:

"The archaeologists have made us think of nomadism not just as a primary state, but as an adventure, an invitation from the outside, as mobility, that surprises the sedentary peoples."[63] This nomad – shall we call him/her conceptual? – Deleuze constructs from the ideas of the Mongol 'war machine' (of the time of the European invasion) against the 'bureaucratic ma-

59 Oxford Dictionary, 10.02.2008, http://www.askoxford.com/concise_oed/nomad?view=uk

60 Karin Johannisson: *Nostalgia. En känslans historia*, 2001, p.43

61 Recent post-colonial studies have shown that e.g. the Sami people of Northern Scandinavia and the Aborigines of Australia have always thought in terms of owning their land, though in a different system than that of sedentary people.

62 Quoted in Gregory Cowan: *Nomadology in Architecture: Ephemerality, Movement and Collaboration*, M. Arch Thesis, University of Adelaide, 2002, p. 84.

63 Gilles Deleuze: *Nomadi ajattelu*,Tutkijaliitto, Helsinki, 1992, p. 17. (Original *Pensée Nomade* in *Nietzsche aujourd' hui*.10/18, 1973, p159-174).

chine' of the sedentary village. To be a conceptual nomad is to stay outside of the code, to stay wild, in resistance.[64]

An ethnographic nomad on the other hand, say in Mongolia, would hardly consider him/herself either homeless, landless or outside. The ger is packed and ready to go in an hour, and up again in another hour. The summer/winter camps tend to be the same from year to year. An ethnographic nomad is, as mentioned by the definition, tied to a community, which usually is that of the family, immediate or extended.

What is considered as an essential part of nomadism in Mongolia is a seamless connection to one's environment: a knowing and belonging of both place and society. An ethnographic nomad of this kind is not so much of a war machine than s/he is a snail, being at home wherever s/he is.

Nomads or not, unprecedented numbers of people are currently on the move in the world: either as refugees, immigrants, perpetual tourists or as first-generation urbanites. In reflecting on the new ways of belonging in a global society Taina Rajanti writes that we are no longer at home anywhere (since we are not rooted anywhere) but 'as if we were at home' everywhere. She continues that what is important in this new way of life is not to be able to face new things, but to hold on to things familiar, to find them again, anywhere. It is not important to be in any particular somewhere, but it is important to be particularly somewhere.[65]

UNDERSTANDING...

To return to urban planning: it was not in the wildernesses of the world that the modern nomads were to live, but in the city. It was the city that would liberate its inhabitants by its anonymity and its structure that was totally free of all that was traditional, old, rooted. So, in building the city it was important to wipe away all that there was and start from the beginning, from a clean plate, a tabula rasa.[66] The modernist urban planning did not only strive towards providing everyone with sanitation, clean air and sunshine, but to separate people from their old structures of life, to create new people.

64 Ibidem, p.17. Deleuze continues to point out that this kind of nomadism does not necessarily mean mobility in space, but mobility in intensity – and that even historically the nomadic peoples have never been on the move in the same sense as immigrants. The nomads are the ones who become nomadic in order to stay where they are.

65 Taina Rajanti: *Kaupunki on ihmisen koti*, Tutkijaliitto, Helsinki, 1999, p.199.

66 Writing on urban development Rem Koolhaas has commented: "All Generic Cities issue from the tabula rasa: if there was nothing, now they are there: if there was something, they have replaced it". Rem Koolhaas, Bruce Mau & OMA: *Generic City*, in *S, M, L, XL*, Rotterdam 1995, p.1253.

Cities were to be machines of emancipation[67] and houses (homes) "nothing more than a factory for the production of happiness".[68]

Regardless of other ideological loyalties the modernist planning spread all over the world and the "footprints and corpses of [its] failed visions are littered everywhere".[69] It is quite universally agreed also that something went wrong, that instead of freedom and happiness, placelessness and alienation were produced.[70] If all this has been done in the way of urban planning until now, why not simply take it all away and do something better instead? Possibly because we do not know what that might be? Or perhaps because the idea that happiness and freedom can be designed is wrong.

Nietzsche says and Edward Relph complements: good can come out of evil, authenticity out of inauthenticity.[71] Adjusted to the discussion of urban design this could mean that authentic living, an authentic place to live (a home?) can be created in a badly designed city. How come? Because belonging, authentic living, does not need an unbroken connection to an origin, people to places or to people, any more than freedom needs a certain kind of a house to function right. Relph states that: "even though the founding of a place may be its most dramatic and significant event, place-making is a continuous process and the very fact of having been lived-in and used and experienced will lend many places a degree of authenticity".[72] In analysing the nomadic tent as a home Gregory Cowan comes to the conclusion that to create architectural meaning there is no need for a specific place, but what is needed is a ritual. By ritual, usage, a community transforms whichever structure meaningful by living it, by making it familiar. It is the familiarity that constitutes home, independently of the changing site.[73]

It is obvious that urban planning needs to revise its understanding of places and belonging. Michelle Provoost stresses in her article on new ap-

67 Michelle Provoost: *New Towns on the Cold War Frontier. How modern urban planning was exported as an instrument in the battle for the developing world*, Crimson, 5.1.2008, http:// www.crimson-web.org/spip.php?article47

68 In the Good Housekeeping magazine, 1910, quoted in David Harvey: *The Condition of Postmodernity*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1989, p. 23.

69 William S W Lim: *Asian Ethical Urbanism*, World Scientifc Pub Co Inc., Singapore, 2002, p. 37.

70 David Harvey is one of the few who claims that there were things that needed to be done in the post war cities and that " high modernism did it only too well" and that "given the technologies available and the obvious scarcity of resources, it is hard to see how much of that could have been achieved except through some variant of what was actually done." *The Condition of Postmodernity*, p.36 and p. 70.

71 Edward Relph: *Place and Placelessness*, London, 1976, p. 64.

72 Ibidem, p. 72.

73 Gregory Cowan: *Nomadology in Architecture: Ephemerality, Movement and Collaboration*, M.Arch Thesis, University of Adelaide, 2002, p. 35.

proaches to town planning that "it is necessary … that the New Towns are being treated as what they are: real cities not to be erased, but waiting for a serious design strategy that will add another layer of urban material, and turn them into normal, growing, developing, aging cities." Lim, in trying to formulate what he calls Radical Asian Urbanism, speaks for 'spaces of indeterminacy':" The[ese] random, impulsive, self-regulated environments continuously add chaos to chaos in the most exciting and surprising manner. They provide alternative lifestyles and natural resistance against global forces of rational conformity. ---However, if the significance of spaces of indeterminacy is not effectively demonstrated or appreciated by the city authorities, we lose the opportunity to provide resistance to destructive modernistic urban interventions." [74]

In Ulaanbaatar there are many different urban restructuring processes, some planned, some not. The centre, which was mainly built from the 1940s to the 1960s and was dominated by the 3-4 storey Russian pink residential blocks and the Greek Classic Revival official buildings, is now being overpowered by glass and steel towers one higher than the other. This, one might say, is nothing new in Asia, or anywhere for that matter. What is still today different in Ulaanbaatar is that these towers are not rising on tabula rasa-ed empty building sites – and only a few minutes' walk away people still live in 'tents'. How the building happens in Ulaanbaatar now is something like this: "It was a beautiful weekend in June-July and we and everyone else had gone to the countryside, so no one was at home. When we came back to town we saw that the park we used to have in the middle of the block was gone. All the trees were cut down and there was a big hole in the middle with a fence around.

Before we knew what had happened – and certainly before we found anyone responsible for having given permits for this – a tower block had risen in there."[75]

Talking of the history of the city with architectural historian Daajav I asked about the current planning policies and he looked thoughtfully into the distance and finally said: "Planning? I don't think we have any planning anymore." In fact, there is planning, plenty of it. It is just that the implementation of any designs has become a totally new game. At the Urban Development Research Institute architect and town planner Narangerel says that "certainly it was easier to plan when the state owned everything and we just had to plan and then build…" Now one can plan all one likes, but very little of it can be realized because the land is privately owned and corruption is running high. So, while one tower after another rises in the UB

74 William S W Lim: *Asian Ethical Urbanism*, Singapore, 2002, p. 24.

75 This is a somewhat free summary based on an interview with a woman, who told this as her own experience as well as that of countless others.

skyline, what Narangerel plans is a restructuring of the ger districts, not by elimination, but by adaptation in many levels. He has various plans of how to recompense the land to the people now living there; to offer them land somewhere else or company rights or apartments in the district if they give the land to the city. Besides, he does not want to get rid of gers, but to upgrade them to what could be called mod-com gers; i.e. gers on top of concrete bases providing basic sewage, water, heating, internet… and a top (the tent) that would remain as transportable as ever. [76] Asking Narangerel when these plans will be implemented, he just smiles.

Visiting the ger district of Dar-Ekh in north-western Ulaanbaatar I was introduced to Dolgor, the leader of a community unit. Since the communist state fell, the city had stopped taking care of most communal interests including garbage collection and lawn watering. So, all these functions of urban order either vanished – which can be seen as a lot of rubbish and dead grass all over – or started to be taken care of by private persons, or neighbourhood units, like the one that Dolgor heads. They take care of the rubbish, the painting of fences, the planning of playgrounds and vegetable gardens; new water kiosks and possibly the paving of roads. The priority setting of these tasks is tight. When my companion asks if they would like to have hairdressing salons Dolgor looks at us like we were really silly, but when she is then asked if they would care to have shower houses with laundry, the attitude is quite different.[77]

FREEDOM

But to get back to childhood preconceptions of freedom: in Finnish 'mythology' there is a figure of the free wanderer, the independent traveller, the nomad that leaves no traces – Snufkin of Tove Jansson's Moomin saga. Snufkin is an absolute symbol of everything that has to do with freedom. Snufkin is entirely self-sufficient: he has no need of other people to make life meaningful, he has no need of their communities, their discussions or their houses. He lives in his tent (green with a pointy top) and is seamlessly conjoined with the wildernesses he inhabits. He is even described as being one of those extraordinary people who have the "simple but rare ability to retain their own warmth".[78] The event of Snufkin passing a village is described as follows:

76 Interviews conducted by the author. Daajav: 07.02.2007, Ulaanbaatar City Museum, Ulaanbaatar, (interpreter Uranchimeg Tsultem) Narangerel: 07.23.2007, Urban Development Research Center, Ulaanbaatar, (interpreter Tuya Tse).

77 Interview with Dolgor. 08.03.2007, Dar-Ekh, Ulaanbaatar (together with and arranged by Michael Fürst, interpreter Otgoo)

78 Tove Jansson: *Moominvalley in November* Square Fish, 2010, (original in Swedish and then in

> Big houses and little houses all very close to each other, some were joined together and shared the same gutters and the same dustbins, looked in at each other's windows, and smelt their food. The chimneys and high gables and the drainpipes, and below, the well-worn paths leading from door to door. Snufkin walked quickly and silently and thought: oh, all you houses, how I hate you![79]

Then one late November he gets stuck in Moominvalley, not with the Moomin family who usually inhabit the place, but with a bunch of needy, uncertain, in search of something kind of people. Snufkin is a very reluctant member of this community and at one point even Grandpa-Grumble loses his patience when Snufkin stays inside his precious tent and does not participate in a debate on whether it is a river, a brook or a flood that runs across the valley. He shouts: "You inside there! --- [W] hen are you coming out to take interest in things?" and Snufkin answers peevishly:" Soon!"[80]

But as things tally on insights start to fall on Snufkin: he realizes that with the Moomin family everything used to be different. Previously he had always thought of them as very dependent (of each other, of him) kind of people, who did not understand his solitary way of life and his needs. Especially Moomintroll, whose longing eyes sometimes quite disturb Snufkin, had figured not just as a friend but as something of a burden to Snufkin. As Snufkin now thinks of Moomintroll it is with longing and insight that he is "the only one who knew how to write to a Snufkin. Brief and to the point. Nothing about promises and longings and sad things. And a joke to finish up with."[81] When it dawns on Snufkin that he has seen the family from a rather selfish point of view he starts to wonder.

What Snufkin learns about himself and his relationship to the Moomin family and the world outside himself by large is that both his freedom and self-sufficiency are not absolute qualities within himself, but something that are supported and in some respects even given to him by the love of the Moomin family. That his belonging to Moomin Valley, coming there every summer and being understood and appreciated and left alone by them, is the basis of his comfort in the wanderer's way of life he leads. Of course, he could be a hermit and totally outside a need for others' caring, but from all accounts this is not at all who Snufkin really is. He is a social being caring both for how he is perceived and treated by others and very much for what

Finnish in 1970), p.73.

79 Ibidem, p.16.

80 Ibidem, p. 83

81 Ibidem, p. 88

others do around him, particularly in the way of architecture and environmental design.

So, at the end of the saga Snufkin understands that his freedom consists of two parts: the going away and coming back: that without there being a 'coming back', without some level of belonging, there is no free wanderer, there is just a refugee. Or in the words of an Asian cultural figure, the Dalai Lama: "Freedom is beneficial only if all the individual members of society take active responsibility."[82]

Annu Wilenius
February 13th 2008, Helsinki, Finland

82 Far Eastern Economic Review, 14 September 1995, pp..54-55.Quoted in: Bruun & Odgaard: *Mongolia in Transition. Old Patterns, New Challenges*, Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 1996. p.37.

Intermediary Projects 2008–2009

2008

Initiating the Bare House Project

When the *Mongolia: Perception and Utopia* project, including the publication, were gracefully finished it was time to figure out how to continue. The other artists and curators who had been with the project from the start were not interested to continue travelling and working with Mongolia, thus I was free to make what I wished for this new project. My main interests were architecture and urban planning issues and the exchange between Mongolia and the West. The working title for this became Bare House Project and I sent the proposal to the Pori Art Museum and presented it to Harri Laakso at the Aalto University. The museum agreed to an exhibition in 2010 and the University to host the artists for artist-in-residency periods at the Pori AiR program. Besides the Pori residencies I started to work towards arranging residencies for Mongolian artists in Rotterdam and in addition those of the participating European artists who had not been to Mongolia yet agreed to join me on my travels there during the summers of 2008 and 2009.

In 2008 it was the first Pori AiR artist of this project, Ana Rewakowicz from Canada (originally Ukrainian who grew up in Poland), who also joined the Mongolian expedition. We took the Trans-Siberian train from Moscow and enjoyed ourselves very much reading and munching on Siberian berries and smoked fish bought from 'babushkas' on the platforms. We were to stay for six weeks, participate in Blue Sun's Art Camp and Ana was to have a solo show at the Blue Sun Gallery as well.

Blue Sun Magazine

My main concerns during the summer of 2008 were negotiating about the residencies in Rotterdam with Blue Sun and working on the Blue Sun Magazine that we had decided to start the year before. Already then there had been enthusiastic plans of getting a magazine together in a jiffy. I remember having quite an argument with the (that time) manager Enkhjargal as I

disagreed about too hasty a deadline. Carol Kavanagh, who was to make a story on her own work, was also quite indignant about my opposition until I informed her that there was no material whatsoever in existence. There was just the enthusiasm. So, nothing came of it, except a lot more planning – as I did think it was a very good and important idea.

Open Academy UB

In April during a conference at Kiasma in Helsinki I met an artist, Shoji Kato, from the Fine Art Academy Helsinki who told me about Jay Koh, an artist and doctoral candidate at the Academy who had worked for over a decade with residencies and other projects in Myanmar. I looked him up and wrote to him about the projects in Mongolia, especially the Blue Sun magazine, as he had also been part of a few publication projects in Asia. We met and had a good conversation and following email correspondence. He also put me in contact with Art Hub Asia and its director Davide Quadrio in Beijing. Jay Koh and Davide had visited Mongolia in 2006 and based on that visit Jay Koh wanted to launch an Open Academy project in Ulaanbaatar. Open Academy was his project also in Myanmar.

At the beginning the plans and ideas flew smoothly between the three of us. We were trying to figure our funding for the magazine, make it part of the Open Academy workshop's plan. Art Hub gave Blue Sun three thousand dollars for studio rent and to reopen their website. Then some points of disagreement started to surface. I had a long phone conversation with Davide, among other things about arranging the residencies and their financing in Rotterdam. He thought it was all great and he also recommended me as a Mongolia expert to Prins Claus Fund, which was the institution Jay Koh had applied to for the Open Academy financing. 'Prins Claus' contacted me to assess Jay Koh's application, which I did in highly positive terms. There were, however, few points that I felt apprehensive about. One was the question of language as in Mongolia in my experience very few of the artists could speak English at all and some just a bit. This issue was not addressed in any way, so I advised to budget for interpreters and in the long run possibly for language tuition. The other obscure matter was that the application stated, more or less, that it was Blue Sun that was applying via Jay Koh whereas Jay Koh talked about it as his project and the Blue Sun artists not having to be part of it at all if their English was not good enough.

As I took these issues up with Davide, Jay Koh and the manager from Prins Claus an understanding about interpretation was reached, Jay claiming it had always been planned as included in the administration costs. Who knows if that was true, but as we chatted/emailed about this and the possible resi-

dencies we ended in a much worse disagreement about language in general. I was of the opinion that it would be very important for the artists to get tuition in English to be able to communicate with foreign artists – as the Open Academy was also a residency program. Jay Koh, on the other hand, was of the opinion that there is an (artistic) audience capable of English anywhere and it is more important to share the knowledge of current art practices with them. Those not being able to express themselves in their own language will not do it better in a foreign language.

I had never thought I'd be improving the art the local artists were doing, but facilitating possibilities in the outside world for them the best I personally could. We more or less broke contact after this until the following year when Open Academy was happening and then I wasted a good deal of time and energy, again, in creating contacts and finding accommodation for it. The contacts worked out fine, but the flat business the Blue Sun artists managed to bungle up quite perfectly. When Jay Koh then wrote to me snidely thanking me a lot for nothing, I decided I had definitely had enough of the 'collaboration'. The only thing I was satisfied about this was that I had spent a good hour, with an interpreter, to explain to Blue Sun artists that the Open Academy existed for their benefit, not Jay's and they should make it known to him what they wanted and felt they needed.

Davide, on the other hand, continued to come up with ideas of where to get funding for residencies in the Netherlands, but as none of these materialised, he also started suggesting places in Asia and Australia: Hong Kong, Australia… I was not so interested in this turn as I wanted the artists to come to Europe and to share into something that I – and most of the other participating artists – knew and were part of, that is Rotterdam and Stichting Kaus Australis, which is a residency program in Rotterdam. So, I kept on working with the Rotterdam scheme.

Stichting Kaus Australis, Rotterdam

I first came to Stichting Kaus Australis as a resident artist in 2004. The previous year I had been to Rotterdam to see a German friend I'd met at a workshop in Iceland many years previously. She told me how great residency programs there were in Rotterdam. She had just visited the opening of a German friend, Christine Saalfeld, in a place called Stichting Kaus Australis and the place was just great and the people extremely nice. So, I applied, was accepted and spent the spring of 2004 there. This was a very amazing experience for me both socially and creatively. As a consequence, I started working together with many Rotterdam-based artists and visited, short-

er or longer, most years since my initial visit. Many of my colleagues also came there after me.

Tiina Mielonen was there for five months in 2005, Saara Hacklin for a month in 2006. In 2006 the three of us curated and managed an exhibition at Gallery Huuto in Helsinki featuring sixteen Rotterdam artists. This group included amongst others Christine Saalfeld, Aletta de Jong, and Chris van Mulligen who later on participated the Mongolia project.

I wrote primarily about a few Mongolian artists being interested in residencies with Chris and got a positive enough response to go ahead discussing the plan with Blue Sun, that is with Dalkha, who still then was the director. We agreed that Enkhbold should be one of the artists applying and Dalkha suggested Ganzug Sedbazarin as the other one. Ganzug was a new member in Blue Sun since 2007. He seemed very capable and interested to go. He had never been outside Mongolia whereas Enkhbold had, of course, by this time been to Finland, once. I helped them to make portfolios of their work for the applications as well as tried to instruct on what kind of things they could say in their application text, which I then re-worked into English with the help of a translator.

Stichting Kaus Australis had their board meeting for the autumn residencies and they decided that these applicants did not show strong enough artistic practice. The rejecting email was not sent to them directly but to me. It also encouraged me to be in contact with the Centrum Beeldende Kunsten Rotterdam (the local arts council) since they had an interest in 'ethnic' projects. I have seldom been as cross as I was when I received this. I answered when still fuming with indignation on the 'ethnic' and said quite a few things I later somewhat regretted. Be that as it may, I also called Chris and we had a long talk. He claimed that they had not been aware that these residencies were vitally a part of a project of mine. He promised they would reconsider the matter if I would write a description of my plan and how this was part of it. I did and Enkhbold and Ganzug were invited for three months' residencies for the autumn of 2009. It can be questioned that they were accepted on my connections and not on their artistic merits, but even if it was so, they merited so much of it that they later on made better international artistic careers than I ever. We all need people who believe in us. Most likely you only afterwards show that you really deserved it. Enkhbold and Ganzug certainly deserved all the support I was able to give.

Later in the autumn Jay Koh, as part of his Open Academy, helped Ganzug and Enkhbold make an application for funding to the Open Society / Soros Foundation. From them they were then granted enough to cover both their travel and living costs. I paid for the studio rent – and all was fine.

Bayanzurkh

Concerning my own artistic/research work I continued with the interviews with specialists and residents. The most productive ones were, again, with the *ger* district 'gardeners', Dolgor and Adya and their respective husbands. The first time we set out, together with Otgoo, the translator, we found Dolgor was not at home. We continued up the hill as directed by Melitta Kuglitsch, a Viennese anthropologist researching *ger* districts, to meet Adya, the woman who in the first place had got Dolgor to start with her garden. As Melitta had warned Adya was not being quite as amiable as Dolgor and to begin with both the interview and filming felt awkward. Then I started to ask about the garden, the green houses and the vegetables, and soon enough we were on very good terms. She gave us both a cucumber to take home.

Adya has a lovely house. It has been built slowly through the years to house her children and grandchildren and the rooms have been added when needed. The ground floor plan Adya's husband Daajaabab took from a building magazine, the second floor they just built as they wished. Adya even had a 'conservatory room', an upstairs room with big windows on two sides filled with potted plants on all walls and hanging from the ceiling. It was magnificent and nothing like I'd seen anywhere in Mongolia.

The house also had central heating by hot water in pipes that Daajaabab had devised himself. No wonder they had won the prize of 'best family' several times over in the neighbourhood.

The atmosphere at Adya's made me think of my grandmother's place in Rajakylä near Helsinki. (In my diary I had added to this notion that only in those aspects as those memories were positive.) Adya also took a liking to my presence in the house and said that as her daughter was far away in foreign lands as I was, so now I was like a daughter to her. I visited her many times after this, of course.

Dolgor we found at home on another visit. They had been to Turkey as one of their daughters had gotten married there. Dolgor's husband was very happy and very much in awe of the Turkish toilets and roads – just the cigarettes had been too expensive. He was laughing talking about the toilets, because they still have the out of doors latrine, like most people in the *ger* districts. Another of their daughters had married a Korean man and when he had visited the family home, he had refused to go to the toilet and left the premises. Dolgor's husband had been deeply offended and could not understand such behaviour at all. Now that he had seen that every house in Turkey has these wondrous, clean, white, running water toilets, he could understand what it was all about. After the Turkey news they showed us around the house telling about building it, piece by piece, the whole family help-

ing out and then we looked at the garden too, and ended up filming Dolgor picking up her onion harvest of the year.

Tsetserleg

Comparing the new residential areas scrounging Ulaanbaatar to the aesthetics and experience of people living in the *ger* districts I was fascinated by how connected these people felt with everything around them instead of just accepting 'standards' from outside. I also felt that the growth of Ulaanbaatar was so hectic and the city so huge that it was really more than I could ever grasp. Instead of even trying I wanted to go back to the small town of Tsetserleg that had so strongly taken my fancy already on the first trip to the countryside in 2005. Dalkha agreed to accompany me for a few days visit to the town.

Tsetserleg means garden and this little town by a beautiful mountain in Central Mongolia is one of the greenest places I have seen about. I remember as we came here for the first time in 2005, it was the first Mongolian town besides Ulaanbaatar, that I had seen. It felt so amazingly… old fashioned, outward, like from a Lucky Luke or what not comic of the wild west. But it was great as such.

I wanted to come back and spend more time in the town to understand it a bit more. I stood by watching a woman collecting empty plastic bottles with her son who made quite a performance with his play gun. And I watched a couple of very young mothers with their babies making milk offerings at the temple.

But the most beautiful memory I have of Tsetserleg is the van ride we took to get there in 2008. We went by the local minivan system. You went to the van depot (doesn't exist anymore) and found a guy who would be going where you wanted to end up. Then you'd wait until he'd found enough people to fill the van. In Mongolian terms a van can take about 20 people. This time it took 8 hours from the moment we went to the depot until we finally took off. I was extremely frustrated and thought that things run this way can never end up good. But as we set out at 11 pm, it became the most beautiful trip I have ever had. The driver had been driving the route to Tsetserleg for eleven years and you could feel how he just had the feeling for the road. The stars came out and beside the road the mountains loomed, dark, mysterious and splendid.

As we reached Tsetserleg and knocked at the door of a guest house we'd stayed in before, a lady came to open and welcomed us even though it was 4 am. She gave us a thermos with hot water, too, for washing.

30 Urban Planning Centre of Tsetserleg, 2008

Having made quite a bit of interviews the past two years I was getting fatigued with the format and was more interested in simply filming: trying to catch the atmosphere of a place on film without explanations. Instead of having many people telling me what to think, I just wanted to photograph, and film. Somehow this was going back to where I started from: photography. What we did then was just to walk around for hours and I would film. After some time, we tried to find a map of the town to better orient about, although the town is really small, less than 30 000 inhabitants. This was a good plan, but it turned out that there was no map of the town. We were told time after time to go to the town architect's office. He would have a map. In the end that's also where we ended up, and he had lots of maps, only they were inbound to his massive surveys of the area and the new urban plan that was to be ready in 2012. We interviewed him and he explained what the council planned to be done in the town.

Two strongest impressions I have from Tsetserleg from this visit were the hideous (out of tune) European pop music that was playing everywhere on the streets and a waitress that placed (a clean) plate in front of me, well, clean safe for, the dead fly in its midst. At first I was annoyed at the music as I was filming, then I realised that this is catching the atmosphere of Tsetserleg, not as I wished it, but as it is. The waitress looked at the fly, shrugged her shoulders, took a dirty dishcloth from her waistband and 'shooed' the

fly to the floor. The gesture had such a balance of surly indignation and grace that one could only admire it. It did, however, also make me think how impossible it can be for someone like her to (ever) get away from a place like Tsetserleg. A lot of the video material from Tsetserleg became part of my work *Mongolia/Ulaanbaatar 2007–2011, At the Building Site* (2012)[83], shown at Mänttä Art Festival in Finland.

Arkhangai '*Plein Air*' Art Camp

This year, instead of going to the usual art camp location at Undur Ulaan or organise a trip on their own initiative, Blue Sun had been commissioned on a '*plain air*' journey to the childhood province of the owner and gallery manager of Xanadu Art, Jargalan. The year before they had made a trip to Bayankhongor, childhood province of Enkhjargal the Blue Sun manager. On that trip they ran out of gasoline, food and water in the middle of a vast desert (Bayankhongor is partly Gobi) – and Carol Kavanagh nearly died as a result. These mishaps disregarded, Jargalan had really liked the landscape painting they had produced on the way and offered to sponsor a trip to Arkhangai the following year. This was how we were sent out (the foreigners paying their own participation, of course). Along with Ana Rewakowicz and myself also an architect acquaintance of Ana's, Gregory Cowan from Perth and lately London, joined in.

There were parts of this trip that most of the others and I supposedly enjoyed, but for the most part I found it very strange. Jargalan had made a schedule for them with each and every mountain and valley she wished painted itemised. Then we drove looking them up, the Blue Sun painters would crowd out of the car with their stencils and paints and paint the given mountain/valley, what not. This went on for ten days.

A quite late diary note I wrote states that my stomach is upset all the time, my skin is burned and I don't want to see one more green mountain ever again.

There are a few positive reminiscences as well. One evening as we set up camp someone found a potato ground behind a winter shed and for the evening meal we roasted potatoes on open fire. The next morning was a painting morning and I settled on the hillside to read Foucault, as I do not participate in the practice of '*plein air*' painting in any way. I had one burned potato (too burned to eat) by my side, beautifully black and mysterious. Then Dalkha came by and gave me an Edelweiss flower. They come in hoards in Mongolia so the connotation is not like in Switzerland, but still the com-

83 Included in the video material in the *Bare house. Ulaanbaatar –At the Building Site* publication (2014).

bination of a burned potato and a white Edelweiss 'spoke' to me somehow. Looking for a suitable background, all I found was the book I was reading. This situation later became the image '*Potato, Edelweiss, Foucault, Fly*'. When photoshopping the image for printing I also noticed that besides the fly there was also an ant. First, I wanted to 'stamp' it away, but then I did not and have grown quite fond of the ant since.

The other intriguing incident on the trip was an afternoon we stopped by a family to cook in their *ger*. It is customary that all travellers are welcome to any *ger* at any time in the countryside and if not given food then at least given the possibility to cook. We started chopping our vegetables and meat and all was quiet and nice. The yard was filled with cheese and aruul in production. The dogs were lying by the *ger* walls quietly. Then suddenly there was commotion all around. We got out and saw two very drunk herders riding towards the *ger* and at the same time a huge truck with an extension car in full tree trunk load passing by. There was such a strong sense of absurdity in the air it was difficult to believe it was actually happening. One of the drunkards was the husband and he came in to the *ger* and continued to drink. Then the wife started to argue with him. And there we were all nicely in a row on the bed watching on. After a while the couple went outside. A bit later as the *ger* was getting very hot I also went to the yard. The children of the family were lying on sacks of something by the side all keenly watching their parents having a fight in the middle.

It gave yet another lesson on privacy and generosity.

2009

Ana Rewakowicz at Blue Sun Contemporary Art Society, Pori AiR, and the Gobi

In 2008 Canadian artist Ana Rewakowicz came to Pori residency for six months. To begin with we travelled to Mongolia with the Trans-Siberian. This time in 1st class and had a lot of lovely food, bought from all the babushkas on the platforms through Siberia: smoked fish, berries, pastries. Arriving in Ulaanbaatar was a different story. Blue Sun had organized a flat for us not far from the centre. It was owned by an elder Mongolian man actually living in Germany and just coming home every now and then to drink with his friends. The place was cluttered with junk, empty vodka bottles

and loads and loads of dust and sand. We spent a few hours cleaning equipment shopping and as we came home Ana stood in the middle of the chaos and said: "It will take months to get this up to standard!" Standards or no, we lived there for a month.

Ana grew up in Poland, of Ukrainian parents. She eloped to Italy in her early 20s and from there to Canada. She was a great asset to us with the shopping, speaking Russian, but she did not like it. The first few days in Ulaanbaatar she dressed entirely in white and sat at Café Amsterdam with her laptop. I thought this was not boding well, but quickly Mongolia charmed her too. As we finally left Mongolia and stood at the bus stop from Helsinki Airport to Pori, she sighed deeply and said it felt like all the colour from the world had been drained away. After Mongolia it does feel like that, every time.

Ana and I also travelled to Sainshand and the Khamryn Khiid Monastery in company of Dalkha. We three walked around the monastery grounds for a long time. Quite at the beginning we met with a group led by an elderly man. He came up to us and asked Dalkha if he was the famous Yo. Dalkh-Ochir. Yes, he was. We strolled on and met with the group twice more. On the third time the man introduced himself to be Tsagaanderem, the director of the Danzanravjaa Museum in Sainshand. He also told that meeting up with us thus three times in this magical place made him feel that it was a sign. He had had a dream of a silver man accompanied by two foreigners. He invited us to his tourist *ger* camp (which proved to be the same *ger* camp in the desert as we had stayed in 2006 with Sam Nixon).

Next day he took us to the Magic Mountain and for a walk in the desert. It was burning hot and wonderfully empty. As we strolled along, he told us that he had a feeling that the four of us were reincarnated disciples of the Noyon Khutagt (Dazanravjaa was one of the reincarnations of Noyon Khutagt) and now we were again walking together in the same landscape as long since. That was just how it felt like to me too. Home. In the right place. All well. Peace on earth. I am not very prone to mystical feelings or beliefs, but this I believed and felt absolutely.

Taking the local train back to Ulaanbaatar for ten hours without seats and then the taxi drivers pulling your sleeves and shouting their lungs out at the station, was a drastic change from the serenity of the desert.

But we survived Mongolia and we survived the autumn in Pori. We had our differences of opinion over several matters. One of interest here was the workshop Ana was supposed to have for the Blue Sun artists. At first she wanted to have a felt making workshop. I doubted it would be of great interest for the Mongolians as they have grown up with it. Maybe something unusual for them? Then she had an idea of having a plastic sculpture workshop. Plastic and inflatable sculptures really being her specialty. The workshop was much enjoyed and Ana made a work of her own as well that was

31 Buddhist/Shaman Altar (the Ovoo was further up the hill, but denied for women) at the Magic Mountain, Dornogovi, 2008
32 Ana Rewakowicz & Annu Wilenius: *24 HRS Air-Cleanser, on the roof of Sampo-Rosenlew factory*, Pori

exhibited at the Blue Sun gallery. Back in Pori we continued from this. The plastic. Something completely unknown to me. We made two collaborative works and held a workshop ending in an exhibition at Generaattori Gallery in Pori. In these works, our major points of difference were that Ana genuinely wished them to be functional, saving the world, and I thought the poetic gesture towards that intention was enough. In our plant incubator the water did not rise into the balloons and in our air cleanser the plants died.

Inspired by her time in Mongolia, and especially seeing the whole-family-on-a-motorbike and the home-packed-up phenomena she created her work of a self- supporting home unit for the *Bare house. Pori-Rotterdam-Ulaanbaatar* exhibition.[84]

84 See Ana Rewakowicz in *Bare house. Pori-Rotterdam-Ulaanbaatar* publication, 2011

33 Danzanravjaa's Re-incarnated Disciples: Annu, Dalkha, Tsagaanderem, Ana, Khamryn Khiid, Gobi, 2008, photograph probably by our tour guide.
34 Baby camel, Vicky the dog, Tsagaanderem and Ana in the Gobi, 2008
35 'Green' Gobi (it had rained for a few nights and all the sand turned green), 2008
36 'Normal' Gobi, 2008

Vienna–Pori-Ulaanbaatar–Zavkhan All Summer Long

The summer of 2009 was a time for Bare House preparations in many ways. Oula Salokannel and I built our log raft and sailed down the Kokemäki River filming material for our work for the exhibition. Aletta de Jong came for her residency period to Pori AiR and visited Villa Mairea. She was very inspired by the nature-architecture connections in Alvar Aalto's and Maire Gullichen's thinking and applied for a permission to film there. After many phone calls and reassurances that the work was not commercial and not snide towards the 'heritage', the permission was given, but unfortunately Aletta had to leave for personal reasons and what later became of the work was something quite different. As for visiting Mongolia, Christine Saalfeld with her partner Bart van Lieshout, joined me on the train journey from Moscow to Ulaanbaatar and we stayed six weeks. Prior to leaving for Mongolia, I participated in a very intriguing conference in Vienna.

Along the Great Wall Conference and the Bayanzurkh Article

In May 2009 Erich Lehner, a professor at the Technical University Vienna, Institute of History of Art, Building Archaeology and Restoration, organised a conference *Great Wall – Architecture and Identity in China and Mongolia*. Dr. Lehner had been the person who originally arranged the study trips to Mongolia participated by Melitta Kuglitsch, the archaeology student and Michael Fürst, the architecture student, with whom I had made friends with and interviewed people in the *ger* districts in 2007. As we had many common interests Melitta and I decided to submit a presentation and article together based on our interviews and photographic material in the Bayanzurkh *ger* district. This article was titled *Neighbours and Gardens: Social and Environmental Change in the Ulaanbaatar Ger District on Bayanzurkh*. It was later published in the conference publication with the same title as the conference. Michael and Martin Sumner, the architect involved in the 2007 projects, made presentations and articles of their own.

This conference was very interesting and informative in many aspects. One was, of course, the China–Mongolia relations. There were eight presentations on Mongolia, of which six were by Western researchers/architects/artists and only two by Mongolians, an architect based in Ulaanbaatar and an art historian/artist living in Vienna. Presentations on China were dozens

and dozens, also the Chinese audience was plentiful. We, who had Mongolian connections, formed our own very small community during the conference days, which was very comfortable and gave good discussions, too.

As such the emphasis on China was nothing unexpected. What was more of a surprise to me was the reaction that our presentation got from many architects and architectural historians. Besides the 'paper' we showed a slideshow of photographs I had taken in the Bayanzurkh area during the past two years. It was all very straightforward documentation of living conditions. What several of the people coming to talk to me afterwards were surprised, and grateful for was, in their words, that the images were not showing problems to be solved, but the aesthetic that the people had created for themselves living there. There was some variation in how this was expressed, but it was clear that they had not seen a 'slum' lovingly photographed before. This I thought was something great to have done. This possibly brought forth differing ways visual artists and architects see their environments. I was not out there to design anything better. I was there to understand what was there.

37 Adya's conservatory room, an earth cellar in Undur Ulaan, Ulaanbaatar "metro": The Bayanzurkh article discussed issues of growing plants and digging the ground (disturbing the peace of the ground) traditionally not done in Mongolia.

From Berlin to the 3rd World

In July Christine Saalfeld, Bart van Lieshout and I boarded the Trans-Siberian train in Moscow. They had already had a bit of travel problems as they had come from Berlin via Belarus and no one had told them along the way that they needed separate visas for Belarus and Russia. So, they stepped out from the train, spent a day visa hunting, boarded the train again and arrived in Moscow in time. We all three boarded the Trans-Siberian without any trouble and all along the way there was only some hard feelings between the carriage attendant and Bart who insisted meditating one hour every morning in the middle of the common carriage corridor, just where the attendant wanted to hoover.

The real troubles began at the Russian–Mongolian border. For some reason the Dutch Mongolian embassy had given them only a two days' visa although they had stated in their papers that they were taking the train. The train takes five days from Moscow, so you want to have the visa at least for seven days, in case. When reaching the border and having an invalid visa you can buy a new one up to three days from the expiry date. That had long gone by then. First there was no language to make each other understood – then there was an interpreter and I had called Tuya in Ulaanbaatar to speak Russian with them and with this translation 'equipment' we understood within an hour or a bit more that they wanted Christine and Bart to go to the nearest airport and fly back to the Netherlands. It took quite a bit more translation to get it through that this was absolutely what they would not do. And finally, a different solution was found: They only needed to travel back two hours on the local train to reach the nearest administrative town and apply for new visas. This would take about two days and then they could board the Trans-Siberian again. And that's what they did.

Jay Koh's Open Academy project had been active in the spring and they still had an apartment rented in the centre of Ulaanbaatar. After the residency artists had left Dalkha, the manager, was living there, but as we came Jay Koh had promised it to us. So settling in was very simple in regard to accommodation. Other difficult issues surfaced soon enough though. Neither Christine nor Bart had ever been to a 'third world country' and as they are very socially conscientious people they both headstrong ideas about coming to help. In minor scale this was giving money to beggars (mostly children) on the streets, but also wishing to possibly work in an orphanage or something of the kind while being in the country. As to the beggars the only 'advice' I could give was that it is better to give food instead of money, so even if the kids would take it to their most probably alcoholised parents, they might be induced to rather eat it than to sell it further.

As to the orphanage they were independent in finding their 'answers'. They contacted an orphanage to go for a visit. Luckily there was a Dutch woman there who had been working in the institution for ten or more years. She took them around and as they wondered how empty it seemed – having assumed there were loads and loads of orphaned or deserted children – their 'guide' started telling them about Mongolian children. The gist of it was that they grow up on the streets and *ger* districts, wild and free. They feast on adventure on a daily basis. As an alternative warm food, warm bed and classes day after day are just not alluring enough to keep anyone in the institution, at least not as long as the weather is warm enough. I was not present so I don't know more of what she said, but Christine and Bart came home somehow chastened from their will to help. Not that they would have lost the good intentions, but they understood that it was all much more complicated than they had imagined. This kind of disillusionment can be said to have been quite common in these exchanges.

Probably also for the Mongolians coming to Europe for the first time.

Art Camp and the Exhibition at Xanadu

That year the Blue Sun Art Camp was organised again and traditionally held at Undur Ulaan, the green mountain by the lovely River Orkhon. It was six days in the flaming heat without any shadow at all. Most years the Blue Sun had rented a *ger* or two to set up – and a ger always has shadow and coolness – but this year it was all nylon tents.

Also, unlike most years there was a bigger project happening: B. Mashbat had planned a performance work to be released on the motorway and be filmed. The work was called *Khadak*, meaning the Buddhist blue scarf used to mark prayer and fastened to anything in Mongolia. Mashbat's project was to nail hundred khadaks along the middle of the motorway. This was to commemorate his brother who had died in a car accident in that stretch of road many years before. Everybody on the camp participated. They nailed khadaks, talked to passing vehicles and the police who decided that this was a project to protect. I filmed – and later edited the film – as the khadaks first were nailed onto the road, then taken off and driven to a sacred valley of very old larches and all the hundreds of them tied to the trees. It made a beautiful film (which was also shown at a video screening at World Tango Art Festival in Tampere, Finland in 2012).

Christine loved being in Undur Ulaan. I think the wide-open spaces without trees or buildings anywhere were a great experience for her. She, assisted by Bart, made work after work after work using white A4 paper and tape. She made her tent of paper, a tree to go with it and then she made clothes

38 B. Mashbat: *Khadak*, performance and video, 2009

for both of them and they took a walk. It was a great utopian project somehow: starting from a 'clean slate', the white paper, such a cliché and still so inspiring. She also made spatial installations with the A4s.

I have never liked being in Undur Ulaan. It's too hot, too limited despite its vastness. I don't like land art, I cannot do it, never could, never wanted to. And I cannot stand direct sunlight, too much. Having no shadow about my project naturally turned to the idea of shadow. There were plenty of trees on the other side of the river, but no way to get there, as the stream was too strong for swimming. As I had just spent most of my spring and summer thinking of the metaphorics of 'raft' and building a raft, what I started to think was some kind of bridge or rope-supported raft to cross the river. I had brought many kinds of ropes with me and I set out to try what would be possible. I tried to swim across with the rope, but that was not possible. After having spent a day trying, I was exhausted and left the rope beside the rock on the riverbank. The next morning it was, of course, gone.

Then I started to walk the riverbanks to find a lower place to cross and in two days I had found one. By then I had, however, given my tripod for someone else to make better use of. So I needed to construct a new tripod for my video camera to document my crossing. There had been a great flood and many tree trunks were littering the riverbank. I took some branches and

39 Christine Saalfeld & Bart van Lieshout: *Works with Paper*, 2009

made a tripod, then took off my socks and used these to fasten the camera. This worked brilliantly. I crossed the river, entered the woods, gathered a sapling to bring over – all quite smoothly before the abundance of mosquitos drove me pretty quickly back to the scorching sun. Coming back to the Undur Ulaan side I planted the sapling carefully, though I could have spared that trouble as goats probably ate it before we reached Ulaanbaatar (60 km away).

This Art Camp resulted in a – more proper than I'd ever seen – exhibition at the Xanadu Art Gallery. Most, if not all, of the Blue Sun members made new work; there was some money to print documentation photos of all the works realised on location at Undur Ulaan. Christine made a paper sculpture of a 'Mongolian' mirror-toiletries set, Chinbat a string installation of the time passing by the sun/shadow, Dalkha something on export-import with sacks of sand and metals mounted in plaster bases. I participated with a documentation (photos and text) of my crossing the river project with the title *Circumstances*. As Katrin Hornek visited the exhibition she exclaimed: "This is so wonderfully Western thinking!!!" Possibly she thought that because it was conceptual work in a very different fashion than what the Mongolian artists mostly made.

40 Annu Wilenius: *Circumstances – Greetings from the Other Side*, 2009

Western Mountains and the Gobi Desert (from a Dutch Point of View)

The art camp and its exhibition 'survived', I thought it was time for all of us to get to the countryside and dwell in 'real' Mongolia. The best I could imagine was a trip to the Western mountains to Ganzug's home to see for myself all those mountains he had painted and kept on talking about. As I thought this would be a great treat to Christine and Bart as well I suggested it to Ganzug, who was hectically happy about it, as well as to Christine and Bart, who were dubious. They wanted to consider and check things out. It was a big plan, I admit. The trip is 1200 kilometres one-way through Mongolian country roads and staying with Ganzug's nomadic family. It was expensive and tough, but I also imagined, the most poetic possibility easily to come anybody's way.

We discussed and discussed, but this was not what they wanted. My next trip idea was to go to the Gobi, the desert and then Khamryn Khiid, which is a very famous monastery built (commissioned) by the lama Danzanravjaa. I had visited there twice before and it is very magical. This we at first agreed on and the Mongolian artists started to make arrangements getting a car with a driver etc. Then it dawned on them that even Gobi was far away and to reach Khamaryn alone would mean eight to ten hours in a car. This was not what they wanted: to sit in a car. It took me a long time to understand, as sitting in a car for numbing number of hours is what travelling in Mongolia is all about. Bart said that he had imagined that to get to Gobi it would take about three hours. This was the moment when the scales fell from my eyes: In the Netherlands the longest train travel you can take from Groningen to Maastricht (or something like that) is three hours. So, if this was the scale, then of course, everything was out of bounds.

Christine and I had quite severe exchange of opinions on both distances and translation arrangements as well as about payments. I love travelling in Mongolia; the jumpy, dusty UAZs are a great love of mine and all the other discomforts on the way have never bothered me. I am also very flexible about food and rather like Mongolian cooking, which sets quite some challenges for vegetarians like Christine and Bart at the time. I had also always thought that since I get Arts Council and other grants to come to Mongolia to do projects the only fair thing to do is to spend what I can on the local artists whether it was travel costs or drinks. Also, I had never experienced the lack of common language as a real problem. Of course, it made a lot of things difficult and slow and you had to have a different kind of patience and presence to understand what was happening around you, but I never thought it was the Mongolians' fault or their lack of some kind. Chris-

tine, on the other hand, found it meaningless to spend time with people she could not have a (meaningful) discussion with.[85] She found it exasperating that she would pay the travel costs of people who could not even speak to her – or would not arrange an interpreter. These are difficult issues and I have no idea how I would have reacted if we hadn't had Sam Nixon, the Australian guide, to give us a soft landing to Mongolia in 2005 and 2006.

Christine and I had quite a tiff and then agreed that we had differing ideas of how we wanted to travel and what we wanted out of being in Mongolia, so they made their own travel arrangements and I agreed with Ganzug and Enkhbold that we would travel to Zavkhan, Ganzug's childhood home, just the three of us. This plan gave rise to a new source of resentment. Dalkha thought I was being 'autocratic' and just using my simple power of having money to go wherever I like and to do anything I liked. Having for so many years participated in the Blue Sun organisation's Art Camps and other travels, exhibitions and seminars and having organised quite a bit of them, paid a huge part of them and brought many international artists into their practice, who also paid their share in the activities, I did not think this fair. Never ever in my own opinion was I pressing for what I was interested in, just doing it on the side and promoting their possibilities. Obviously, we ended in quite a squabble as well. But I knew this was what I wanted, even if it was the last thing I did in Mongolia – and so off to Zavkhan we went.

Zavkhan and Mongolian Elegance

For the Zavkhan trip with S. Ganzug and T. Enkhbold (Zug(ee) and Boldo(o)) we travelled by Korean minivan from Ulaanbaatar to Uliastay City for thirty-five hours non-stop. The van was totally filled with people, to the brim. In the middle we sat with knees interlocking and falling on each other to sleep. It was surprisingly comfortable and all right. Then in Uliastay we rented a jeep with its driver Pemba to drive around a mountain range and end up in Zugee's home valley near Songino.

Mongolian roads being what they are – there is an atlas called the roadmap of Mongolia, but the truth of the matter is that there are extremely few roads, and a lot of tracks – it is understandable that people's relations to

85 Now, years later, I am maybe not so absolute that it is not necessary to have a common language, or at least to a great level. It is possible to work with little language, but of course it is quite tiring. There are also many other things in different cultures that make communication difficult. Even if you have language enough, for example, as I have said elsewhere, in Mongolia you don't say anything if what you have to say is not positive. So problem solving can be very trying indeed. Then again people who have to discuss, analyse and re-analyse, contest, and discuss a bit more can also be quite tiring.

41 Mongolian minivan travel comfort on the way to Zavkhan, 2009
42 Pemba's Jeep by Khar Nuur

their cars are utterly important. Some families still move between their seasonal camps by yak carts and horses, but most people try to invest in a truck or a tractor to move about.

The Jeep and Pemba with it were superbly wonderful in the countryside. There was also a 'funny' moment realising what the Jeep meant for Zugee. We arrived late in the evening and the next morning we all slept late, but Zug was in a hurry to go and visit his brother a bit further in the valley. He wanted to go with the Jeep, so I thought it would be at a certain distance. Pemba, however, was still deep asleep and we didn't have the heart to wake him. Zug tried to start the car by himself, but didn't manage.

He doesn't really drive, or have a driver's licence. After trying a good while he banged the door and said: Ah, we walk then!

I had no idea of what distance we were talking about, but kindly trekked behind him up the hill – and was mightily surprised as it was just over the top of the nearest hill, some 300–400 meters away. I am sometimes a bit slow, but it did occur to me that he had wanted to impress his brother by driving into the *ger* yard with the Jeep. As it dawned on me I couldn't help laughing out loud and teased him about it. Not that he found it funny at all.

Long before that happened, we drove around a mountain range to see a bit of sand dunes and a few rivers on our way to Songino. During these days I witnessed a wonderful range of everyday life inventions using whatever happens to be at hand. At one lake I saw a herder stepping on two horse skulls on the muddy lakeside to wash his hands without smudging his shoes.

43. Mongolian Elegance: Horsehead stepping stones (the lakeside was very muddy) and improvised lunch with herders, somewhere not far from Songino, 2009.

Beautiful. Then as we stopped seemingly in the middle of nowhere to cook lunch, we were first joined by four herders and a bit later a dog. We had just prepared food for ourselves and had no extra utensils to serve the food, but it mattered very little. Boldo and Zug cut plates out of plastic bottles and carved chopsticks out of twigs – and the food was shared between the seven of us.

When we were cleaning up and about to leave the dog stayed watching us very keenly from a distance, too scared to come closer. Then Zug took a piece of plastic wrapping from some of the food stuffs and made a hole in the ground and poured the remaining soup into it, so the dog could have it after we left. Inspired by these – and many other similar incidents – I started to form an idea of Mongolian elegance in my mind.

We visited Zugee's family's winter camp place first, then the village of Songino and finally we arrived at the summer camp of two *gers* in a lush, green valley surrounded by peaky mountains. Zug had not visited his parents for two years, so the event was very important to him. I could not imagine not seeing my mother for two years and witnessing the moment of coming home was very touching. But it was amazing how quickly the hugging and sniffing (Mongolians don't really kiss, they take in the odour of the other) went on to cooking and playing chess; homely, ordinary, comfortable, in minutes.

I was the first Western person ever to have come to that valley and the family kept on wondering at my eyes, mostly the eyes. The colour… Only goats and wolves have blue eyes… and they are so big…aren't you getting mosquitos into them all the time, etc. We had some lovely yogurt. The Mongolian way to eat it is by drinking and then licking the bowl. Zug's father had been to St. Petersburg a couple of times on Communist Party matters and knew that Westerners eat yogurt with a spoon and told the mother that I should be given a spoon. She responded that I should eat like any Mongolian. My Mongolian is not very good at all, but this much I understood of their conversation.

Later several aunts and uncles came by and we ended up playing canasta. As amusing and exotic as I had found the family's first reaction to my appearance, the canasta game reached a limit. I used to play a lot of canasta as a teenager and am rather good at it. But a twenty years' break means you need to think a bit – and this the 'family' could not 'understand'. They played every day and they had never met anyone who was not 'like them'. I played very well, finishing the game twice, but I was too slow for them, so they kept on tugging at my cards. After three rounds I had enough of it and walked out of the ger in to my (hired) jeep and read Nietzsche for two hours – and felt a lot better afterwards.

44 Ganzug with his mother in Zavkhan, his childhood home near Songino.

The journey to Zavkhan was one of the most poetic, intensive and probably also in many of its aspects challenging travels I have ever made. Returning, first to Ulaanbaatar and then to Finland, I felt I was somehow only half present, half of me remaining in a separate time. Having experienced Zavkhan and Zug's family I felt I had touched if not been part of, or as such understood anything deeply essential of their life experience, but still I had sensed it and it had made me feel something, reflect on the self–world relation, and its difference for them and for me.

2010–2011

Bare House: Pori – Ulaanbaatar – Pori

2010

Residencies at Stichting Kaus Australis & Residencies at Pori AiR

In preparation for the Bare house exhibition the idea was that all of the artists and architects would do residency periods in Pori in order to produce new site-specific work. I was working as a lecturer at the Aalto University Department of Art and Media in Pori at the time, and was also responsible for the coordination of the residency program there. So I neatly organised all the artists and architects involved for residency periods there. These were very different in length. Ana Rewakowicz stayed six months, during which we made a trip to Mongolia for six weeks, Sonia Leimer and Christian Mayer stayed a month as did Aletta de Jong and Christine Saalfeld. The Mongolians came just before the exhibition for a month. And everybody came for 2 weeks for building up the exhibition in May 2010. Michael Fürst and Gregory Cowan, the architects, came to give lectures separately from the exhibition time.

Before these residencies I had also arranged two of the Mongolian artists, Enkhbold and Ganzug, to go to a residency at Stichting Kaus Australis in Rotterdam. This is a residency where I first went to in 2004 and fell in love with it, and its hosts. I had been there almost every year since then for some time at least, so it felt like the best gateway to Europe for Mongolian young men who had never been outside Mongolia. Kaus Australis is a very special place. It's a huge hall built of concrete slabs, thin walls and iron wiring, but inside it has incredible warmth and spirit. I helped Boldo and Zug make their applications. At the time they had not yet done so very much, but Dalkha, the Blue Sun director at the time, and I thought they had good young spirit and genuine interest in doing things differently. So the applications went off, and came back with a denial. Chris from Kaus Australis mailed me saying that maybe I should be in contact with other institutes in Rotterdam who 'deal with ethnic' cases. I was furious. I had worked so hard at getting those 'not so currently actual artist' to come to Finland and have exhibitions and get grants etc. etc. and then when I had another pro-

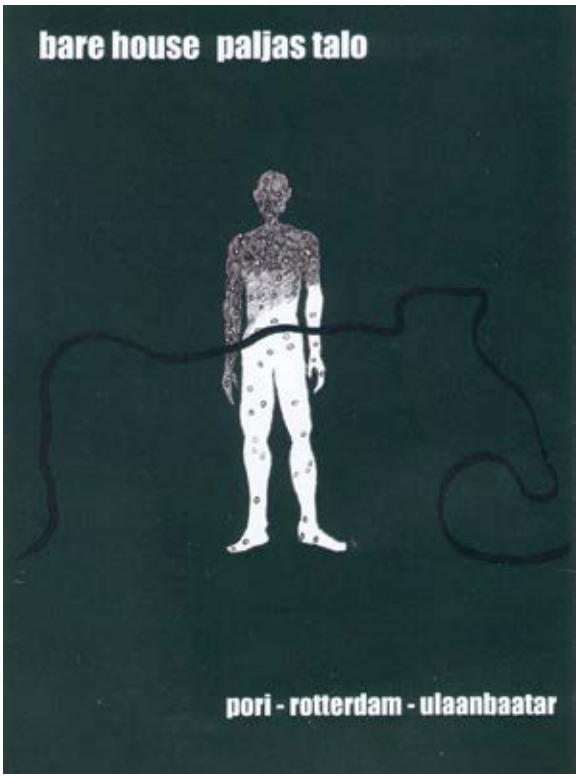
ject than them, this was the answer. I called Chris and told him exactly what I thought of it all. He said they had not understood that it was actually my project… and they would consider it again. Enkhbold and Ganzug may be obtained these residencies on my connections, and not on their current artistic merits, but later on they have both had much more successful international careers than I ever shall. In the end they were very welcome – and when they were actually there everybody loved them to bits.

Ganzug and Enkhbold were in Rotterdam for three months. I visited twice for two weeks at a time. They made many new works and found it amazing to have such a huge working space for themselves, money to buy food and working materials, people interested in what they were doing. It was a great time. We also made Mongolian dinner at the end of December 2009 which was made particularly special because of a snowstorm that put a stop to almost all traffic in Rotterdam. Still people came, walking through the snow or waiting for hours at train stations. And Zug and Boldo made several hundreds of buuz, a Mongolian style dumpling. I made the Russian salads.

Bare house, Pori

The process of the exhibition in Pori started with curator Laura Köönikkä. She was interested in working together with the Aalto University Department of Art and Media in Pori, and my project was an obvious choice, as there were no others like it about. She looked at my plans for possible artists and the kind of work they were making. She was pleased, and the museum was booked for us in two years' time. This was a good beginning. At the time I was working as a lecturer of theory of visual culture and also running the residency program attached to the department. It was thus easy to arrange for all the artists and architects to come to stay in Pori. Most stayed for one month but a few for 6 months. New works were created and Pori and its surroundings well explored.

The crisis started six months prior to the opening. The museum director, Esko Nummelin, wanted specific plans as to how the exhibition would be. I told him that I could not possibly know that as most of the artists had not come for their residencies as yet and thus not produced the works that would relate to the place. Of course, I could have imagined and lied, but I could not see the point. He knew it was a residency based project and very open towards the artists. The result of this 'genuine' attitude was that we were thrown out. We were offered the backyard, a small intermediary space and a gallery space detached from the museum. It took me several days to shake the shock off and feel like alive again. After all, I had sixteen artists I had promised all sorts of things. Then Harri Laakso promised the Univer-

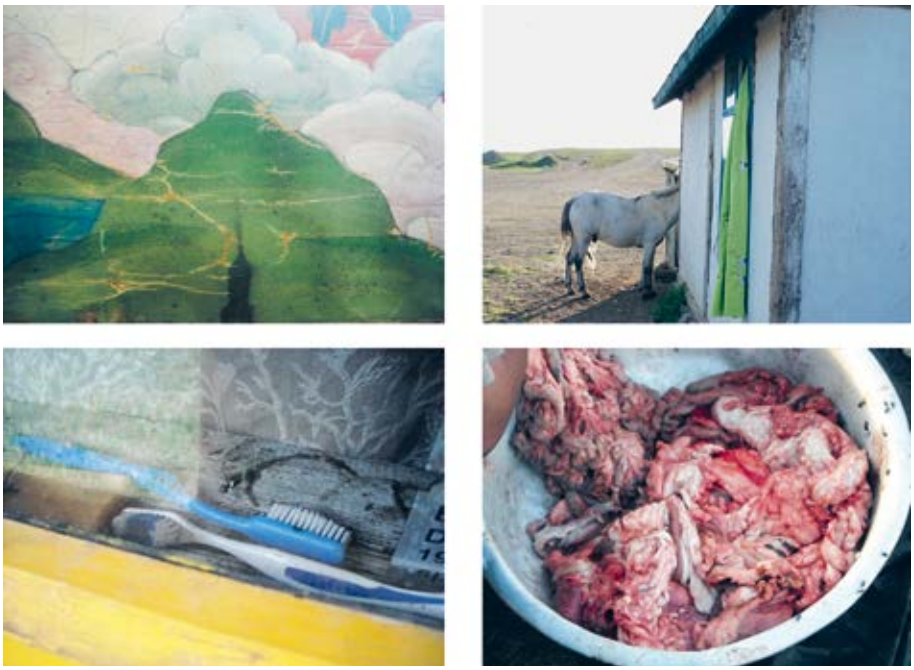


45 *Bare house: Pori-Rotterdam-Ulaanbaatar*, poster. Drawing: Chris van Mulligen, Graphic Design: Annu Wilenius, 2010

sity's studio space for the exhibition and salaries for students to supervise. This was a great solution. Thank you, Harri, again and again. Of course, it meant that the exhibition was on view for one month only instead of three.

What we really ended up in a public fight about – the museum director and I – was insurances. Maybe it is something one should forgive and forget, but it does come into the problematics of roles and responsibilities. Oula Salokannel and I placed our work *St. Isak's, Pori*, architectural miniature in a vitrine – in a small woods patch where the house had originally been. Discussing with the museum curator, Pia Hovi, she said all was fine with insurances. I believed her. Then when the work was vandalised, the museum director said that it was the responsibility of the curator, me, to place a work in such a location. We emailed about this fervently. Then he made it public writing to the University and to the City and I don't know where accusing me of pestering his curator with undue accusations and on top of that I had nearly killed several of his employees! Well, one of them, the best and only one who was doing anything at all, had got on a ladder to fasten a video projector!!!

46 Oula Salokannel & Annu Wilenius: *The Raft, the River and the Plumtree,* Pori Art Museum/Pori Puuvilla, 2010



47 Annu Wilenius: *Thoughts in / of Between,* Pori Art Museum/ Pori Cotton Mill, 2010

This charade ended with Aalto University/ Harri Laakso picking up the bill for rebuilding *St. Isak*'s. The negative attitude of the director was directly reflected on the attitude of the personnel: They did next to nothing and were mostly very unpleasant. Luckily, I had hired, on account of the Department, a technician of 'my own': the visual artist Paavo Paunu. We did a lot of crazy things to make things possible. One of the funniest situations was when we ended up stealing horse manure for Enkhbold's work. Then we really smirked at what it is to be a curator. Became a very nice work and the gallerist didn't at all oppose to the (mild) smell.

Still when it all was over I promised myself I would never ever enter Pori Art Museum again. And I haven't. There were probably many reasons why the collaboration with the Pori Art Museum did not really work. The museum director didn't obviously trust me – or Mongolians in general. The curator that had made the deal with us had left the museum quite some time before. Of course, I was inexperienced and they took advantage of it.

Besides *St. Isak*'s (2010) Oula Salokannel and I showed the *Raft, the River and Plumtree* (2010) installation at the Pori exhibition, furthermore I also showed by series of photographs titled *Thoughts in/of Between* (2009).

Nomadic Urbanism and Other Oxymorons to Learn from[86]

Essay II, publication Bare house. Pori-Rotterdam-Ulaanbaatar, 2011

Mongolia, a republic which extends over 1.5 million square kilometres of land, is inhabited by only 2.9 million people, and about 4.6 million goats and several million heads of other livestock. One of the most sparsely populated places on earth, Mongolia contains a magical mix of different landscapes as well as a mix of different ideologies and their relics. Ulaanbaatar, the capital city of Mongolia, is by no means the most comfortable place, but it certainly is immensely interesting. In Ulaanbaatar, nomadism and soviet city planning are complemented with self-organized ger districts and staggering tower blocks. For those who are not overwhelmed by first impressions, it can also provide a visionary understanding of a future. The question here is, "what can be learned from the particular way that nomads interpret urbanism?"

I first came to Ulaanbaatar in the autumn of 2005. As a group of five artists and a philosopher, we travelled to Mongolia in search of interdisciplinary, non-hierarchical, down-to-earth and self-directed research and art practice, and in order to purge ourselves of existing ideas of many things. We wanted to face something radically different from the world and the life we led at home, but to go as a tourist to a country recently on the verge of catastrophe, with poverty and extreme winters, was something quite problematic, as we certainly did not intend to go 'slumming'[87] in the 'developing' world, looking for some pre-modern, authentic way of life. What we came up with, instead, was to organise an art exhibition, and to seek contact with the local artists in that way.[88] At the opening of the exhibition, we encountered a whole host of Mongolian artists inviting us to visit their studios to see their work. In viewing that work, alongside getting our first experiences of the Mongolian countryside and pastoral nomadism, the themes of urbanism, structural change of the society, Mongolia's rediscovered history

86 An earlier version of this essay was published in a Viennese art magazine in an issue called Libertine after the font in which it was printed. (www.theselection.net/zeitschrift)

87 Slumming (derived from slum) originally referred to a practice, fashionable among certain segments of the middle class in many Western countries, whereby one deliberately patronizes areas or establishments which are populated by, or intended for, people well below one's own socio-economic level, motivated by curiosity or a desire for adventure.

88 So we put up an exhibition at the Union of Mongolian Artists' UMA gallery. The exhibition we called Here is Not There. Here You Always Bring with You.

and religion, after the seventy-odd years of Communism, combined with our own interests and culminated into exhibition exchange projects with which I have been working for the past five years.

What we encountered in Mongolia – besides steppe landscapes and tumultuous urbanisation – was, of course, ourselves. All of those thousands of miniscule ways in which we are accustomed to having our lives and environments organised – and when it is all gone, one becomes somehow naked. At first, this nakedness comes out as irritation, as to why things cannot be done properly, logically, orderly, like they should, but on further reflection, one also realises that all those things may be where you are from, but still they need not be all that you are, and that they definitely are not all there is. It is a conceptual revolution on a personal scale, a bit like the case of the black swan: until the first one was encountered, swans were by default white, but it only takes one black one to scrap that definition.[89] In Mongolia, there are no black swans to my knowledge, but there are hedgehogs with ears and monks that marry [90] – and many, many other things which allow one to realise the limitedness and cultural groundedness of one's conception of the world.

WAKING UP IN THE RUINS OF MODERNITY

In order to try to understand the ways that people conceive of life in Mongolia, I started to study the ger districts of Ulaanbaatar, by photographing and interviewing people. To my surprise, what happened to me, as I walked around listening to people's' childhood memories, was that I recognised so much of my own childhood environment in Laajasalo, a southern suburb of Helsinki, in Finland. When I was growing up in the 1970s, there were still unsealed roads and people themselves mostly built the houses in any which way they could manage. This experience of recognition was very touching. It was, however, sobered with my knowledge of what has happened to Laajasalo since then. Already some decades ago it was 'perfected' with moss-free grass lawns, standard villas and asphalted roads.[91] The same thing could be seen happening in wealthier areas of suburban Ulaanbaatar: Western

89 Black swans were not thought to exist until they were 'discovered' by a Dutch expedition in Western Australia in the late 17th century. Prior to that the term meant an impossibility, since then the fragility of any system of thought.

90 These two examples come from a hilarious exchange one night in Sainshand when a discussion of Danzanravjaa and his habits concerning drink and women were interrupted by a rustling noise at the corner of our ger. Turning on the light, we saw the cutest creature: a hedgehog with big pointy ears.

91 I later made a work consisting of the ger district photographs paired with a voice-over telling of the change that Laajasalo went through from my childhood to the present. The work is called *Of the House I Grew Up in…* and was part of the *Mongolia: Perception and Utopia* exhibition at Kerava Art Museum in 2008.

standard villas, with Western standard rubbish bins and Western standard swings in the yard for the children to play upon, the obligatory asphalt and iron-fences around, all there, though probably all made in China. Seeing this was the second moment of recognition; all those things that have made our lives so drab and limited back home are on their way. Wrong – they are already here – and soon, there will be nowhere to go where everything will not be all the same. Of course, in Mongolia, this is the second wave of standardization. The first one was the Soviet one, possibly even fiercer in its belief in the standard as the true base of equality and happiness.

But why is this happening (again)? Why aren't we telling the 'developing' world that this is not a good idea? Why aren't we telling ourselves that this is not a good idea? What is wrong? Wondering at this, I came across sociological thinkers such as Zygmunt Bauman, Ulrich Beck and Bruno Latour, who have each tried to formulate, in different ways, the idea that modernity[92] is no longer a plausible way of understanding the state of the world and us humans in it, that what we need to do now is to think again radically and profoundly question the ways we have formed our lives until now. Bauman analyses the current situation – of "impotence in the face of a new world" – as being based on a separation of power and politics. We no longer feel that we have tools to cope with the world, and this leaves us in a state of fear, and of usage of forms of life already dead. In order to even begin to repair the 'tools' one needs to realise they are broken, or dysfunctional. In other words, it is necessary to realise that the Modernist way of life – as expressed in the idea of a Modernist (Western) standard of living – is neither ethically nor ecologically sustainable.[93] It is not acquirable for anyone for a longer period of time any more, and most certainly, it is not acquirable for all the people for any remaining time we have on this planet. This realisation must be accompanied by the realisation that what we have grown to appreciate as necessities of dignified life have to change; our vision of ourselves, others and the planet cannot remain unchanged, now that we have finally, virtually, become one. Bauman summarises the idea of modernity as fear, writing: "The kind of society that, retrospectively, has come to be called modern, emerged out of the discovery that human order is vulnerable, contingent, and devoid of reliable foundations. That discovery was shocking. The response to the shock was a dream and an effort to make order solid, obligatory and reliably founded."[94]

92 Modernity as we have known it as the Enlightenment idea of progress – of development.

93 Z. Bauman: *Liquid Times. Living In An Age Of Uncertainty*, Polity Press, Cambridge, UK, 2007, p.1–2, 26.

94 Z. Bauman: *Intimations of Postmodernity*, Routledge, London ,1992, p. xi.

Beck, in his turn, calls the ideas we no longer have use for the First Modernity, and the one in which we are trying to re-formulate the relations of the planet, humans and the rest of existence, as Second Modernity. Beck describes a sense of 'boundarylessness' as a central experience of this new world, where "apparently fixed differentiations and dichotomies have become sterile, no longer providing orientation, dissolving and intermingling" and where "the historical fetishes of the state and the nation can no longer order and control the lives and interactions of human beings". In this new set of circumstances, people "must themselves find a way to redefine their interests and interrelations, among the ruins of former certainties, in whatever way makes continued coexistence possible".[95]

Latour is possibly the most radical in his terminology[96], suggesting that we actually never have been modern, that we were just caught up in an idea of modernity, never actually reaching it. [97] To speak of the state we are now in, it may be possible to use the term a-modern or anti-modern – if modern needs to come into it. In Latour's thinking, the idea of modernity culminates in the notion that things human and inhuman could be separated, that there could be an actual nature-culture divide. This idea made it possible to change the surrounding world in very radical ways, because changing something in 'nature' was not thought of as changing anything in human relations. In pre-modern cultures, which took the interrelatedness of everything seriously, such changes would never have been allowed. Instead of actual modernity, what Latour suggests we live in, is an all-comprehending, interconnected network of hybrids, mixtures of human and inhuman ingredients. In this interconnected whole, the way we form things into separate entities, concepts, is always a political act. This habit of separating things is quite arbitrary, but as such, necessary for getting on with life, because constantly questioning everything would be much too exhausting.[98] Latour writes of this invisibility or 'uncontestedness' of everyday life as the 'black boxes of our lives': the insides are intended to remain unknown – until after the 'crash'. He also thinks that we are mostly, and should be, black boxes to ourselves.[99] In other words, trusting the world is a basic need we have, for getting on with our lives smoothly. We trust that one day will fol-

95 U. Beck: *Cosmopolitan Vision*, Polity Press, Cambridge, UK, 2006, p. 8.

96 Boundaryless…This is a concept I came by accident in the Blackwell's bookshop in London. I opened it and felt it spoke to me. My professor Rajanti totally dismissed him, so later perusal to his thoughts were forgotten.

97 Namely because modernity is an impossibility.

98 Latour (1993), p. 10–12 and T.-K. Lehtonen: Lehtonen, *Aineellinen yhteisö (Material Society)*, Tutkijaliitto, Helsinki, 2008, p.113

99 Bruno Latour: *Politiques de la Nature*, Harvard University Press, 1999, p.87

low another, much in the same way as the one before preceded this one. No great change, no awareness. It is only when something does not function that we become aware of its existence at all, and that we need to readjust our trust relation anew. So, in the ruins of the idea of modernity, we are left with the task of re-evaluation and re-formation of a (good) life, but also with the task of pointing out that it is time to wake up and do so.

HAPPINESS IN A RADICALLY INCOMPLETE WORLD

As I am writing this, there is a discussion going on in television about the happiest countries of the world, and the criteria for happiness. In one listing, Finland comes first, in another one the sixth, just after Bhutan[100], and that is preceded by Switzerland, Austria etc. Besides the obvious economic standing, factors such as social connections, sense of justice and equality, as well as trust in general, are mentioned as happiness factors. The more we feel that we can trust people around us and the society we live in, the happier we are. We Finns believe ourselves to be a tough and honest people. We are also good at trusting. So were the Icelanders, which the happiness calculus some years ago placed on top. Some years ago, Iceland and Finland also shared the title of the least corrupt countries of the world. Makes one think of the good old saying that 'what you don't know, won't hurt you. ¨But it does… at least when it catches up with you. And so, the Icelandic people, who were the happiest and most trusting nation in the world, are now economically enslaved and mentally at a loss in a new world that just does not function the way it should.[101] Also, the trust of the Finns has had its fluctuations recently, although not quite on the same scale.

In happiness tables such as these, Mongolia does not fare very well. It is quite far down the ladder of world's most economically productive countries, but high up on the list of the most corrupt countries in the world[102], so what could we possibly want to learn from it? Walking the streets of Ulaanbaatar, or any of the minor towns of Mongolia, one can sense an atmosphere of hopelessness. Still, spending more time in the country and surpassing this notion, there is an attitude and elegance there that I think we could well learn from. Besides the aesthetic grounded in the virtues of the nomadic relation to material possessions – the less you have, the less you have to move

100 Bhutan is run on policies based on Gross National Happiness instead of Gross Domestic Product. See http://www.grossnationalhappiness.com/

101 Besides the obvious hardships of the economic situation also positive phenomena have emerged. For example as McDonalds and Burger King have left the country, due to too high production costs, local food businesses are turning up with recycled porcelain, 'home' roasted coffee and, one might suppose, an attitude.

102 Corruption Perception Index by Transparency International, http://www.transparency.org/ policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2010/results

with – if a tool can perform ten functions, it surely is better than a tool that can do only one, etc. – we could learn flexibility in various areas of life. How about rekindling a capacity to tolerate ambiguity, a patience to see what is there before rushing to create something new – in order to better control - or an ability to forgive and forget and just get on with things? What we could learn to be more comfortable with, is the idea of uncontrollability. The world simply is not complete, and cannot be completed. The best we can do is to learn to cope with that incompleteness and uncertainty, and make a virtue out of it.[103] I am obviously not writing this in awe of totalitarian governments any more than in nostalgic yearning for pre-modern life, but in awe of the people who have had the spirit to survive and to do it with such good spirits and style. I think that in Mongolia there has developed a particular aesthetic-existential capability that I would like to term Mongolian elegance. It is a way to cope with scarcity and chaos with grace.

Back in the TV-programme on happiness, the discussion has reached the topic of social connectivity. In this, the Finnish are not so good. But we Finns are on top of the list for nations who rely more on their friends than on their family. And we are on top of the list of single person households. In Helsinki over 60% of people live alone. To contrast this, it is interesting to compare with a few Mongolian examples: some years ago in Mongolia, Michael Fürst, an Austrian architect later to participate in the Bare house project, went to the ger districts with the question "how would the people like to have a silent room where they could be all on their own?"[104] The idea was received with some ambiguity. Silence could be related to a nostalgic idea of living out in the steppe – the ger districts being very noisy – but how to organise solitude and to what exact purpose?

Similarly, when visiting a Mongolian architect, S. Sergelen, who was showing us his plans for a new housing development with four families living in a unit forming a swastika shape, we asked with great interest why he had not divided the living quarters into rooms? His answer was that many Mongolians like to have one living space like in the ger. Here, our Western ideas of specialized spaces and privacy as the formulations of true freedom squirmed in anxiety. But could it be that the distinction, separation, estrangement of bodies, spaces and functions have not led to the happiness we intended? Richard Sennett, for one, has criticised this separation of private space in modernity as something that leaves us in an eternal adoles-

103 In similar sentiments, for example, the 2009 Rotterdam Architecture Biennale Open City had a motto: Make No Big Plans! Stating, however, that this does not mean that plans should not lack in ambition or physical size. Simply that even plans should be open-ended and not totalising.

104 For Michael Fürst's work *The Silent Room Project*, see *Bare House: Pori – Rotterdam – Ulaanbaatar* publication, p. 96–103.

cent state, coveting our own security and trust in the perfectly controlled world that we limit to a minimum, in order to be absolutely secure. In order to grow up, to be genuine, unafraid persons, we need the discomfort of other people, unknown people and unknown events. We need public space that is authentically public, meaning that we cannot choose it, cannot control it.[105]

This idealising uncontrollability in social relations also comes through in an intriguing interview scene with a Mongolian politician-poet in Katrin Hornek's film project *If Architecture Could Talk*. The poet-politician has erected a ger on top of his summerhouse in an Ulaanbaatar ger district in order to preserve the Mongolian traditions for his offspring, who live in an apartment in the city. He talks very poetically on the communication aspects of the ger; the circle means people always face each other, the one single room means it impossible to hide from one other, thus preventing people from becoming selfish and evil. For quite some time, his wife sits quietly next to him, looking somewhat sceptical. When he comes triumphantly to the end of his tirade – ("The law of democracy is a natural law in which the free movement of humanity is essential. People will go where free market prevails.") – he notices that his wife has gone, actually quite some time earlier. The scene leaves no doubts as to the wife appreciating the freedom that other rooms, other spaces, provide in this ger-topped villa.

And surely, there is much to be said for having a room of one's own – and why not a house of one's own, with water and electricity and sewage – and maybe also a car of one's own and a garden, and a gate around it… and somewhere along the line, things that may seem quite innocent to begin with become nothing of the sort.

NOMADIC CIVILIZATION AND URBAN NOMADS

With talk of globalisation and the growing mobility of humans around the globe, also talk of nomads prefixed with urban has come about. This is interesting, as these terms have long been considered uncomfortable together, if not oxymoronic.

In most societies, industrialization and urbanization have been the first cause of sedentary peoples starting to move about, but prior to this modern movement, staying put, being sedentary was seen as the basis of what is called culture or civilization. It has been thought that civilization would be urbane and technological by definition; a new technological invention from fire and the wheel to world wide web having taken humanity to its next step of development. In evolutionary theory, where cultures develop from

105 R. Sennett: *The Uses of Disorder. Personal Identity and City Life*, W.W. Norton & Company, NY, 2008, (original in 1970), 2008, p. 27–49. 21 See *Bare House: Pori – Rotterdam – Ulaanbaatar* publication, p. 90–95.

savagery to barbarism to civilization through domestication of cattle and the emergence of agriculture, the nomad was seen as categorically stuck in a previous stage of development in comparison to settled societies.[106]

In 1884 Friedrich Engels wrote: In the Eastern Hemisphere the middle stage of barbarism began with the domestication of animals providing milk and meat, but horticulture seems to have remained unknown far into this period. It was, apparently, the domestication and breeding of animals and the formation of herds of considerable size that led to the differentiation of the Aryans and the Semites from the mass of barbarians…[107]

In 1946, Arnold Toynbee, in his A Study of History, describes nomads as 'arrested civilizations', in other words, societies that had got stuck for millennia in the same stage of development, like bees or ants. To contradict these essentialising views on the nomad, David Sneath presents in his study, The Headless State, the idea that even though this view might have been plausible to hold for someone like Engels, 20th century anthropology clearly shows that pastoral nomadism is not a pre-agrarian phenomenon, but a way of life developed long after early agrarian societies in the area practiced semi-nomadic herding, and semi-sedentary societies mobilising permanently.[108]

In studying nomads in the city and in the countryside, research in Asian studies and social anthropology such as that of Caroline Humphries, David Sneath, Li Narangoa and Ole Bruun has all come to the conclusion that nomadism pervades in Mongolian existence, no matter how much their life styles are otherwise changing.[109] Humphries and Sneath make a point of distinguishing between urbanization and urbanism, writing: The city exerts its influence over large territories, and urban values may be adopted by pastoral people, whose mobility and production techniques encourage advanced and specialized knowledge. Thus, in a situation of wellbeing, urbanism may spread into pastoral communities, while settlement within a city area may in fact – particularly in economically deprived circumstances – lead to isolation and the de-urbanization of culture.[110]

Narangoa and Bruun sum up Mongolian (pastoral) history in four 'moments'; the first being mobile pastoralism under native Mongolian rule, the

106 David Sneath: *The Headless State, Aristocratic Orders, Kinship Society, and Misinterpretations of Nomadic Inner Asia*, Columbia University Press, 2007, p. 121

107 Friedrich Engels quoted in Sneath (2007), p.122

108 Sneath (2007), p. 122

109 O. Bruun & L. Narangoa [Eds]: *Mongols. From Country to City. Floating Boundaries, Pastoralism and City Life in the Mongol Lands*, Nordic Institure of Asian Studies, 2008, p.2–8

110 C.Humphries & D. Sneath: *The End of Nomadism? Society, State and the Environment in Inner Asia*, 1999, quoted in Bruun & Narangoa (2008), p.7–8.

second a pastoral-monastic society under Buddhist rule, and the third, modernisation under Communist rule. Now Mongolia has entered its fourth moment, of divided urbanism-pastoralism, "in which both the new urban citizenry and the pastoral communities are under the complex rule of a new city-based elite, international institutions and the market."[111] The city and the countryside are inherently intertwined, and people move between them, both physically and mentally. Having once moved to a city does not mean to become sedentary. Many come, and many go again. "The Mongol city has become a phase in the greater pastoral cycle, integrated as an institutionalised alternative in the pastoral economy."[112]

Also Gilles Deleuze thinks of the nomad as an alternative that combines. Deleuze constructs his nomad from the ideas of the Mongol "war machine" (of the time of the European invasion) against the "bureaucratic machine" of the sedentary village. "The archaeologists have made us think of nomadism not just as a primary state, but as an adventure, an invitation from the outside, as mobility, that surprises the sedentary peoples." To be a (conceptual) nomad is to stay outside of the code, to stay wild, in resistance, partly belonging, partly autonomous. Deleuze continues to point out that this kind of nomadism does not necessarily mean mobility in space, but mobility in intensity – and that even historically, the nomadic peoples have never been on the move in the same sense as immigrants. The nomads are the ones who become nomadic in order to stay where they are.[113]

GARDEN CITIES OF TOMORROW

In an appendix to his book Spaces of Hope, geographer and anthropologist David Harvey presents a utopia for our times, called Elidia or make of it what you will. He starts his story by telling how Ebenezer Howard once in 1888 read Bellamy's utopian novel Looking Backward and, inspired by its vision of making the existing world better, went out to look at London of his day. He was appalled by the misery – and some ten years later, wrote what has become known as Garden Cities of Tomorrow, the beginning of the Garden City Movement which inspired New Towns the world over. Likewise, Harvey goes out and takes a look at his contemporary Baltimore and is "even more appalled". What he wants to get at is that although it has become generally thought that all utopian thinking is evil and will inevitably lead to totalitarianism and disaster, to fight against a 'There Is No Alternative' mental-

111 Bruun & Narangoa (2008), p.6.

112 Ibidem

113 Gilles Deleuze: *Nomadi ajattelu (Pensée Nomade in Nietzsche aujourd'hui*, (1973) in *Autiomaa (Wasteland)* (in Finnish), Gaudeamus, Helsinki, 1992

ity[114], some visionary ideas are necessary. He writes: "It is many years now since Einstein taught us that space and time cannot meaningfully be separated… and if space and time are viewed as social constructs (…), then the production of space and time must be incorporated into utopian thought. The search is on, therefore, for what I shall call 'dialectical utopianism'." [115]

What Harvey sees as a problem, since utopian thinking has been categorically announced dead, or at least deadly, is that it has made everyone shy away from wanting to put the foot down on anything definite – just leaving things at all-inclusive 'both – and' situations that mean nothing much in the end. But to materialize any visionary thinking, says Harvey, one has to include closure, at least for the time being. The task is, in other words, to pull together spatiotemporal utopianism that is both grounded in our present possibilities, and which at the same time takes into account that "human uneven geographical developments" need to be somehow balanced.[116]

Well, I took a walk – many walks over the years – in Ulaanbaatar's ger districts and I was not appalled by misery. My hope was re-awakened by the inventiveness and sensual consciousness and connectedness of the people. Discussing seeds and seedlings for hours with enthusiastic ger district gardeners, or admiring a pensioner- forester presenting the central-heating system he designed and built all by himself to avoid the pollution from coal heating, I could not help but think that – even though these aspirations, greenery and central heating, can be seen as emblems of modernity – what makes the difference is that they have done it all by themselves. Having built their homes and planted their gardens they know, and care for, each brick and each seedling. These things were not given to them as standardized and self-evident, not as invisible moulds of personality that they would not know of or bear responsibility for.

Namely, besides the nomads moving back to the countryside with their mobile phones, solar panels and satellite antennas, another new form of Mongolian life has become evident also – in the outskirts of Ulaanbaatar. The ger districts, stretching over the hills surrounding Ulaanbaatar as far as the eye can see, have begun to be thought of as a new type of inhabitation, a semi-nomadic, semi-settled ger city, whereas due to somewhat lacking building traditions, the tower blocks have turned out to be something of a disappointment. In the neighbouring capital of Kazakhstan, Astana, the inhabitants have named the latest two housing projects as Titanic and

114 Shortened to TINA in thatcherite Britain for its over-frequent use. See A. Minton: *Ground Control. Fear and Happiness in the twenty-first century city*, Penguin Books, London, 2009, p. 9.

115 David. Harvey: *Spaces of Hope* Edinburgh University Press, 2000, p.182

116 Ibidem, p. 196

Kursk.[117] The Mongolians quite fondly call their current tallest building The Pregnant Lady – for its heavily swelling side – but at the same time, the old Russian-built quarters are the most wanted in the real estate market. Yet, the ger districts are preferred by many, because of closer proximity to the ground, one's family and the fresh air provided by their position up on the hills, but also by the growing green areas.

Designed greenery, as such, is slightly oxymoronic for Mongolia, as the nomadic lifestyle has not made gardening in general possible or desirable any more than agriculture. Mongolian tradition suggests the surface of the earth is sacred and therefore it should not be broken. This probably has a practical origin in preventing erosion, and anyway, the Mongolian ethic has a very strong emphasis on preservation of nature.[118] As part of the Communist modernisation project, parks and avenues were introduced to the cityscape of Ulaanbaatar. The first tree-planting subbotnik took place in 1925, the year after Mongolia became a Communist country. In the 1960s, Ulaanbaatar could boast of a plenitude of green parks and courtyards.[119] Current city planning includes many plans for new parks and for better maintenance of the existing ones, but water has become very scarce and expensive, and privately owned land is difficult to keep for recreational purposes. Many of the courtyards that used to be parks in the centre of the city have been built out with new high-rise buildings. As the city is steadfastly growing towards the classic problems of urban misery, the ger districts are developing green areas of their own through neighbourhood projects as well as private gardening. Even the government has acknowledged the potential of the ger districts and their greenery. From the 1990s it has actively encouraged people in the ger areas to grow their own vegetables and also other projects for re-developing the ger districts have been launched.[120]

117 V. Buchli: *Astana* in *Materiality and City in Urban Life in Post-Soviet Asia*, edited by C. Alexander, V. Buchli and C. Humphries, University College London Press, 2007, p. 65

118 34 P. W. Germeraad, & Z. Enebish: *The Mongolian Landscape Tradition: A Key to Progress. Nomadic Traditions and Their Contemporary Role in Landscape Planning*, P. W. Germeraad, & Z. Enebish 1996, p. 27

119 Interview with Mr. Daajav, architectural historian in the Ulaanbaatar City Museum, 2007. See also M. Kuglitsch & A. Wilenius: Neighbours and Gardens. Social and Environmental Change in the Bayanzurkh Ger District of Ulaanbaatar in *Architecture and Identity in China and Mongolia*, Vienna Technical University, 2010. Subbotnik is a Soviet term meaning voluntary work for the common good. Mr. Daajav who moved to Ulaanbaatar in 1938 remembers spending most of his Saturdays doing tree-planting subbotnik.

120 A. Schenk: Mongolei, C.H. Beck , 2006, p. 175 and interviews with Mr. Naragerel and others at the Urban Development Research Institute, 2008

SO

Perhaps seeing Mongolia, its urban nomads and ger districts, as something visionary is romantic slumming, and perhaps, to think that there is autonomy and a radical alternative in the ways of the (ethnic) nomads is to project judiciousness into alterity.[121] Also Deleuze's wild conceptualisation of the nomad has been critiqued, for example by Paul Hirst, pointing out that in his own writing at least: "networks are generally nested in hierarchies, nomads stick to riding camels and raiding, and the war machines run on coal and petrol."[122] Nonetheless, isn't it the creation of new concepts – trying things out in new unexpected combinations and seeing how they react – that is being visionary? Stepping out of the black box of modernity and shaking off false certainty, to face a world where things need to become different and still to be essentially based on who we are? First, I suppose, we just really need to learn to know who that actually is. So much of modernity seems to have been about becoming what we are not, and making the world around us what it is not.

In a conference in Beijing recently, I gave a presentation about nomad and modernist spatial ideals. Afterwards, a young Chinese scholar came to thank me for a very interesting talk, but wanted to ask why (on earth) "do you romanticise nomadism and criticise modernism? Here in China, we all want to be modernised, and I am sure so do the Mongolians!" What could I say, but that for the first, what I tried to say was that, if the Western way of living were the only possible way to live a good and dignified life, we would indeed be in a sad place, as there is no way all of China, for example, can live like people in the West, let alone all (nearly) seven billion of us on the planet.

There just aren't enough resources for it. Secondly, and luckily for us all, it is not the only way, it isn't even a very good way. "So?" So…

Annu Wilenius
December 13th, 2010, Pori, Finland

121 As Hal Foster has suggested as the prime sin of artists playing anthropologists. H. Foster: *The Return of the Real*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachussetts, USA, 1996, p. 175–177

122 Paul Hirst: *Space and Power. Politics, War and Architecture*, Polity Press, Cambridge, UK 2005, p. 4.

2011

Ulaanbaatar

Bare house – Ulaanbaatar

Then finally, of course, the project needed to be brought back to Mongolia for exhibition and for this purpose Oula Salokannel and I travelled to Mongolia by the Trans-Siberian train in 2011. All along the way from Helsinki to Moscow to Ulaanbaatar and then later on to Beijing and Hohhot, we saw the birch tree being the ultimately most popular decoration piece in stores and cafés. From this sprung the realisation that what we had always thought of as the ultimate symbol of Finnishness, was just as simply Russianness for the Russians and Mongolianness to the Mongolians. To ponder upon this, we built a pavilion that brought together besides architectonic elements from all these countries and their usage of birch, also extracts of films with scenes of love and war in birch woodlands.[123]

For this 'Mongolian' version of *Bare house* Oula stayed for 4,5 months, I for 6 as I wanted to experience the Mongolian winter. We were joined by Ulu Braun from Berlin for a few weeks in July and by Karin Suter and Chris van Mulligen from Rotterdam for a month in October. Oula and I rented a big flat in the centre of the city, that was what we had to offer for the others. Everything else they paid for themselves.

Bare house – Ulaanbaatar Exhibition at Zanabazaar Fine Arts Museum

There was very little money for production or anything extra. We had many meetings in order to figure out ways to get money from somewhere or to solve material needs in different ways. A lot of materials 'materialised' miraculously. Woodworks we did at a local school where Ganzug's uncle was teaching woodworks. But we also had many meetings about production where I would keep on asking this and that – and all the Mongolians would just stare at the walls. We had several of these silent meetings, more of them when working on the publication. It is a Mongolian, or Pan-Asian, belief that if

123 See Oula Salokannel & Annu WIlenius in *Bare house -Ulaanbaatar publication*, 2014, also video materials.

you say aloud negative things, you are calling them to you. So what it is best to do is to be silent if what you have to say is not positive. I, of course, found this exasperating as in Mongolia most things go wrong any way. One just mustn't mind it.

We managed with the money and materials in the end. My exhibition design idea was concrete road pavement stones and yellow electrical cords. The stones we borrowed from the company producing them; it didn't cost anything. This was organised by Ganzug. The electricity cords were from the Black market (not illegal anymore) and very cheap Korean. For video projections we had Styrofoam boards. It was not allowed to attach anything to the walls or ceiling Zanabazaar being a very historic building.

The only problems we had with the museum had to do with permissions and timetables. In Mongolia in 2011 you still installed an exhibition in an hour or two, as it was painting on strings or sculptures on pedestals. We managed to get one and a half day to install our installations. And two hours to take it all down as the museum workers were going home… Other issues were that Ganzug would have wanted to bring his goat performance inside the museum and Karin wished to use some elements from the museum's collection. The goats were very welcome on the square outside but definitely not inside the museum. Ganzug was very disappointed: he had already arranged a pastoralist to deliver him 50 goats. He understood that it didn't work in Finland, but in Mongolia… The other limitation was the museum collections. Karin was promised she could have anything she wanted, but then the morning of the opening the museum attendant came to check the vitrine (from the museum, but old) and decided it was not safe enough. So, that with that local aspect to the work.

Oula and I made an installation about birches as we had experienced them as important to all along our travel through Moscow and Siberia to Mongolia (and China).

48 *Bare house. Ulaanbaatar*, poster/flyer, 2011

49 Exhibition design: concrete pavement stones and Korean yellow electric cords.
50 Ulu Braun's, T. Enkhbold's, Katrin Hornek's and B. Kholboo's installation works.
Opposite page:
51 Exhibition info and publications.
52 Opening at Zanabazaar Fine Art Museum: *Bare house. Ulaanbaatar*, Flower Tsetsegbadam (interpreter), Annu Wilenius presenting the *Bare house. Pori – Rotterdam – Ulaanbaatar* publication. Photograph Oula Salokannel


bass house

53 Oula Salokannel & Annu Wilenius: *Ulaanbaatar Pavilion* at Zanabazar Fine Arts Museum, Mongolia, 2011

After the Exhibitions a Different Desert - Ömnogobi

In 2011 after all the official exhibitions, we travelled to Ömnogobi, the very Southernmost part of the Gobi Desert, to Dalanzadgad and beyond. This was organised by Enkhbold and the main plan was to visit his father and other family around the area. We were, besides Enkhbold, Munguntsetseg, Enkhbold's fiancée, Ganzug, Enerel, Chris van Mulligen, Karin Suter and myself. We travelled for two weeks and had the most amazing experiences, like the night we spent with the wood smuggling family.

On our trip towards Ömnogobi we kept on getting lost all the time and being late almost every night from the *ger* camps or other accommodation places we had planned to stay at. Mostly this went nicely enough as there were other *ger* camps close to any village, but one night we were driving really late in the mountains, in the dark; tired and a bit frustrated that it was again like this. Then we came to a remote pair of *gers* all on their own among the mountains.

Enkhbold went in to ask if we could stay. It is the traditional Mongolian way that all travellers are always welcome. So we were welcomed in to a cosy *ger* filled with about 7–8 people, plus the children. It became quite crowded, but lovely and warm – and the cup of vodka went around. The head of the family went somewhere with 'our' Mongolians, so for half an hour or so I needed to be the drink-hostess. It is customary that there is only one (silver) bowl and a person, usually the host or someone otherwise deemed to be in suitable position; the host/ess fills the bowl and hands it to the eldest or most important etc. holding the left hand under right elbow. When the vodka is drunk, the bowl is handed back and the ritual repeated with the next person. I know how to do all this well enough, but I felt quite uneasy as to try to figure out who of the gathered people was the eldest or somehow otherwise venerated. I don't think I offended anyone: they were just laughing at me doing 'the Mongolian thing'.

The evening was lovely, but the night turned out to be quite a nightmare. On top of the family, the seven of us were sleeping on the floor. It was freezing cold. To start with the grandfather was listening to a transistor radio that was totally out of frequency, then the parents started fighting – and at 4 am they woke up one of the children, about 6 years of age. He had to be driven to school. He started to cry and shout. He didn't want to go. It was a total chaos. Later we were told that they had to start so early, not because the school was so far away, but because they were illegally chopping wood in the surrounding mountains and needed to smuggle the lumber into the village before others there would be awake.






54 Mongolian fashion on the road: Enerel Enee, Karin Suter, Chris van Mulligen, Munguntsetseg, Enkhbold and locals.
55 Mongolian fashion on the road: Ganzug and the waterfall
56 Mongolian Roads on the way towards Ömnogovi.
57 Enkhbold polishing his boots prior to meeting his father later in the day.
58 Enkhbold, Munguntsetseg and Togmidshiirev at the Horse Monument near Dalanzadgad.
59 From the Horse Monument.
Opposite page:
60 Enkhbold's cousin's *ger* in the desert.
61 Cousin's family and the travellers: Enerel Enee, S. Ganzug, Karin Suter, Munguntsetseg, T. Enkhbold, Chris van Mulligen, Togmidshiirev.

Even after a night like this we woke up to a bright, beautiful morning. The *gers* with their equipment for all sorts of things that we could not even imagine were very interesting. And there was a very beautiful moment as Enkhbold spent a good half an hour shining his boots, as we were to meet his father later in the day.

When finally reaching Dalazadgad and beyond, the two moments that keep coming back in my memories are the Horse Monument and Enkhbold's cousin and his family living out in the desert.

At the Building Site

Essay III publication Bare house. Ulaanbaatar, 2014

BECOMING WHO WE ARE

Mongolia is changing. Of course, Mongolia has been changing particularly rapidly over the past twenty years or so – but recently, the change has taken a new turn, described by the Guardian newspaper as being a country "on the brink of one of the most dramatic transformations in human history"[124]. What it is all about is mining: opening up the once sacred surface of the Mongolian soil and divulging coal, copper, gold, uranium… The thriving economy brings a lift to most people's standard of living; still many are hesitant to be overtly positive or negative about the whole process. It is not good or bad, it simply is. Change.[125]

I first came to Mongolia seven years ago as a part of a group of artists who wished to challenge our perceptions of the world by trying out how we would experience a place as radically different from our own European backgrounds as Mongolia.[126] As much as we wished to see an alien culture, we wanted to experience ourselves as aliens. And we did – but this happened through the years in many different ways, as of course, during the process it was not only Mongolia that changed, we did also. For better or worse – who is to say one way or the other? Had we not lived the lives we have, we would not be who we are anyway. Nietzsche writes evocatively of the process of becoming oneself in *Ecce Homo*, stating that "one becomes what one is presupposes that one does not have the remotest idea *what* one is". To be able to avoid "blunders of life, side-paths and wrong turnings" would definitely spoil the process. Maybe the greatest wisdom comes precisely from the misfortunes that befall us – "they are an expression of great sagacity".[127] Knowing oneself is a practice of reflection better to be directed backwards than

124 Jonathan Watts, 2011 "Gobi mega-mine puts Mongolia on brink of world's greatest resource boom" in The Guardian, 7 November 2011 online, available: http://www.guardian.co.uk/ environment/2011/nov/07/gobi-mega-mine-mongolia accessed 6 June 2019

125 Taina Rajanti and Annu Wilenius: Travels in Time, Space and Intensity. In *International Yearbook of Aesthetics* Vol 17 2013., pp 249-260. Proceedings of the Bologna Conference 2012 "Nature and the City. Beauty is Taking on New Form." Eds. Jale Erzen & Raffaele Milani. International Association for Aesthetics. https://www.scribd.com/document/231367411/iaa-yearbook-2013-pdf

126 This project was titled *Mongolia: Perception and Utopia* and resulted in exhibitions in Mongolia, Finland and Estonia as well as a publication Hacklin &Wilenius [eds.]: *Mongolia: Perception and Utopia*, 2008.

127 Nietzsche: *Ecce Homo*, Digireads Publishing, 2009, (original in German: *Ecce homo: Wie man wird, was man ist*, written 1888, first published 1908), p. 64.

forward. We should be immersed in the experience and only afterwards take our time to reflect.

This is what the art exhibition exchange project *Bare house. Pori – Rotterdam – Ulaanbaatar* has tried to do in its way. Exchanging people and places, cultural contexts, and with them, the practices of producing and displaying works of art, we have created a semi-ethnographic-artistic process of mingling our 'becoming selves', between Mongolia and Europe. This current publication is meant both as a documentation and as a reflection of the exhibitions at Zanabazar museum in Ulaanbaatar in 2011.

BARE HOUSE ON THE ROAD

The first *Bare house* exhibition was held in Pori, Finland in 2010[128], and many of the works there were site-specifically produced to comment on Pori, its history and geography. All the participating artists and architects spent time working at the Pori Artist-in-Residence program, and two of the Mongolian artists also had a residency in Rotterdam in the Netherlands. In making a new version of the project for Ulaanbaatar, several new artists joined and created new works in Mongolia, only some of the works remained the same as in Pori – and even those were re-worked with new edits and with Mongolian subtitles. Some of these versions showed in very intriguing ways how divergent it can be to show even (almost) the same work in a different context.

S. Ganzug, who had had to give up his idea for a performance – *Museum for Goats* – with fifty live goats in Finland, due to the lack of suitable animals, was very surprised that he could not have them in a Mongolian museum either. To obtain the goats was not the problem this time, but regulations about the museum space. It was kindly offered that he could exhibit them outside on the square. This would have missed the whole point of the work. Another work by S. Ganzug was a documentation of a performance bringing windmills in the form of folded-papers on sticks to his native village in the Western mountains of Mongolia. Coal and wood being the major sources of energy these apparently childish toys, surrounding the major electricity pole in the village, could be understood as a campaign for the idea that energy could be derived from a very plentiful local source, in a way that coal and wood are not. The performance in the mountains awoke quite some wonder and criticism. Displayed as documentation in the museum it was, however, mostly not understood either as personal or political provocation.

Another work bringing together European and Mongolian views on housing issues is Katrin Hornek's *If Architecture Could Talk*. A two-channel video installation paralleling Austrians - building gers to gain real freedom from

128 Also published as Wilenius |ed:]: *Bare house. Pori – Rotterdam – Ulaanbaatar*, 2011.

housing regulations and dependence on society – with Mongolian building developers - ger district dwellers and pastoral nomads considering the probable freedoms of living in apartments. This work aroused a lot of interest in Mongolia as it mingles traditional and futuristic Mongolian values. Another piece that was reworked with Mongolian translation was my own video installation from 2008 entitled *Of the House I Grew Up in…Helsinki – Ulaanbaatar*. I had photographed ger districts around Ulaanbaatar, and combined these with stories of my own childhood environment. This seemed to be of little interest for the local audience, possibly for being too ordinary and too alien at the same time.

The difficulty of transferring works of art between places and contexts became evident in the set of cultural (mis-) interpretations that took place as T. Enkhbold was invited to Manchester for the Asia Triennial. His performance there was part of the exhibition in Ulaanbaatar also as a simultaneous video documentation. In many Manchester based newspapers, his performance of erecting his hand-crafted ger and making a performance of ritualistic gestures was well received and marvelled at for its exoticism. One of the reviews questioned, however, the relation of Enkhbold's work and its 'roots'. Critic Phoebe Chambre writes:" Enkhbold's work is enfranchised by his nomadic community, yet if 'performed' in rural Mongolia, the piece surely wouldn't be art. Enkhbold (ironically enough) depends on changing, predominantly modernised urban places to enliven his work as 'art'."[129]

It was a curious comment – as no pastoral nomad – nor any other Mongolian would recognize Enkhbold's practices as part of their daily routines – and what other reason would there be for this not to be 'art' out in the steppes? Lack of an audience? Lack of an understanding of 'art'? To contest this view on the nomads, it might have been interesting to display the restrictions the museum set for his 'nomadic' performance. These restrictions included advising against nudity, use of horse manure, burning of anything and the use of untreated animal skins. Setting these two 'performances' side by side might have created a more dynamic cultural meeting than the performance of the 'museum nomad' – dressed in white pantaloons, making EU approved, child-safe gestures, with EU approved child-safe materials. What is missing in criticism of this work, in this hyper-conscious-of-absolutely-everything fashion of European art world, as Enkhbold playing the role of the ethnic nomad, exploited or willing, is that what is truly great about places like Mongolia is that they are still (partly) wild!

129 Phoebe Chambre: *Enkhbold Togmidshiirev's Gentle Message*, The Manunion magazine, http://www.student-direct.co.uk/2011/11/16/enkhbold-togmidshiirevs-gentle-message/, retrieved on July 21st 2012.

Another occasion for a certain amount of interesting cultural-context mismatching happened with Aletta de Jong's installation *Landscaping Modernism*. The work brings together various ideas of recycling and upcycling, being both reflective and critical of (Western) consumption; it uses Dutch photographs of mountains of waste metal combined with a still life of herbs and medicine gathered from nature and set up in reused plastic bottles etc. Aletta, who has never visited Mongolia, had to cancel her trip there, so we gathered it together on site for her. Setting up this display of late urban European ideas in Mongolia, where being ingenious with whatever material you happen to have around is a centuries-old if not millennia-old art form, felt at least nothing like preaching to the converted. Rather, it felt as though there was a missing link here: that the always-new-throw-everything-away culture had not taken enough ground yet for this radical reassessment to appeal. The work made a beautiful blend of two cultures and locations, although it may have had a stronger aesthetic than ethical allure to the locals. There is, of course, also that slight uneasiness about capturing 'degrowth' in a (still recently) developing country. The misconceptions and explanations that we exchanged while making the work made it very clear that for someone who had never been to Mongolia, it is very difficult to imagine it.

These incidents of creating and displaying art works, bringing together social and material circumstances, in different cultural contexts, express the potential of art to both create experience and to stimulate debate.

WINDS OF CHANGE

I reflect on my own experience of these exchanges. As mentioned, our initial idea to go to Mongolia in 2005 was to experience something radically different from our own lives and environments, and we certainly did. At first, everything was an adventure, and there was a tolerance for the most difficult things because of the sense of an adventure, at least when it doesn't last more than two to three months. I got used to a lot of things and felt quite comfortable becoming almost Mongolian (without Mongolian language, though).

Gradually, I started to work with the *ger* districts, walk around and listen to people's childhood stories and sit about in gers sipping endless cups of milk tea and attend to garden parties with barbeques and beer – and I felt very strong recognition of my own childhood environment in the 1970s Helsinki, when my suburb was still half-designed and half-wild. Also in the Mongolian countryside I felt quite at home. I was not bothered too much about privacy (lack of) or hygiene (lack of, also) and many aspects of the nomadic households felt very homey to me. And as we stood on the Sukhbaatar Square for the 800th anniversary of the Mongol empire sipping vodka

straight from (a plastic) bottle and listening to the Scorpions (live!) playing *Wind of Change*, I certainly had no complaints.[130]

Then last year [2011] I came for the last, final, exhibition of the *Bare house* project. I stayed six months, during which time I was to organise, fund and curate two exhibitions in a museum that did not really cater to the concept that exhibitions are *built*. The usual way to make exhibitions is still based on string-hanging and pedestals, and this goes together with the idea that an exhibition is 'mounted' in a few hours. There were also many surprising moments dealing with the information, marketing and opening hours of the museum, just to mention a few issues. Of course, these are issues one should expect to be something different in a museum of Buddhist relics in Mongolia to what one would expect in a contemporary art museum anywhere. The ways in which art is framed or built to be perceived as art are very dependent on both geographical and temporal contexts. Be that as it may, these issues combined with the immensely physical fact of change in the city of Ulaanbaatar – especially traffic and queueing had become totally impossible – I became acquainted with very many parts of my European-Weberian mind that would just not budge an inch for any kind of assimilation at all. I felt myself, ultimately and absolutely, exactly what I had been legally labelled: a registered alien.

It is very easy to get – and to give – a chaotic impression of Ulaanbaatar and Mongolia. Partly I would say it is also true. There is a very different idea in this culture about, say, planning and information, for example. A common nomadic attitude could be paraphrased "Why worry about it now? Everything will be upside down tomorrow anyway".[131] But, I think, it is important and good to remember that although Mongolia is creating quite a chaos with market economy and motor traffic, just for example, it is far from fact that there would not be systems in the country that the people are very keenly and tightly tied to – and that these systems are not just theoretical but actually practiced. One of these systems is religion, which in Mongolia is a Lamaist mixture of shamanism and Buddhism – and practised by most Mongolians throughout their daily lives. There is a ritual for everything, from morning to night, and for anything special, such as cutting your child's hair or planting anything, it is best to consult a lama. Many of the hectically driving cars are decorated with solar-panel prayer-wheels. Then there are, of

130 Scorpions' *Wind of Change* is the iconic song of the 1989 fall of the Berlin wall. In Mongolia it coincided with the demonstrations of the democratic revolution on the Sukhbaatar Square 1989 – demonstrations that were followed three months later by the resignation of the world's second oldest Communist government. Friends with me in the audience said that sure some fifteen years ago it had been important to them, but now…well…

131 i.e. Humphrey & Sneath: *End of Nomadism? Society, State and the Environment in Inner Asia*, White Horse Press, Winwick, Cambridgeshire, UK, 1999, p. 306.

course, the very strong structures imposed by pastoral nomadism, which is very far from roaming the steppes aimlessly with your possessions in a haphazard bundle at your back. In a ger every item and every person has a place. And whenever the home is moved, it is moved for a purpose to a purposeful place. And above all there is the family, which is what Mongolia is all about. Urban or rural, you live the system of the family. So the chaos one experiences in current Mongolia is the chaos of very sudden change – possibly the most sudden in human history? No wonder one feels it.

CITY OF ILLUSIONS

As I returned home and once more retold my experiences to my professor, Taina Rajanti (as the *Bare house* project is part of my doctoral studies[132]), I was encouraged by her to read a science fiction story by Ursula K. Le Guin called *The City of Illusions*. She thought it would be good reading for me because it is a story of how you need to be the only, the singular, alien in order to be able to assimilate to a new culture. If you are two, you will form your own community and remain alien forever. As I read it, to my surprise and fascination, I found out that it was about much more than that.

The City of Illusions is a story of an alien – later to be named Falk – who is found in a forest on Earth some 2000 years from now. He has entirely lost his memory, and no one has any idea where he could have come from. The community takes him in and teaches him their language, culture, skills and beliefs. He becomes a full member of the community, but his origin still bothers him – vaguely as the only memory he seems to have is of a distant mountain landscape – and so finally he sets out to find out where he is from. The Earth is governed by a race called the Shing that are either alien or human pretending to be alien in order to stay in control. As Falk reaches the city of the Shing he encounters many layers of truths and in the actual city it is impossible to tell whether you are in an actual space or talking to an actual person or whether these are all just projections, illusions of different kinds – as are the 'truths' around.

In the city of the Shing, Falk finds out, however, that he comes from a distant other galaxy and that his memory has been erased. The Shing tell him that his old personality can be restored by an operation, but that this would utterly destroy his current personality. Of course Falk does not want this – so he goes through a self-suggestive meditation ritual that he hopes will enable him to reach his new identity even through the old one. And he succeeds. At first he goes nearly insane having these two entirely differing

132 For Aalto University, School of Arts, Design and Architecture with the title *Semi-detached Ger with a Garden: Experience of Self, Community and Environment through Urbanizing Mongolia*, addressing the question of art exhibition exchange as a form of research.

personalities inside his body simultaneously, but eventually he manages to balance them. And this remarkable endeavour, being two at once, enables him to finally escape from the Shing city and steal a spaceship and head towards his own planet.

What is essential here, I think, is that he can use both of the personalities and their very differing abilities and knowledge alternately and simultaneously. The old self is a space-astronomer that can program the ship to travel the 140 light years through space back home, the new Earth person has learned enough brutality not to mind the violence needed in order to escape. Still the story does not end in a final, even hybrid truth, winning the day and the entire universe finding peace at that. Besides his own two experiences and selves, Falk-Ramarren, as he is called now, takes the stunned Shing captain and another young alien the Shing have schooled to be a propaganda tool, home with him – and concludes that now they will have at least three different versions (of truths) of Earth.

In other words, the *City of Illusions* is a story about how by accident and by will power – and a lot of technology – one mind can hold inside itself two entirely differing personalities and cultures. It is also a story about how this kind of merging (though still keeping aware of parts) is essential to manage superbly in the universe. Besides this, it is ultimately a story of how both technologies and ideologies govern our being in the universe and different combinations give different results. Somehow I felt that this story expresses the idea of rising above alternatives and somehow also the intense hope of a difference that I, along with many other artists and (urban) researchers, felt that the combination of Mongolian nomadic and Buddhist culture together with latest technology could possibly be.

STRANGERS TO OURSELVES

What I am trying to address through all my stories is the different experiences that a project like this can reveal about both others (persons, cultures, cities) and about ourselves. The things and places that we belong to and don't, and in which ways this appears in different phases. We mostly somehow imagine that we have solid, whole selves, but of course we don't. We are divided. We are processes. We change. Julia Kristeva for one has made a great point of the stranger inside ourselves, the unconscious, the part of ourselves that will never be known to us, that does not belong (to any house or culture).[133] She writes of an emerging paradoxical community of foreigners that acknowledge their own inner strangeness alongside the strangeness of others – and that through this combined knowledge of 'radical strange-

133 Julia Kristeva: *Strangers to Ourselves*, Columbia University Press, 1991, p.192

ness' we might shift somewhere else.[134] And so we go in search of… positive nihilism?[135] Combinations of Western and Mongolian identities (selves and families), practices of art, ethnography, urban research etc. in order to see what is there, after being ripped off much, and then to think about what can be changed. Stressing the importance of both diversity and disparity, Jane Rendell considers Kristeva's term *diagonal axis* as the core argument for interdisciplinarity – and at least in this case, internationality. What is essential is that, in choosing to give up what we already know and by setting out for unknown lands (and practices), the "transformational experience of interdisciplinary work produces a potentially destabilizing engagement with dominant power structures – allowing the emergence of new and often uncertain forms of knowledge."[136] Rendell and Kristeva both emphasize that what is important here is not only to be intellectual and critical, but also to be emotional and political.[137]

To follow Nietzsche: it is oneself that one needs to challenge; oneself that one needs to find a new galaxy in – a new possibility of life, a new building site.

Annu Wilenius
Arabia, Helsinki July 13th 2012

134 Ibidem, 195

135 Positive nihilism can be defined as the removal of all non-inherent valuations (judgements, categories, social-logic etc.) so that immanent values can be perceived and reconstructed. Positive nihilism is not typical only to Nietzsche but also to many traditions of pagan, atheist, Buddhist and Hindu thought. (The Unpopular Truth, 2008 Online: http://penetrate.blogspot.fi/ 2008/11/nihilism-in-search-of-working.html accessed 6 Au 2012, David Storey 2011)

136 Jane Rendell: *Critical Spatial Practice: Curating, Editing, Writing*, in Judith Rugg and Michéle Sedgwick [Ed:s]: *Issues in Curating Contemporary Art and Performance*, Intellect, Bristol, UK, 2007, p.60

137 Ibidem

Epilogue Projects 2012-2016

Further Collaborations and Discussions

Finders Keepers, Mindscapes at Mänttä Art Festival

As I was invited to participate at the Mänttä Art Festival I felt at odds to be presenting work about Mongolia all on my own and felt it better to parallel my own works with S. Ganzug's works, inspired by experiencing the Netherlands with a herder's mind. The work was built into three silo bases as the exhibition venue used to be a fodder factory.

The first of the silos presented S. Ganzug's work *You Can't Cheat Sin by Flour*, which consists of three video performances realised in Rotterdam, Ulaanbaatar and Hong Kong between 2009 and 2011. Besides the videos there is an installation with sacks of flour hanging on horsehair ropes and a small mountain of flour on the floor. The title of the work is a Mongolian-Buddhist saying. In Mongolia wheat is very scarce as the nation is still partly nomadic and agriculture has not been part of the way of life.

Wheat has thus been considered as something very special and holy. At Buddhist temples – and most likely in many homes – people have been smearing all sorts of (symbolic) objects with dough in order to make it absorbe the evil spirits. Although this cleansing act has been well-meant in its initial sense of purification the saying has also become to be used in the sense that hiding away mistakes will not make them go away. In Finland we say that there is no use to wipe the trash under the carpet, in a slightly similar meaning.

Ganzug first started to work with flour during his residency period in Rotterdam, the Netherlands. One day we visited an old windmill in Overschie where a miller was still producing flour in the traditional stone-wheel-windmill-way. Ganzug, who had been making pancake sculptures for some days, was fascinated and bought a package of flour, and even had the miller sign it as the author of the flour. This made me laugh.

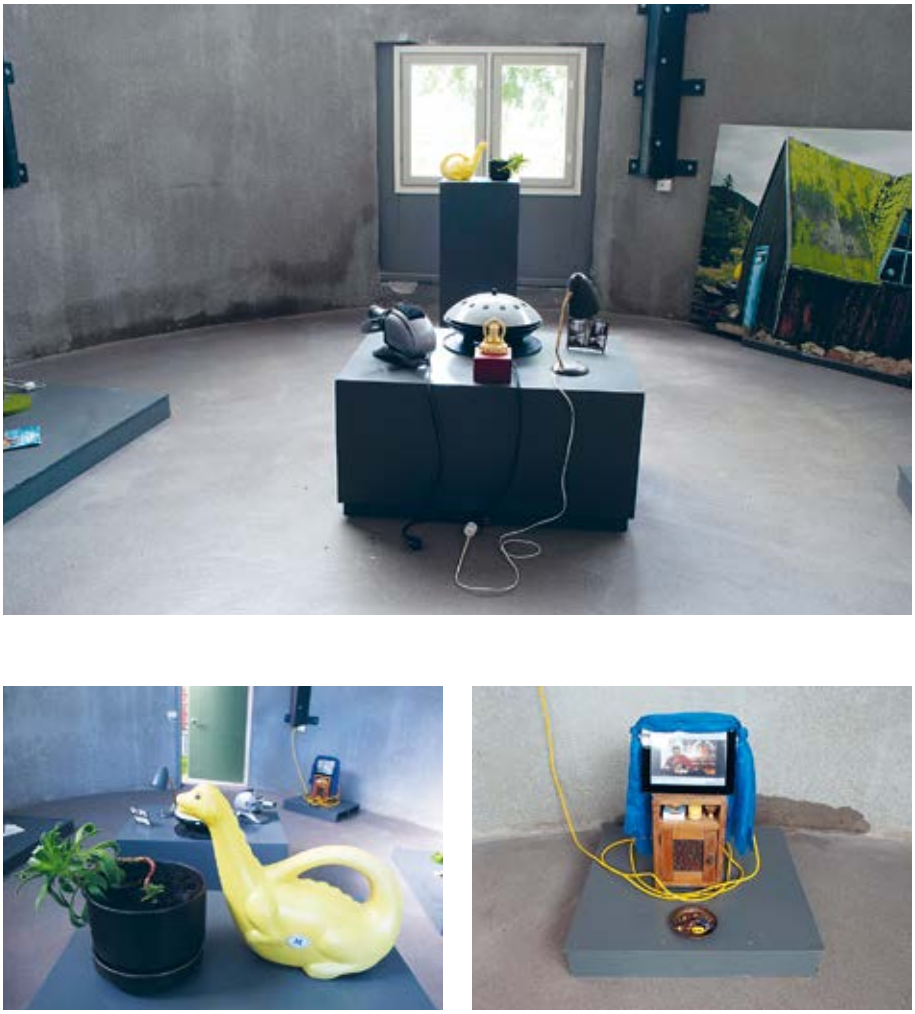
The idea of signing flour would never have occurred to me. It also made me wonder what Ganzug saw as the meaning of flour and dough. I reflected back, when still in Mongolia and Ganzug was asking me if there were fields in the Netherlands. It took me a while to understand what he meant. Crops, fields, agriculture…Right, but how could anyone be interested in

62 S. Ganzug: *You Can't Cheat Sin by Flour*, Mänttä Art Festival, Finland, 2012

that? Something so normal, so uninteresting… But of course, he stated the obvious to me: For him, coming from the mountains and herding, the idea of agriculture is very exotic.

In the second silo was placed my video work *At the Building Site – Ulaanbaatar 2007–2011*. This is a work of video material filmed in Ulaanbaatar and other locations in Mongolia between 2007 and 2008 combined with sequences of still photographs of Ulaanbaatar and some countryside trips in 2011. The film starts with a long scene of an old lady sitting outside her ger in a wide open steppe landscape. Nothing really happens, besides the wind starting to blow a bit harder and the grasshoppers chirping a bit louder. This changes into a still photo series of the 2011 new Ulaanbaatar with its gleaming golden cars, swimming pools offering hot yoga and tower blocks one higher than the other being raised instead of the old Russian built 3-story housing and *ger* districts. The photographs are accompanied by hectic radio and traffic jumble from central UB.

Then a circular scene (the camera going around and around, again and again, filming the same scene, but the activities of people changing at every turn). The location is a touristic camp just outside Ulaanbaatar, combining amazing mountainscapes and forests with very special Mongolian-Buddhist architecture. Then the film goes back to the Ulaanbaatar 2011 stills – to return to the circular filming at an Ulaanbaatar based monastery at Datchoil-



63 Annu Wilenius: *City of Illusions or How One Becomes What One Is*, 2012

in. And so different scenes alternate between countryside stillness and city noise, until winter comes and all is silent.

During these past seven years as I have worked with/in Mongolia I have made enormous amounts of video interviews with architects, town planners, historians, residents of different areas and how the city of Ulaanbaatar has changed and how do people feel about it. And although I have made some artistic works relating to urban planning in Mongolia I have used very little of this material. My idea for this exhibition was to finally take up all this tape – go through it and finally make my Ulaanbaatar film. As I started watching I felt immensely tired. I watched and watched and listened – and the more I did, the less I wanted to see and to hear; to have information or anybody's opinion on anything. I just wanted to show what was important to me. What I love in Mongolia. What makes me walk the streets and steppes again and again in my mind, and makes me feel alive. (Also what I hate in Ulaanbaatar and its change.) This I did the best I could.

In the final third silo I built an installation bringing together objects and photographs, books and a video that have all been important to me in my relation to Mongolia.

There is a Buddhist monk on a YouTube-video spiriting away bad dreams. There is a plastic dinosaur watering a plant stolen from Tsetserleg (Garden City) many years ago. There is a composition of technical gadgets from air humidifier to slideprojector, lamp to solar panel prayer wheel. Somehow I felt that this collection of items visualised the intense hope of a difference that I, along with many other (urban) researchers, felt that the combination of Mongolian nomadic and Buddhist culture together with latest technology could possibly be.

And there are two books that bring together the beginning and the end of my 'travel': Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo* and Ursula K. LeGuin's *City of Illusions*. City of Illusions is a story about how by accident and will power – and a lot of technology – one mind can hold inside itself two entirely differing personalities and cultures. It is also a story about how this kind of merging (though still keeping aware of parts?) is essential to manage superbly in the universe. Besides this, it is ultimately a story of how both technologies and ideologies govern our being in the universe and different combinations give different results. And diversity is…the only option? Based on these two books I called the whole piece *City of Illusions or How One Becomes What One Is*.

64 Oula Salokannel & Annu Wilenius: *Helsinki Pavilion*, Galleria Huuto, Jätkäsaari L3, Helsinki, 2012

Helsinki Pavilion at Galleria Huuto 10 Years AAARGH!!!

The *Helsinki Pavilion* (2012)[138] installation consisted of 16 birch tree trunks hanging from the ceiling, a *ger* sauna that we rented from Donny MacCracken (Ospace Company), and a blue rain water barrel. Inside the ger were three film clips showing scenes happening in birch woods. The films were the same as we had in Ulaanbaatar. One Finnish, one Russian and one Mongolian. As the birch we had noticed to go as a strong symbolic element through Asia

138 See Oula Salokannel & Annu Wilenius in *Bare house. Ulaanbaatar* publication, 2014, also video material.

to Finland, so also the blue plastic barrel appears to be such an element. The sauna was not on, but the stoves were there as well as wooden benches and plastic buckets. I found the *ger* sauna accidentally biking along Töölö Bay and suddenly encountered the *ger* – and Donny. It felt totally magical.

Venice Biennial & Prins Claus Fond

Besides the two above mentioned exhibitions of my own (in collaboration with Ganzug Sedbazarin and Oula Salokannel) 'results' generated by the Mongolia project could be said that Enkhbold ended up being one of the two artists participating the first ever Mongolian Pavilion in the Venice Biennial in 2015. The pavilion was curated by Gantuya Badamgarav and as associate-curator Uranchimeg (Orna) Tsultem. Ganzug participated in the unofficial sideshow, as did Ser-Odin Dolgor and Marc Smitzch. I was invited as a special guest, but had to decline due to personal reasons. I had a long discussion about it and the Mongolia project with Orna later in the summer. She was adamant that the residencies in Rotterdam had been crucial for how Enkhbold's and Ganzug's careers developed. She thought that the work I have been doing has been immensely valuable to the Mongolian artists that have participated, and for others for seeing what can be possible.[139] Also e-mailing with Gantuya, she said that just people coming from the outside and thinking of the kind of work the Mongolian artists were making (contemporary, conceptual, land art) was of interest was important – and then with the exhibitions and residencies that there were people who believed in them.[140] Makes all the difference in the world.

Then in 2016 I was invited by the Prins Claus Fond in the Netherlands to nominate a Mongolian Candidate for their Asia Award as I had functioned as their Mongolian expert at some occasions, and next year I was invited to the festivities and conference arranged in Amsterdam. This was a great honour. Dolgor Ser-Odin and Marc Smitzch were also among the invited. Marc started a Land Art Biennial in Mongolia in 2005. It is doing very well nowadays.

Publications

As mentioned along the way of this documentation, we made three publications in connection with the exhibitions. These had very different circumstances, which were also part of the research – at least the last one that was

139 Skype conversation with Uranchimeg Tsultem, 15.07.2015

140 Email from Gantuya Badamgarav, 08.02.2019

about finding out how it would be to realise a publication project in Mongolia. I shall get to that at the end, but first a very rough comparison of time and money in these projects.

The first publication, *Mongolia: Perception and Utopia*, edited by Saara Hacklin and myself, published by Kerava Art Museum in 2008 was funded by grants that we, the artists and curators, got together. The budget was 5 000 euros. The only persons paid were Uranchimeg Tsultem for her essay and John Hopkins for the proofreading and editing. It was only in English. There were four essays: by Antti Ruotsala on the effect of Mongolian Empire in the formation of the concept of Europe, Uranchimeg Tsultem's essay on modernism and tradition in Mongolian art, Saara Hacklin's essay on the relations of wolves and cities, and my essay on imagined and experienced freedom and Mongolia. The edition was 300. The book and DVD were ready three months after the opening, which we at the time thought absolutely horrid.

The second publication, *Bare house. Pori – Rotterdam – Ulaanbaatar*, edited by me, published by Aalto University in 2011 was funded by Pori Art Museum and Aalto University by 20 000 euros. There were four essays again: by Uranchimeg Tsultem, Taina Rajanti, Saara Hacklin and myself. The only paid to was Uranchimeg Tsultem. Graphic design and digital imaging were done by Petri Nuutinen, a professional and paid for. Translations by Tsendpurev Tsegmid were also generously paid for. The edition was 800. The publication was ready one year and three months after the opening. Nerve straining, but what could one do? 30 pieces were flown by DHL to be in time for the Ulaanbaatar exhibition opening in 2011. What the cost was I don't want to remember, nor how much problems we had with the customs. But it was there and that was very important to me at the time. There were not many published texts in Mongolian about contemporary art at the time. According to Tsendpurev Tsegmid there had been only 3 before our book in Mongolian, so that was worth the money, and the effort, I think. Many had actually also read it and wanted to discuss, to comment on it. But as my Mongolian is about the same level as the average command of English among the local artist community it mostly ended up in smiles.

Then it came to the brilliant idea of trying to have a book project realised in Mongolia. *Mongolia: Bare house. Ulaanbaatar. At the Building Site*, edited by me, published by Aalto University and paid for by grants and self-financing. In the autumn 2011 I felt that it was all very clear with the material and ideas. So wrong I was. We held meetings with the Mongolian artists about the images and texts. As with the exhibition in the summer, some of the meetings were very quiet. The translator did not show up even though she had decided the time. If the artists didn't feel they had anything good and great to say, they would just remain silent. I still felt that this was going to be a good project.

65 Book launch at TENT. Rotterdam, 2014

I worked with it for over two years. I did everything for it, save very little graphic design by Ganzug, translating by Tsendpurev Tsegmid (after having made a deal with two other translators prior to her) and B. Enkhjargal and, of course, Gregory Cowan for proofreading and editing the English. I wrote every month or at least every second month to ask the Mongolian artists for the texts and translations. As said it took over two years to gain all the material. Tsendpurev and Gregory were paid. There was only one essay, by me, as there was no money to ask anybody to bother. I also did the graphic design, photoshopping including colour adjustments with which I felt especially uncomfortable with – I also learned to do ready-to-print PDFs – and a lot of other things in getting a publication together, with the great help of my graphic designer friend Hella Pakaslahti. The budget was 3 000 euros –1 200 euros – 400 euros. Explanation for this will follow. The edition was 300. It was printed, first time, three years and three months after the opening.

What happened besides the project dragging on forever was that, roughly put, I learned as a solid research result, never to trust a Mongolian. I don't, of course, really mean that, but I was very badly hurt by what happened. The first embezzlement was the 400 euros for the DVD. Ganzug gave it to his friend who was supposed to do it for us. Ganzug trusted him and gave him all the cash before the work was done. So the guy took the money and ran. 400 euros is not all that much, so I paid it again and this time it was OK. Then the publication finally got out of the printing house, but only 100 copies were relatively OK. The rest were dirty and covered in glue. Ganzug refused to take them and they agreed it would be printed again. It took over a year for the printing house to have time to do this. I had already paid Ganzug the remaining 1200 euros for the rest of the books. Then when it final-

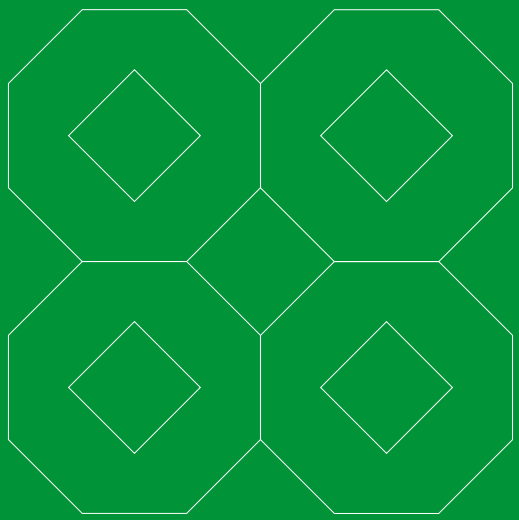
ly was ready Ganzug wrote to me asking for the money, again. I suppose he thought it would be just as easy as with the DVD. But I had no money. I told him as much.

I really could not pay that sum again, we had already got all possible grants for it…so what I suppose happened to those 200 books that I had given more than two years of my life to get together, was to be thrown in the printing house trash. There is free to download PDF at Aalto University bookshop, but that is not quite the same thing.

In this chapter I have attempted to convey the diversity of activities and thinking generated – or not – exhibitions, travels, residensies, publications. In a word that curating need not be just making exhibitions, but can be so much more, and that even 'just' exhibition making included a myriad of aspects and phases. This, I think, goes well to describe what nowadays is called 'the curatorial'. I learned a lot about curating besides, of course, learning an amazing amount about Mongolia – and myself. The way I have chosen to present the project is meant as my experiment on narrative writing as a way to convey experience: to combine information and story-telling.

PART II

SELF AND THE WORLD



Chapter 2

Virtue of the Undefined?

I started with photography when I was 14. Then my great hero was Robert Capa and I wanted to become a war photographer. As the years passed this plan changed slightly and I became a photographic artist instead. Through all the years of 'doing' photography there have been three images that really caught my feelings for the medium – and then two incidents that made me realise something essential about my position, my agency as visual artist and curator. The first incident made me into an independent curator, the second possibly a researcher. This chapter is about photography and curating, and my personal relation to them as forms of authorship and agency; it is the story of the five image-incidents that really made me think.

On Photography

The first image is Robert Capa's *Loyalist Militiaman at the Moment of Death* from the Spanish Civil War in 1936. This is an image famous worldwide and a very sharp and cruel example of the idea of the decisive moment.[141] To push the camera button just at the same time as the rifle trigger and catch a man pierced by the bullet. This surely sums up everything that is grand and disgusting about the decisive moment. Besides this it brings forth the connection between photography and death that is a classic in its own right.

When I stopped wanting to become a war photographer, I switched on to totally staged photography. I never, or at least very seldom, took photographs of my own daily life, not even when travelling. I had a very strong feeling against what I thought of as the camera taking the life away from reality: not commemorating or preserving, but killing. The best description of this feeling I have come across is the TV film called the *Langoliers* based on a Stephen King novel[142]. The langoliers are (imaginary) creatures that eat time. An airplane disappears through a time warp into a strange world where nothing tastes like anything, there is no echo from your footsteps, matches don't light etc. It takes the passengers quite a while to realize they have

141 Whether it is true or not. There is a a lot of comment on it being staged. See, i.e. New York Times Article: https://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/18/arts/design/18capa.html Accessed 26.03.2020

142 Tom Holland (director), Tom Holland & Stephen King (script): *The Langoliers*, for TV, 1995

ended up in the past – and the langoliers are coming and the past is disappearing fast, almost from under their feet. This was not a world I wanted to inhabit. At the end of *Langoliers* the passengers travel through the time warp again and end up in an airport where the present time is just about to arrive – and when it does, such relief! The colours! The light! The sounds! The dead end of this scenario was how I felt about much of photography. I still appreciated Capa's image because it was everything I loved and hated and loved to hate about photography.

Struggling with the ideas of presence and absence, preservation and lethality the next image that struck a chord with me was Ralph Gibson's *Mary Ellen and Hand* from 1971. Gibson is extending his hand from behind the camera towards Mary Ellen, who he is photographing, thus the presence of the photographer behind the camera is explicit. There is also a sense of reaching out, with some longing if not desperation, and this sense is made stronger as Mary Ellen is turning her gaze away from the camera and Gibson. It is a complex, beautiful photograph of not being there (for the camera).

Gibson's gesture of extending his hand and making his presence known is thus maybe somewhat crude, though effective. To take the idea further to a more conceptual presence of the photographer Paul Graham decided to photograph the skies over six Northern Irish cities during the ceasefire of 1994. He felt that there was nothing concrete that he could photograph that would represent the fact of the cease-fire. The only thing he documented was his presence at these locations at a certain point in time.

Turning these ideas around for some years during my studies I ended up doing as my final work for the Department of Photography a series called *Atmospheres – or documentations of not being there*. This was a series of nine images, chromogenic but entirely grey. They were simply photographed in very grey, misty weather, no tricks. There is much to be said about grey and its quality of being in between presence and absence, but I'll limit myself here to just stating that the point I wanted to express was partly the absence of the photographer from the place (scene) photographed, always being 'on the other side'. Another point I wanted to make about absence was that of photographic technique, if that is a correct term in this case, as i.e. in the image of a single branch in non-focus in such a way that the core, the actual branch, disappears and only fluffy contours are left visible.

Of course the comparison of camera and gun, and shooting as well as the general relation of photography and death are photo theory classics. Susan Sontag summarises it, quoting a Yashica ad, as "Just aim, focus and shoot", in her essay *In Plato's Cave*.[143] But she is not leaving the parallel to a simple level, instead she considers carefully how photographing is appro-

143 Susan Sontag: *On Photography,* Penguin Classics, London, 1978, p.14

priation of what is photographed in many ways. It is violation, exploitation, presumption, intrusion, trespassing, distortion, assassination, still it is not possession or rape. And if it is murder, it is "soft murder"… a sublimated murder as camera is a sublimated gun.[144]

There is, according to her, also a special relation of distance in photographing. Continuing on the parallel to shooting with guns she says: "When we are afraid we shoot, when we are nostalgic, we take pictures".[145] Even though there is desire in photographing, there is always also the distance (of nostalgia for a moment that is going to be gone in another split of a second?) and not the "push-and-shove" of actual sex.[146] Thus photography is more of an assassination than direct murder.

Sontag continues on the relation of the photographer and the subject photographed that as photographing is appropriation, it is also participation in another person's (or something's) vulnerability, mortality, mutability. She claims that it is exactly this way of a photograph to isolate a single moment in time, to slice, to freeze, to end all the rest, that makes photography reveal how unavoidably photography testifies how we lose time all the time. "All photographs are memento mori."[147] This can also be thought of in relation to the idea of understanding as power.

Photographs also try to make us believe that by seeing the past and seeing faraway places and events, we get to understand the world. We see it, so we know it, but according to Sontag the opposite is true. Understanding is exactly not accepting the world by its looks, but understanding starts from the realisation that what matters is how things function. And functioning always happens in time. Sontag summarises the core idea of this:" Only that which narrates can make us understand."[148]

At the same time as photography is giving us the illusion of grasping at actuality and the whole world it deprives us of them both. Sontag writes of the different ways in which photography has taken the place of actual experience, not just in news and public media but also in people's private lives. "Ultimately, having an experience becomes identical with taking a photograph of it…"[149] Paradoxically at the same time as being a token of presence, of experience and participation, Sontag points out that photograph-

144 Ibidem p.13-15

145 Ibidem p.15

146 Ibidem p.13 Sontag also discusses the camera being a phallus and all that follows from that, but I skip this here as it is not relevant to my point on photography and death.

147 Ibidem p.15

148 Ibidem p.23

149 Ibidem p.10, 24

66 Robert Capa: *Loyalist Militiaman at the Moment of Death*, 1936
67 Ralph Gibson: *Mary Ellen and Hand*, 1971
68 Paul Graham: *Bogside, Derry, Cease-fire*, April 1994

69. Annu Wilenius: *Atmospheres –or documentations on not being there*, 2000

ing is also "an act of non-intervention".[150] There has to be that distance between the photographer and the subject – at its utmost Sontag writes that in a situation where one would need to choose between a life and a photograph, so many nowadays choose the photograph.[151] And there is a great sadness in how images are taking over from 'the real world'. We live in an image-world.[152] "Photography is both a pseudo-presence and a token of absence"[153], she concludes.

In a similar vein Roland Barthes writes of photography being the emblem of our losing the ability to experience duration. He separates the time before photography as mythic Time, inactuality, Monument; eternal in other words, whereas the time of Photography is a time of (false?) Actuality, History…sliced moments put in chronological order. The time of photography is a time of impatience; "of revolutions, contestations, explosions, assassinations, in short, everything that denies ripening".[154]

Barthes also likens Photography to Death. He suggests that as Death has to be somewhere in society, and it no longer really gets a place through religion in most people's lives, it has taken refuge "in this image which produces Death while trying to preserve life".[155] Barthes also writes of the flatness photography brings to Death.

Here is this person 'preserved' and in a while there will not be anyone left to whom it would personally matter. The fake actuality of photography comes through this, but Barthes laments also the enthusiasm of all the young photographers around the world who imagine to be capturing actuality, but are in fact "agents of Death".[156]

Photography by its distancing function does not only separate, alienate, seclude us from the outer world, it separates us from our own selves by turning presence into absence – or at its best a pseudo-presence as Sontag puts it. The world becomes an image on the Other side of the Camera. Camera becomes a screen between a half-fictitious image-self and totally-fictitious image-world.

Camera is, as stated before, not only a gun-extension, or sublimated gun, it is also a penis-extension, a sublimated phallus? Besides these very male

150 Ibidem p.11

151 Ibidem p.12

152 Ibidem p.11-12

153 Ibidem p.16

154 Roland Barthes: *Camera Lucida,* Hill& Wang, NY,, 2000,(original in 1980) ,p. 93-94

155 Ibidem p.92

156 Ibidem p.92

metaphors Camera is a "tool of power" (Sontag). A tool of power that by keeping its distance and thus position of power remains intact.

But if photography is so evil, why do we love it so? How have we let it seduce us so totally? It is said that power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. It is like asking why do we love to hate sex? Rhetorics. What I am interested in, actually, are the relations between photographer, camera as an apparatus and the subject photographed. Camera has an uncanny existence in itself. The photographer uses it to aim, focus his/her gaze (a power tool already in itself) and shoot. It may appear that it is only the photographer's presence (power) that is involved, or the connecting gazes/presences of photographer and subject. But this is so untrue. There lives a Presence, a Power, in every camera. It can be an age-old forgotten Reflex at the back corner of a Charity shop with umpteen years of dust upon it, it is still alive. Not to forget all the ubiquitous photography around the world that make us feel looked at, violated, appropriated (assassinated?) wherever we go – even though we at the same time know that mostly nobody else than the camera is looking. These paradoxes of photography: Barthes thought it was a Death machine that creates illusions of life for preservation. I think the utmost paradox of photography is that the apparatus that produces death in so many ways is itself *alive*.

Baudrillard creates his own version of the relation of the alive camera and world in relation to disappearing (dying) photographer in his text *Because Illusion and Reality Are Not Opposed*. He analyses the whole process of photography in terms of subject – object. But as we have learned, accustomed, to think that the photographer brings the world alive, Baudrillard claims that it is the world that wants to be photographed and the camera that wills the gaze – the only true way for the photographer, the (supposed) subject, is to disappear… "into the void of the desert".[157] The image has a will, a life and photography is the purest form of this as it does not imitate, it does not have significance, it just is. And to truly let this happen both the photographer and the audience must give up on 'meaning'. There is no meaning. There is simply the existence of a captured moment that is as unreal as unreal can be: no time, no movement, not enough dimensions… [158]

There needs to be an absence of the photographer and admission of the void of meaning within the object in the world. Referring to Barthes Baudrillard sums this up in saying: "The 'punctum' is the figure of the void, of absence opposed to the 'studium', which is the context of meaning and reference. The void at the heart of the image gives it the magic and power that

157 Baudrillard/ Guillaume: (2008), p.164

158 Ibidem, p.157

are usually pushed out by signification."[159] Exhibitions thematising, art history explaining…kill the true core of photography, its void. There is a purity in photographic images that no other media has, its technological straightforwardness. "Let the silent complexity between object and lens, between appearances and technology, between physical quality of light and metaphysical complexity of the technological devices unfold without bringing in vision or meaning."[160]

Here both the subject and object fade into the void, and the dark space of the camera remains with a selfhood?[161] I like this idea a lot: thinking of my old Mamiya 67 and how it feels to feel her strapped around my neck, resting against my stomach with all its weight and darkness… that there in its insides relies true existence.

On Photography and the Curatorial

As I finished my studies at the University of Art and Design, Department of Photography, I was quite disillusioned with photography as well as with art in general. I did not feel this was what I wanted to spend my life with – and accordingly ended up studying history of ideas at the University of Stockholm in Sweden. It took my graduation and two great residencies, in the Netherlands (Stitching Kaus Australis, Rotterdam) and in Iceland (SÌM, Reykjavík) to regain enthusiasm for visual expression.

A very fortunate experience I had during my studies in Stockholm was to become able to see architecture. I had surely looked at it before, but I had not seen it. Then suddenly (during history of architecture studies) my eyes opened, so to say, and I started experiencing architecture, masses and spaces in a nearly erotic way. This was something that came up strongly in staying in the residency in Rotterdam. I had a studio of 70 sq., which I thought was crazy big, so I purchased a large army tent and put it up in the studio to live in that instead. Besides my own works (*On Architecture: All Architecture* is *Environmental Crime, Portable Lawns*) I became aware that architecture and built environment were issues that almost all Dutch art was commenting on in some way. Looking around there were so many works that commented on things I was thinking of commenting – and so there was the idea of putting together an exhibition of Rotterdam-based artists for Helsinki. My friend and colleague Tiina Mielonen came to Rotterdam the following year

159 Ibidem, p.155-156

160 Ibidem, p. 158

161 Ibidem p. 164

and as she was one of the founders of Galleria Huuto in Helsinki we decided to make a proposal of a group exhibition from Rotterdam there. This project then became *Art of Inhabitation* (2006), first in Helsinki then later on in Dordrecht (2008). These were curated by Saara Hacklin and myself.

Shifting away from the single point of view of artists responsible for their own work only, was a great experience for me. Visiting studios, discussing other people's work in this new fashion, writing about it, thinking out exhibition concepts…I felt I could finally combine the things I was interested in both in art and in history of 'thought'.

I was definitely not doubtful about whether I should be both artist and curator in the same project. I never felt that I could not see the importance of the whole because of my own work. Rather, I could only see my own work as part of the whole.

Another shift in my artistic work was that of combining it with my thesis work at the University – and later with my doctoral dissertation. For my MA for History of Ideas I was writing about landscape architecture in Reykjavík during the 20th century. For this I went around Reykjavík photographing hundreds and hundreds of places and details. It was all meant just as an illustration, but then when it was all there I realised there was a 'body of work' there. This became the series *Icelandic Reality* (2006). In a similar 'innocent' fashion I started to interview the Mongolian artists in the *Mongolia: Perception and Utopia* project in order to have informative artist portraits in the museum (Kerava Art Museum, 2008). It was only when editing that I realised that I had created a 'work', *Stories of Artistic Practice in Mongolia*.

There was something important for me about this unintentionality in the process. Also when photographing (after giving up staging a long time before) I always wanted just to be 'snapping' whatever, without having a plan, a projection of where, when and how these images would connect and be presented. I often wanted to have at least a few months, preferably even a year or a few years, in between taking the photographs and then choosing them for some combination and use. A good example of this is the series *Thoughts in/of Between* (2008/2010). These are images from Mongolia in 2008, from a journey around Arkhangai province. A year later I sat down on my computer, went through the folder from that trip and chose four photographs. Even though I tried to find more for the series I could not – except for *Potato, Edelweiss, Foucault, Fly*, which is quite different from the other ones, still.

So not knowing what I was doing while doing it was essential to me as an artist. It was essential to me also as curator, though slightly in a different way. To begin with the organising of exhibitions had been to meet artists and see their existing work and through discussion select pieces. But as our projects continued what became the important thing about curating,

70 Annu Wilenius: *Thoughts in/of Between: Edelweiss/ Potato, Foucault/Fly* , 2009

organising, arranging – whatever one wishes to call it – was being part of the production, being there to see and understand the emergence of meaning. In the Mongolia project this was very much being there with the artists as they came to Mongolia for the first time, seeing how they reacted and to what and in what sort of ways they reacted, as well as seeing the Mongolians experience Europe for the first time and seeing how they reacted and what they found interesting in a strange environment. In other words, as a curator not to be a selection committee but a sounding board, not a defining element, but an enabling one. Documenting these projects was essential, not just making exhibitions. In the publications the artists and architects are writing themselves what lies behind their works, their experiences of travelling and cultural exchange. Also the essays in the publications give sounding board for the public to get an idea of what these travels and meetings have been, I hope, at least.

For me working with a project like this – with so many different aspects of travelling, exhibition-making, residencies, writing – it has been central to think about both documentation and interpretation in relation to self-reflection and being in intense relation to others. This has also included the acceptance that 'true' interpretation is an impossibility or a (vicious) circle if each interpreter wishes to claim authority;

To claim power, instead, as said, one must accept that there is no ('final') meaning and no core, origin or authority. Interpretation is a fluffy thing that we can entertain ourselves with in 'the storytelling way' of being in the world. This notion also refers to the role of ignorance. Ignorance is a good starting point for many things, but I absolutely do not mean that it is a state where one – or anyone, for that matter – should remain. There is much to be gained through experience whether it was one's own or others. Ignorance, however, gives you some sort of special freedom to approach things from, to begin with.

On the Curatorial and the Ethnographic

In recent years there has been a myriad of discussions and debates concerning curating and research in contemporary art. The practice of curating has changed radically from what it used to be – or at least used to be called – not so long ago. Many new practitioners have taken up the role and/or the title of curator – and received praise and controversy for it. One such group is visual artists expanding their artistic practice from solitary production of works of art to display in galleries and museums to practitioners of a multitude of functions in the field of contemporary art and visual culture. Another field into which both artists and recently also curators have shifted

their activities and interests is research. These practices are slowly establishing themselves under such terms as artistic and curatorial research. Also artistic practices have changed due to these and other developments in contemporary art; often referred to as turns, whether educational, ethnographic or as said curatorial.

Hal Foster has presented the possibly most critical stance against both disciplinary and cultural overstepping. He does contest himself by asking if there is reason to believe in critical distance or if it is even in any case possible in our world today. Still in analysing the artists' anthropology-envy, and related phenomena, he states that something even worse than failing the purity of critical distance is the "reductive over-identification with the other" or "far worse…murderous disidentification from the other".[162] This process of self-othering is what he sees as the saddest inadequacy of this most understandable coming together of contemporary art practice and anthropology. It so neatly, almost magically, lets artists "resolve the cultural semiologist and contextual fieldworker" and "condemn critical theory, revitalize and re-centre the subject…and all at the same time".[163]

It could be said that not much has changed about this in the past twenty years with the addition that it is not only artists who want to be everything in one package, but also curators. Then again authors like Georges Bataille and Jean Rouch[164] had their combinations of anthropology, film and philosophy in the earlier part of the 20th century, not without much comment, of course. I think it is just a very natural combination: art and anthropology – and philosophy.

Foster does, however, speak for the importance of (self-) reflexivity, just as long as the story of the research/art practice does not entirely become the most important thing there is. This is a common topic from discussions of the relations between artists and curators. Who is the "carer", who the "maker"? Who is the artist and what does that mean anyhow? Furthermore, it has been discussed furtively what is the curator?

Why does this term (re-) surface with a new meaning in the late 20th century contemporary art scene? Zygmunt Bauman, for instance, has analysed the need for a new type of a scapegoat to be this reason. His idea is that since there is no single, universally accepted authority in the field of contempo-

162 Foster (1996), p.180–183

163 Ibidem

164 Jean Rouch: https://mubi.com/specials/the-groundbreaking-ethnography-of-jean-rouch, Georges Bataille, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Georges-Bataille. Accessed 19.06.2019

rary culture, then the curators being "in the front line of a big battle for meaning under conditions of uncertainty"[165] get to fill this position.

The roles of artists, curators and researchers have been actively contested and commented and the overstepping of one's own field or role often criticised as well as sometimes praised. However, what most of these discussions do not take into consideration so much is the very point of diversity of experience from different points of views and what this actually does to one's experience and perception of both the practice and the world at large. On this more positive strain Paul O'Neill, for example, writes of the new phenomenon of the group exhibition as being the primary site for curatorial experimentation, and thus creating a new discursive space within the artistic practice. He argues that by bringing a greater mix of people into exhibition culture has "established a space for defining multifarious ways for engaging with disparate interests, often within a more trans-cultural context".[166]

Stressing the importance of both diversity and disparity Jane Rendell considers Julia Kristeva's term diagonal axis as the core argument for interdisciplinarity. What is essential is that in choosing to give up what we already know and setting out to unknown lands (and practices) the "transformational experience of interdisciplinary work produces a potentially destabilizing engagement with dominant power structures allowing the emergence of new and often uncertain forms of knowledge."[167] Both Rendell and Kristeva also emphasize that what is important here is not only to be intellectual and critical, but also to be emotional and political. These being most probably just the kind of qualities that could again be criticised for lack of distance purity.[168] Or as being staying outside for the freshness of the air?

My standing in these issues is that I have set out to study the functions and results of diversity, alterity and change through an assumption of boundarylessness. I did not presuppose there to be essentially a 'self' and an 'other', a native and a foreign culture or any essential quality of being an artist, a curator or an editor. Crossing and blending these matters through the project I have learned that there are connections and combinations that link easier and smoother than others and some matters just don't link – in other words that there possibly do exist boundaries. Still I would implore

165 Zygmunt Bauman quoted in Paul O´Neill: *The Curatorial Turn: From Practice to Discourse* in Rugg & Sedgwick [Ed:s] (2007), p.23

166 Ibidem, p.14-15

167 Jane Rendell: *Critical Spatial Practice: Curating, Editing, Writing*, in Rugg & Sedgwick [Ed:s] (2007), p.60

168 Ibidem

hybridity to be desired for. To me the combination, for example, of working as an artist, curator and researcher in this project were necessarily inseparable. What interests me is to follow the emergence of meaning, seeing how it changes and this applies just the same to persons as works of art facilitating situations that enable new experiences and critical analysis of what happens in the world. This is the done research, the realised exhibitions and residencies and the works of art.

When we, as a group, first set out to travel to Mongolia besides the strangeness of the experience we were interested in ideas of landscape(s) and were very enthusiastically reading J.G. Granö's *Pure Geography* from 1930 as well as his travel stories to the Altai Mountains. Our own travels in Mongolia were very different from his, but at the same time settled into some kind of parallel or relation to his, as we visited the same places and made similar observations. What formed to be a central experience the first few years was the shared notion that for both the Europeans as well as for the Mongolians Mongolia represents strong ideals of freedom and continuity in varying forms. These ideal images were mostly countered with a very different 'reality' and thus we named our first major exhibition exchange *Mongolia: Perception and Utopia*.

For me personally the most striking experience was Mongolian urbanism: the city of Ulaanbaatar and its layers of urban planning and lack of it in the rapidly spreading ger districts around the city. It took a very long time to get enough understanding on any of it to transform it into art works, but as I finally did they were all about the urban landscape with links to gardening, nature conceptions and belonging to a place. When I applied for the doctoral program at Aalto University I claimed my research to be about the green areas and urbanisation of Ulaanbaatar. The title – *Semi-detached Ger with a Garden* – was originally meant as a joke, an impossibility as I thought *gers* are definitely units (on their own) and nomads do not create gardens as they are always on the move. Roaming around both the countryside and Ulaanbaatar I learned that there are plenty of semi-detached *gers* and plenty of gardens.

For the second exhibition exchange project, *Bare house*, the specific thematic was framed as issues of architecture and built environment. The artists and architects took very different approaches to this and I was writing in my essay about city planning and stepping out of modernist illusions. It was not until the third exhibition project – second part of *Bare house* – took place in Ulaanbaatar that it dawned on me that what I really was researching was art, exhibitions, contexts and through these the change garnered in our understanding of ourselves, others and our cultures. It was sensing this that at last got me also to write about the art works and the contexts of their production and display in the publication of that exhibition. It was also at

this point that I turned from architecture related literature to Nietzsche, Kristeva and Ursula K. Le Guin, and the relations of different illusions and layers of the self, differing time- space hybrids of the inside and outside of ourselves and our world.

Ennui

So having worked as an artist, as a curator and as a writer I was quite happy with my undefined way of practice, until one December morning in 2007 I walked into a seminar called *The Secret Identities of a Psychoanalyst*. This was a seminar on the works of an Austrian photographer, psychoanalyst and experimental film-maker Friedl Kubelka.[169] Among many other works she presented the work *Vue Tactile* (2007)[170]. This is a work in which she arranged an elder blind man, a painter, to touch the breasts of young women. First he touches them with the clothes on, then naked. In the first one he also touches the face, then just goes for the breasts. (Later Kubelka told that the first woman was known to him, the others not.) While he is doing the touching Kubelka has left the room and the camera is filming 'on its own'.

After showing this work Kubelka enquired the audience, especially young women, how they (we) felt about it? Did we feel annoyed? Abused? What followed was something quite curious: young woman after young woman shared ideas of how interesting, erotic etc. it would be to be touched by a blind man. I listened and listened and finally I could not help but raise the point that what was at issue in the film was not that a blind man was touching young, naked women, but that a middle-aged female photographer is setting up the scene – and however much she may have absented herself from the room, her presence is absolute though the camera and its documenting film. Kubelka was quite annoyed with this comment and just stated that this was what the feminists always say. And sure, there could be said a lot about male and female gazes and how they zigzag and where the power-relations stand. For example, Laura Mulvey has written very detailed analyses of the relations going on in cinema and female and male spectators, actors and photographers. However, my interest in the matter is really not in gender, but in photography, so I will not go further into these discussions here.

169 Seminar *The Secret Identities of a Psychoanalyst Friedl Kubelka (Friedl vom Gröller)* at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Helsinki, organised by Elina Saloranta.

170 Elina Saloranta [Ed]: *The Secret Identities of a Psychoanalyst Friedl Kubelka (Friedl vom Gröller)*, Kuvataideakatemia, Helsinki, 2010

71 Friedl Kubelka: *Vue Tactile*, 2007

Feminist or not this moment made me realise how important it is to be aware of your own position, your own agency in the situations that you work in. Thinking back to my 'rule of the undefined' I felt that even if I still think it important to not know what I am doing while doing it, it is just as essential as to be able to understand, analyse and conceptualise it afterwards. This is what I am doing with this dissertation in relation to my own shifting positions and agencies, especially concerning the Mongolia project. Going back to my influential images: Just as much as there is Gibson's hand touching Mary Ellen's, there is the gaze of Kubelka glued on the hands of the blind man – and this is what is really there.

The acknowledgement of presence and perspective: this is what is artistic research. It is not research into art, about art or any other prepositional alternative in that direction. It is research of reality through art, from the perspective of art, through the contesting challenges set up by art, as Esa Kirkkopelto concludes in his essay on artistic research and reality.[171]

But what is that 'reality'? To return to the discussions surrounding photography and its way of distracting people from 'reality', from their own

171 Esa Kirkkopelto: *Taiteellinen tutkimus ja todellisuus*, (*Artistic Research and Reality*, in Finnish), Teatterikorkeakoulu, Helsinki, 2009

72 Ralph Gibson: *Mary-Ellen and Hand,* 1971, Friedl Kubelka: *Vue Tactile,* 2007

'real' experience, it is quite interesting to parallel Sontag's and Barthes' ideas on photography to Jean Baudrillard's, photographer and philosopher, about our experience of the world in general, camera or no camera. His basic idea is that even if we imagine we are the ones in command it is the outside, the object, that seduces the subject and in this seduced state it is impossible to really understand what is what and in what kind of relation it is to the rest – complete understanding of the world is impossible. The more people are seduced – by images or otherwise – to believe in true contact with reality, the more they are drawn to a simulated experience of the world. This Baudrillard calls 'simulacra' or 'hyperreality'.

Similarly, as Sontag proposes that photography's tendency to give the illusion of having a full understanding, a full view of the whole world and how this illusion in its discrepancy with reality makes our world more and more frightening, Baudrillard writes that although 'hyperreality' does not

make the world unreal it gives an idea of being able to have a coherent and complete understanding – and as it does not hold out, our societies become more and more fearful. In the essay *Perfect Crime*, he sums the result up as that in such a sense "reality dies out".[172] So here we photographers, curators, writers and ethnographers travel the globe and try to grasp at actuality and reality – and really are just harbingers of different kinds of deaths?

In this chapter I have charted my own 'career' as artist and curator: my thoughts on and relation to these agencies. It is also an attempt to describe the relation of theory and practice I have experienced, not only in the Mongolia project, but in a more general way. Being very much submerged into practice can be wonderful, but it can be equally important to find solace in a book.

172 Jean Baudrillard: *Perfect Crime*, Verso, London, 1993, p.37

Chapter 3

Nomadic alterity?

I set out with an assumption and presupposition, of sameness and universality, as I chose to call it. Although together, we chose Mongolia for being the strangest, farthest away place we could imagine – I never really thought there was a difference, an otherness there. Certainly, we experienced many differences – ways of thinking and doing – but I didn't think of it as something fundamental. I mean this in the sense that I didn't think there would be anything I would be unable to understand. I thought that the people I worked with, made friends with, would not ultimately misunderstand me. I had complete trust in those people I was dealing with – until each person and each project, one after another, somehow got very complicated. These preconceptions and experiences led me to wonder, in different ways over the years, on the essential concept(s) of culture(s): one's own culture, and that of the other, one's conception of self – and the other. Through these the questions of tradition, history, change, future and freedom came into the centre of my study. I shall here concentrate on the ideas of alterity and the nomadic.

On Diversity and Alterity

The central concepts I have 'identified' in this project have become diversity and alterity. These repeat through the research in different variants and different contexts, so obviously the question is about dealing with quite flexible concepts and I shall try to define here what background I have for using them. Diversity is something that my generation, born in the 1970s, have grown up with. It means that all different people will live nicely together as they are and other cultures will not be assimilated (accepted, not assimilated!). This is classical cultural diversity thinking. Then it was thought better that the different cultures should be in their 'ghettos' together, and then they were to be spread around again… This is something that goes on and on in every European country's housing policies. What I am acquainted with is Helsinki from 1970s to 2020s.

There is also talk of diversity and/or interdisciplinarity within (academic) professional fields. Not so long ago the idea of synergy of combining was the word on everybody's lips. Then it died a bit on the way and was changed to greatness (largeness). The bigger the better! But is this really diversity?

This is the 2010's. This is also the question already Segalen in the 1920's asks about travelling. In the beginning (before Middle Ages) there was 'genuine travelling' as he calls it: it was war, adventure (plundering?) or pilgrimage. From 1800s on it became touristic. It wasn't for real, says Segalen. It was cultural plundering – which then of course later on became material plundering too. And then again touristic plundering of everything at hand, or eye, reachable by the camera and possible to take home at one's own cost.[173]

In his *Essay on Exoticism* Victor Segalen summarises the possibilities of diversity/ alterity very well, I think, in stating that:

> Exoticism is therefore not an adaptation to something; it is not the perfect comprehension of something outside one's self that one has managed to embrace fully, but the keen and immediate perception of an eternal incomprehensibility.
>
> Let us proceed from this admission of impenetrability. Let us not flatter ourselves for assimilating the customs, races, nations, and others who differ from us. On the contrary, let us rejoice in our inability ever to do so, for we thus retain the eternal pleasure of sensing Diversity.[174]

All these ten (something) years that I have been working on this dissertation, every now and then I've had, more or less, the same conversation with professor Harri Laakso in which I talk about understanding and he claims that understanding is a form of power and appropriation and one should not try to 'take over', but to let be… To coexist with what you cannot understand. It has taken me a long time to take this on.

So to conclude in a new (for me) kind of positive vein: I think the one idea that truly will live on with me is Segalen's idea of 'I love you, not because you are the same as I, but because you are different and I cannot understand you'.

The touristic – and later general globalisation – turn is a change in the relation to alterity, to Otherness, from 'no entry' in any which way to a radically different culture, to different cultures (different than Europe) becoming a very desired commodity. There is no over-passage hedge as long as one holds the camera?

Baudrillard/Guillaume continue from this scene that this has changed in our times of, more or less, mixed cultures and identities in general. We are losing difference; we are definitely losing radical alterity. Segalen and Baudrillard seem to consider multiculturalism (allowing for all cultures as

173 Segalen (2002), i.e. p.39

174 Ibidem, p.21

they are and deeming them equal and bound to blend in good and bad) as a sad option. This is diversity, not alterity. True, radical alterity is cherishing the difference, keeping to the difference.[175] This, I hope and suppose, does not mean separation, but that men are men, women are women, children are children, and obviously trans-gender people are trans-gender. Not trying to take away what is the difference but to make it the best in you.[176]

The idea is to embrace the diversity of how things and beings exist by identifying ourselves in ourselves as strange, alien, alter. Divided, splintered selves… selves disappearing in the non-existence of such a substance? Kristeva, Braidotti and Baudrillard, at least, have their own versions of how this is eventual – and happy? That mild diversity of acceptance as long as we are close enough would be radicalized into being as radically different as we can and still live together with respect? Not to love you because you are the same as me, but to love you because you are other and I cannot understand you.[177]

This kind of considering descent and coming together of things links quite perfectly also to how I have conducted this Mongolia project. I have not believed that things are as they are of their own accord or in any way unchangeable. Something I have thought one of the most important things in travelling and living in strange lands is that you become aware not only of all the things that 'others' are doing 'wrong', but essentially how much of 'where you come from' is 'part of you', and how much you actually feel more comfortable with other customs. These thoughts on descendingand no-origin are also important, I think, in making and curating art. Things come together in the most unexpected ways and suddenly they make 'perfect sense' and thus great works of art and great exhibitions come to being – not God-given, but worked out from a great chaos of things.

Harri Laakso asked me at one point if my Mongolia project was my interpretation of Nietzsche. I didn't have a direct answer, but thinking it over: Yes! Of course it is. My Nietzschean answer to the Universe is Mongolia. Without meaning to be overtly negative about Mongolia I think Mongolia is a very good experience ground for Nietzschean nihilism as I understand it. For me Nietzsche means cleaning up all the old debris and always starting again. It means keeping a clear head no matter what happens. One should not cling to the old or reach too far out to the new, but be able to exist, to live, in the moment as such. To be able to think back and forward even when energetically living the NOW. This is nihilism in the sense that one does not

175 Ibidem, p.21-, Baudrillard/Guillaume: *The Sidereal Voyage* in Baudrillard/Guillaume (2008), p. 75-76

176 Interpreting Segalen.

177 Not in these very words but in idea throughout the publication.

believe that any truth is a truth for more than a moment or so. Positive nihilism in that one can always believe in new things for a while – and good things may come out of that. Nietzsche also has the ultimate idea of nothingness in relation to humans. He writes:

> [T]his hate of the human, and even more of the animal, and more still of the material, this horror of the senses, of reason itself, this fear of happiness and beauty, this desire to get right away from all illusion, change, growth, death, wishing and even desiring – all this means – let us have the courage to grasp it – a will for Nothingness, a will opposed to life, a repudiation of the most fundamental conditions of life, but it is and remains *a will*! – and to say at the end what I said in the beginning – man will wish Nothingness rather than not wish at *all*.[178]

As well as this belief in believing Nietzsche had his own version of what could today be thought of an early version of posthumanism. Malcolm Bull summarizes some of these thoughts in writing:

> In the ultimate extreme of nihilism, nothing, like all the other things that might be thought to constitute common being, is lost, and so it can only be the loss of nothing that is constitutive of being-in-common… It is not humanity that is the limit of nihilism, but finitudes not shared only by humans. Being singular plural is the condition of all things…What I have in common with a dog or a stone is not being the same being, but finitude is something that everything shares, 'all the dead', 'all the living', and 'all beings'.[179]

On Nomadic and Posthuman

Nomadic is a very complex term as it is used in so many varying contexts. Originally it refers to pastoralists: people living by herding their cattle and moving around without a settled place to live.[180] More recently it is related to current life styles of moving from place to place often and more or less living

178 Nietzsche (1887), 2003), p.118

179 Malcolm Bull: *Anti-Nietzsche*, Verso, London & NY, 2011, p. 113, referring to Nietzsche.

180 Comment: Gantuya Badamgarav:"Reason for moving around is basically looking for "fresh" grasses for animals. Mongolian land is so arid and bearing capacity is not enough to keep animals throughout the year. Otherwise, they would keep living in one place. Desire for move for nomads is not same as gypsy people." E-mail 08.02.2019

out of one's computer (and suitcase, hopefully).[181] As a philosophical concept it has also been used to refer to a certain kind of structure of knowledge by for instance Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari and later on Rosi Braidotti.

In *Nomadic Subjects* Braidotti defines her position to nomadic as follows:

> In other words, the nomadism I defend as a theoretical option is also an existential condition that for me translates into a style of thinking. One of the aims of this volume is both to develop and evoke a vision of female feminist subjectivity in a nomadic mode.[182]... Though the image of 'nomadic subjects' is inspired by the experience of peoples and cultures that are literally nomadic, nomadism in question here refers to the kind of critical consciousness that resists settling into socially coded modes of thought and behaviour.[183]

Braidotti – as Deleuze – emphasises that to be nomadic one does not need to be a world traveller. Although I personally went seeking the outside, the nomad, amongst 'literally nomadic' people, this fact of non-travelling nomadism is very important to me. I went 'out there' to find myself. I found myself with a yearning... I am still wondering what, exactly, for.

Also for Gilles Deleuze nomadic/nomadology refers to something conceptual rather than physical moving, traditional pastoralism. It is nomadism of thinking which evades sedentary positions. It is about always being outside the system, in opposition, in movement, not staying put. And this doesn't mean at all physical movement even though he takes his metaphors from the Mongolian armies of Chinggis Khan – the army camps of tens and tens of thousands of soldiers appearing from nowhere overnight – Deleuze's nomadism is primarily an intensity. It is about how you concentrate and identify with matters for the time being and move on, and back? For Deleuze knowledge, or the way things are in this world, is not linear or adding up. It is rhizomic, a web where anything can be connected with anything in quite a haphazard way.[184] Like for Nietzsche long before Deleuze, there is a strong sense

181 Gantuya Badamgarav: "This type of life also shares similarity with ancient nomadic lifestyle. Modern people move for "fresh" ideas or places. May be, it is because the places they live do not provide enough food or space for their brains or spirit or do not provide satisfactory financial gains or living condition." E-mail 08.02.2019

182 Rosi Braidotti: *Nomadic Subjects. Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*, Columbia University Press, NY, 1994, p.1

183 Ibidem, p. 5

184 Gilles Deleuze: *Nomadi ajattelu (Pensée Nomade in Nietzsche aujourd'hui*, (1973) in *Autiomaa (Wasteland)* (in Finnish), Gaudeamus, Helsinki, 1992, p.18

of chance and discontinuity of significance. Anything can happen, anything can connect with anything and there is no reason there should be a reason for this. One can still try to understand the connections and make sense of the world. At least as I have understood them.[185] This is a storytelling method to understand life; we tell ourselves stories of our own lives as well, hoping things connect.

Braidotti also uses the term nomadism/nomadic when referring to the ever-changing nature of human subjectivity. She emphasizes that people should become aware of the identities they are 'given', subjected to, and through this acknowledgement make opposing them a part of their resistance project. This also means re-interpreting, re-reading the stories told of cultural identities, giving the stories new perspectives from the alternative view point of minority/alternative sections of society. The core idea with Braidotti as with the other thinkers mentioned, is resistance to the idea of an unchanging, coherent subject. Nomadism is a constant inner state of change. But even nomads have their 'camps', their moments of stopping and taking rest; reflecting how they are coping with this nomadic state. Braidotti points out also that what is important with nomadism is not only to deny dichotomous thinking, but to acknowledge that no one is singular, a solemn unity. Despite this it does not mean that we would or could be 'anything'. We are who we are. Pieced together of the multitude of experiences and connections we have had. We are stuck with a lot of what we simply are 'by birth'. It is important to know who one is, how one is situated, how one is interpreting the world. If you are a white Western (wo)man, you cannot, not be that. You can add qualities, experiences, knowledge, understanding to this. You need not be 'just' what you started as.[186] Something that also Deleuze talks about as 'not either or, but both and'.[187] Braidotti summarizes the Deleuzian 'becoming' as:

> the affirmation of the positivity of difference, meant as a multiple and constant process of transformation. Both teleological order and fixed identities are relinquished in favor of a flux of multiple becoming.[188]

Reflecting on this in the context of the Mongolia project I had been wondering about the gender question. Mongolia is a rather macho culture and

185 Ibidem, p. 22

186 Rosi Braidotti:, *Nomadic Theory*, Columbia University Press, NY, 2011, p.2-3

187 Deleuze as summarised by Braidotti in *Nomadic Subjects*, 1994, p. 23

188 Ibidem p.111

especially in the beginning of the project the absence of female artists surprised us. We did get in contact with some, and invited them to Finland, but our main collaboration partner, the Blue Sun Art Centre, was totally a club for men. We asked about this and were told that they had too little to support the women. This probably meaning both studio space, exhibition opportunities and mental support for female artists as a phenomenon. The women graduated from art school, then they had babies – and were not interested to hang around in smoky, vodka infused cellar studios. (They obviously didn't say it quite like that.) I never felt awkward being a woman telling the whole lot of them to do things as I wanted. As I left Mongolia last time by train through Siberia, once more, I was given a book to read by the train attendant. It was about a London- based fashion journalist changing her life and going to Africa as a volunteer. In this story she was the boss in an African community where women were not supposed to make decisions. But she was not considered as 'woman', she was an honorary male.[189] Considering this, I thought, that even though the Mongolian artists I dealt with did not use that term it was a bit of the same thing. I was often referred to as White Tara, that is a Goddess of Culture. At one speech situation Yo. Dalkh-Ochir[190] was using this description; how it was like I had descended from the Heavens to them. Not being able to take such a compliment, I responded: "Actually, I came by train".

They didn't appreciate the humour, unfortunately. This just as a both-and reflection: woman and not woman; one of us, not one of us.[191]

To conclude for me 'nomadic' means all of these things: pastoralists, movement in intensity and constant change in the way one understands

189 I'm sorry to say I cannot remember the author or the name of the book.

190 On Mongolian names: Yo. is short for Yondonjunain, a patronymic of Dalkha's. Mostly Mongolians are addressed by first name and the initial of the patronymic, ie. S. Ganzug for Sedbazarin Ganzug. Mostly people are called by nicknames: Ganzug becomes Zugee, Togmidshiirev Boldo etc.

191 Gantuya Badamgarav: "Reason of referring you as White Tara could be that by that time being artist in Mongolia was a big sacrifice, especially for contemporary artists. Country was going through economic transition period, terrible economic crisis. Almost nobody would appreciate contemporary art, as most of Mongolians had developed "soviet realist art taste". Artists did not make any sales and did not receive any support. Artists lived 1 dollar a day may be even less. Just appreciating their artworks was already like reward or support for them. So you would definitely be seen as a god. Historically Mongolian women held lots of power, could get involved in decision making process. By the time you came to Mongolia, lots of women artists were working to feed the family. Given situation, they could not afford the time for making artworks, which do not bring money for family. Right now, the situation is much better and lots of female artists create their works. There are several female artists, who are more powerful and more recognised than their husbands (who are also artists). Surprisingly their husbands support their wives, give them space/freedom for works." E-mail 08.02.2019

the world. In this research project they overlap in a way that makes it hard work to keep up being aware what one means with it each time.

Braidotti continues from nomadism to posthuman. Posthuman simplified means that you do not think 'Man', humans, as the measure of everything, the core of existence, its meaning and goal. Animals, sticks and stones are as much alive and part of our existence as we are ourselves. Braidotti bases her thinking on Spinoza and his monism: that we are not dichotomic, not separated, not in a nature-culture axis nor in a brain-body one. A statement that keeps repeating in her texts and lectures is: *We are here together, but we are not One. We are in it together but we are not one and the same*.[192] So there is a genuine seeking for diversity. Not understanding what it is to be a leaf, but to acknowledge the fact that the perspective is there and worth being aware of.

My own introduction to posthumanism / new materialism was through a seminar at Turku University. Besides lectures I participated in a workshop by Esa Kirkkopelto, a Finnish theatre director, scriptwriter and professor of artistic studies at the Theatre Academy. In it we stood in a circle, eyes closed and started by imagining ourselves to be trees, then it started raining and we melted into puddles – and with contact with the soil became mud. The mud then formed into different kinds of beings and wandered around in a circle in the hall. At a certain moment we were told to stop and remain what we were just at that moment. We were then to tell what we had ended up as. I had become the crippled porcelain doll in the film *Oz the Great* and *Powerful*.[193] Missing a leg and shattered all over… It was quite an amazing experience to have been wood, mud, clay and porcelain within ten minutes, and still feeling the sensation of all those materials in myself. Posthumanism is, of course, so much more, but this dissertation may not be the place for it more than through the very essential idea of togetherness in true diversity, that is alterity.

In this chapter I have discussed varying conceptions of diversity and alterity, nomadic and posthuman ways of being. I have tried to reflect on these matters through my experiences in relation to Mongolia. What is conceptual can be researched though practice and vice versa. Travelling can be physical, or not. Being one thing one moment and a moment later something else is just how the world lies, according to Segalen, Baudrillard, Deleuze and Braidotti at least – and my personal experience.

192 Braidotti: *Memoirs of a Posthumanist*, Yale University, Tanner Lectures on Human Values: *Posthuman, All Too Human*, March 1st 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch? v=OjxelMWLGCo, (i.e 1:00:00 -1:02:50). Accessed 13.06.2017. See also *Nomadic Subjects,* 1994, *Nomadic Theory*, 2011

193 Sam Raimi: *Oz the Great and Powerful*, 2013, *http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1623205/*. Accessed 20.04.2018.

Chapter 4

Nomadic science fiction?

In this chapter I will consider ideas from Walter Benjamin, Ursula K. Le Guin and Hal Foster. I will take up the questions of differences and similarities in art projects; artistic research and ethnography based on discussions on the so-called ethnographic turn in contemporary art, that is combining ethnographic concepts and contexts with contemporary art, also linked to finding one's 'self' – or at least something – from 'the elsewhere'. Especially Hal Foster's comments on the problematic aspects of finding oneself will be considered. Ethnography and science fiction will be closely linked here. I will consider these links through the work of Ursula K. Le Guin, and then sum up these thoughts in relation to my own texts on the Mongolian project.

What do I mean by nomadic science fiction? Nomads come into this story in a myriad of ways: as pastoral nomads, as urban nomads (artists etc.) and in the more abstract form of nomadic knowledge and practise. The latter is based on Rosi Braidotti's term nomadic subjects[194] for the idea that there is no constant, coherent truth that we can achieve; no complete, coherent apprehension or understanding of the world – nor of ourselves. We travel around the world and we travel around our 'selves'. We gain experience, and thoughts, knowledge if we like to call it that, but there is nothing constant or coherent, and definitely nothing unchanging about it.

The notion of a temporary, fragmented, subjective experience and knowledge, for me at least, led quite naturally to science fiction. I am a great fan of science fiction as a genre, but I mean more than that by referencing it here. Science fiction is a fantasy about how things might be, and as such, I think science fiction employs a wonderful tentative attitude towards the world and itself.

Science fiction, in the case of the writing of Ursula K. Le Guin, has close ties to ethnography, and anthropology. As I have been interested in the parallels of artistic projects in "foreign" places with ethnography and anthropology, I have also read literature on 'how to write ethnography'; John van Maanen's *Tales of the Field* and H.L. Goodall Jr.'s *Writing the New Ethnography* for example.[195] Both van Maanen and Goodall include reflections on how much the researcher is involved in every situation, creating them, conducting them or being at their mercy. They consider how much and in what genre these matters should be handled in professional literature, and they make

194 Braidotti (1994)

195 Van Maanen (2011), H.L. Goodall Jr.: *Writing the New Ethnography,* Rowman & Littlefield, 2000

enlightening reading, that every artist working 'in the field' should read; as much for entertainment as for information.

To demonstrate my own experiences in Mongolia as an artist, a traveller, a curator and as a wanna-be urban researcher – and relating to the theoretical reflections above – I have included in this thesis three essays I have written for exhibition-related publications in 2008, 2010 and 2012 (See chapter 2.). Each gives a context both to the Mongolian 'mental environment' as well to my changing relationship to it.[196]

Ethnography and anthropology both stress the importance of being aware of one's own culture and presuppositions, as well as the circumstances and reactions of the studied persons or situations. To write these openly into one's research, in the philosophical and literary scene, the presence of the writer has been obliterated time and again in the past two centuries. The best-known texts I found on the matter of the disappearance, decline and finally death of the author are Roland Barthes' *The Death of the Author* and Foucault's *What is an Author*? These are well-known texts and points of view. Instead here I shall consider these matters from another point of view: Walter Benjamin and his text *The Storyteller,* in which he analyses the decline and disappearance of storytelling as a form of communicating experience.

On Storytelling

Instead of the death of the author – or the disappearance of the author-function – Walter Benjamin takes up the disappearance or decline of storytelling, and death is the ultimate basis of authority in his essay. Benjamin claims that what was once the core of our existence, our culture of storytelling, is dying out. The reason for this he thought to derive from the fact that our capability to convey experience has diminished. Times have changed and our ability to communicate has changed, too, in the timespan from 1930s to 2020s. Still I think his thoughts on this matter are well worth considering.

In seeking to define what makes a story and what makes a storyteller, Benjamin separates tales from faraway, on the one hand, and stories of local interest, on the other. Stories obtain authority by distance in time or space. Either they are stories that a traveller brings with him[197], or they are sto-

196 Annu Wilenius: *In Search of the City/ Nomad/Understanding Freedom* in Saara Hacklin & Annu Wilenius [Ed:s]: *Mongolia: Perception and Utopia*, 2008, Annu Wilenius: *On Nomadic Urbanism and Other Oxymorons to Learn From* in Annu Wilenius [ed]: *Bare house Pori Rotterdam Ulaanbaatar*, 2010, Annu Wilenius: *At the Building Site* in Annu Wilenius [ed]: *Bare house Ulaanbaatar At the Building Site*, 2014

197 In Benjamin's text the storyteller is gendered as male. One may have opinions on that but he was writing this in the 1930s.

ries that have been told again and again, and have their veritability in tradition. In both cases, for the form of storytelling it is important that they are rendered, as the teller's own experience, or vicariously – on behalf of someone whom he has met and who has told her/him the story. It is essential that the telling goes through the 'me' of the teller – and in telling it becomes the experience ofothers.[198]

What has changed? Benjamin addresses two instances of modern times which he thinks have made the difference. Firstly, there is the emergence of the novel. The novel has a different way of being written and read than the story has a way of being told and heard. Where a story is claimed as experience of the teller, it is not thought of as if (s)/he was in any important way the author; (s)he has no legal claims to what (s)/he is telling for example. Like Foucault, Benjamin too understands the birth of the novel, as a result of the individuation process of modernity. A novel has an author, and a novel is read on one's own, mostly, whereas a story is listened to as a group.[199]

The second change Benjamin addresses is that of information. As Susan Sontag has also discussed in relation to photographs, Benjamin quotes a journalist of *Le Figaro* saying that his readers are more interested in an attic fire next door than a revolution in a faraway country.[200] It is important that news concern happenings that are close both in time and space, claims Benjamin. Another aspect of information that is entirely contradictory to storytelling is that it needs to explain itself, totally and immediately. It is vital to a story that it is never explained away. A story needs to be open-ended to really form itself in the mind of the listener. In comparable fashion, according to Barthes and Foucault, the story needs to form in the mind of the reader, the interpreter, and the discourse / information gets its veracity from being proven true by evidence, from that evidence being given and explained.[201]

Another aspect which connects storytelling and death – which fights against the disappearance of experience, due to overload of information - is the aspect of eternity. "Eternity has its strongest source in death,'' Benjamin writes, and he suggested that this is in decline, together with the declining communicability of experience. This is also something brought about by modernity: the avoidance of the sight of death. Before modernity, there was not a house or a room where someone had not died at some time. Now, Benjamin claims, people want to live in houses that death has not touched – and when their relatives get old and finally die, they are stored away in san-

198 Walter Benjamin: *Illuminations*: *The Storyteller* (1936), 2011, p. 83-87

199 Ibidem, p. 89

200 Ibidem, p. 84-85

201 Ibidem, p. 87-88

atoria and then buried or burned away.[202] It is death that truly gives authority to anyone, anything. Benjamin writes:

> It is, however, a characteristic that not only a man's knowledge or wisdom, but above all his real life – and this is the stuff that stories are made of – first assumes transmissible form at the moment of his death. Just as a sequence of images is set in motion inside a man as his life comes to an end – unfolding views of himself under which he has encountered himself without being aware of it – suddenly in his expressions and looks the unforgettable emerges, and imparts to everything that concerned him that authority which even the poorest wretch in dying possesses over the living around him.[203]

It is this authority of death that is the source of the story – the aspect of eternity? I consider the essential notion in this statement to be the idea of the encounter with oneself. It happens not only in death. One is usually unaware of it at the moment it happens – one recognises it at the moment of death, the latest. Whether recognized or not, these encounters – these special experiences – are what stories are made of.[204] They create the magic that Benjamin refers to. He claims the experience of magic to be at the heart of liberation. The magic of fairy tales – and stories in general – does not make man 'one with nature' but rather, makes him aware of the complicity of nature and the magic in being free. We poor grown-ups only experience this occasionally, says Benjamin, that is when we are happy. Why would that be now? Because there are no limits to what is possible? Benjamin writes:

> The liberating magic which the fairy tale has at its disposal does not bring nature into playing a mythical way, but points to its complicity with liberated man. A mature man feels this complicity only occasionally, that is, when he is happy; but the child first meets it in fairy tales, and it makes him happy.[205]

This point on magic has been very important for me in relation to Mongolia. Feeling like walking into a fairy-tale made my head spin and my interest and curiosity live on and on and also to turn to not so magic matters of urban planning and organizing in Mongol fashion. Of course, the notion of the

202 Ibidem, p. 93

203 Ibidem, p. 93

204 Ibidem, p. 107

205 Ibidem

nomad, nomadic, is central to almost everything in Mongolia and having experienced nomadic life in practice has meant a lot to me, alongside the conceptual dimensions of the term. Nomads – Mongols – relate everything very differently from the West: in relation to nature, family, spirits, materials, organisation of things, analysing (or not) situations. Being confronted with radically different ways of life makes one (or made me) more and more aware of the relativity of one's 'own truth' of anything. Everything shifting and re-shaping one's thinking constantly. I didn't 'turn' Shamanistic or Buddhist, but I did develop new kinds of sensitivities through the years, as I am sure, did all that participated the project; Western or Mongolian.

On Science Fiction

Sci-fi[206] is literature speculating on past or future based on assumptions on changes in the universe(s), mostly supposed to be thousands or milliards of years ahead or past… parallels and triples etc. – the point of sci-fi, I think, is rather in the somewhat neutral speculation ground that it enables us to think about ourselves and our current world.
The limits of our reality and universe? The nature of our humanness? The quality of our intelligence? The endurance of our nature?

Sci-fi proposes different universes, different histories, different sets of gender relations…different everything, and then it is mostly about war. So is it, more than anything else, about ourselves? Baudrillard/Guillaume make an interesting suggestion on re-creating 'alienness', alterity, in a world getting too self-same by entering into a world of illusion or fiction; of which I at least see science fiction as the perfect example.[207] Baudrillard does not talk of sci-fi. He talks of Japan as I talk of Mongolia. Those who have not encountered these alien spheres, make up other planets, universes, galaxies. Same story. Find the Stranger! Find the Alien!

Important is in which sense, for what means (s)/he wants to be found. There are people who want to identify the stranger/alien to eliminate – and then there are those who want to find genuine strangeness, not only in others but in themselves, to stop all difference from disappearing from this world. Sci-fi literature has a good scope of all kinds of scenarios for both.

The writer Ursula K. Le Guin outlines the defining elements of science fiction to be that, firstly, the story always happens 'elsewhere' in time and

206 Sci-fi as a term was originally meant to term second rate science fiction literature, that was closer to fantasy than to science. But through time it has become the common term to refer to the whole genre even in other languages than English. I, at least, experience it as value-neutral, and use it as such.

207 Baudrillard & Guillaume (2008), pp. 47-.

place, mostly in the future, as the future is a blank page, and secondly, that "the imagination can do what we like with it".[208] A feature typical of science fiction is its emphasis on realistic detail, hence the reference to science in the name. Science fiction links to anthropological text: by describing an alien culture, and one which is often initially incomprehensible to the 'author' of the text. Le Guin also writes in the fantasy genre, which, like science fiction, depends on the plausibility of detail.

Fantasy is not documentation of what happened, rather, it is comprised of the minutiae of what didn't happen, but could happen. Essential to Fantasy is that both the author and the reader agree to believe, to go with the story. This plausibility sets an absolute requirement for coherence. Within the fantasy text there cannot be anything incoherent, illogical, or too complicated. Le Guin states: "realistic fiction can be, perhaps must be, incoherent in its imitation of our conceptions of reality. Fantasy, which creates a different world, must be strictly coherent on its own terms, or it loses all plausibility".[209]

Many of Le Guin's novels are part of the genre called the '*bildungsroman*' (coming-of-age novel in German). The term is used in a multiuniversal, multicultural sense. Those I have personally been most impressed by are *The City of Illusions* (1967) and *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969). *The City of Illusions* is an exploration of an alien becoming part of a new community, alone, not knowing the language or the place he has ended up in, and most importantly of all, not remembering anything of his own world or identity. Slowly he becomes something new, but thoughts about where he has come from, and some repeating dreams, keep bothering him. Consequently, he leaves his new-found home, and goes in search of his identity. The whole story is packed full of deviations and simulations, truths and versions of truth, so that it is impossible for the reader to know what is what. In the end, he finds out who he has been, and he is given a chance to regain his personality, but only by first forfeiting his current identity. Falk-Ramarren manages however, to keep them both, although he is nearly going mad to begin with, having two simultaneous personalities. He masters this (schizophrenia), and – with this diversity of skills and knowledge – he manages to get a spacecraft, and begin his voyage to his home planet: with three different kinds of truths.[210] The (almost) end lines of the story are: "Was he leaving home, or going home?"[211]

208 www.ursulaleguin.com. Accessed 11.03.2016.

209 Ibidem. The site has changed since a few years back, but also found this quote at https://gradesfixer.com/free-essay-examples/ursula-k-le-guins-the-dispossesed-urras-vs-anarres/. Accessed 10.06.2019.

210 Le Guin: *The City of Illusions* Granada Publishing Ltd. Panther Books, 1973, (first published, Victor Gollamez Ltd., 1971, copyright Ursula K. Le Guin, 1967), p. 158-59

211 Ibidem, p. 159

Falk-Ramarren does not go home knowing what is, and what is not. Rather, he comes home knowing that there are many different kinds of ways to see, experience and understand things.[212] *The City of Illusions* was recommended to me by my professor Taina Rajanti in a discussion about assimilation to an alien culture. Rajanti's interpretation of the story was that you need to be alone, to be the only one, in order to manage this. If you are two, you always have support for your own worldview and can go on hiding in there.[213] In *The City of Illusions* this possibility is removed also by the fact that Falk cannot go into hiding, or to find solace in his own mind, in his own self, as these have become alien to him as well. I was most impressed with the split personality diverse abilities aspect of the story.

In *The Left Hand of Darkness*, the protagonist is in a more typical ethnographic position, as (s)/he enters a strange culture, in a faraway planet, as an envoy and a diplomat, prepared for the mission, with a lot of information and rudimentary skills in the local language. The planet, Gethen, is very different in many ways to the place where Genly Ai, the protagonist, comes from. For one thing the gethenians do not have genders. They are androgynous except for a few days in a month when they enter *kemmer*. In *kemmer* they may become male or female. Everyone can sire and bear children. Genly Ai finds this very puzzling in many differing situations as well as what the gethenians call *shifgrethor*, a way of respect and discretion that is never spoken about – but all know how to behave appropriately. Le Guin has stated that she was interested in thinking about what the basis of humans would be if sexuality was not a factor.[214]

Another developmental issue explored in *The Left Hand of Darkness* is technology. Gethen is extremely barren; a cold planet with scarce natural sources. Very slow industrialisation has taken place through the centuries, but when something has been found good enough for its intended use, it has not been improved upon by new versions. The text suggests this was also due to the lack of a dichotomy between genders. This altogether different worldview – may be traced to a lack of precedent in the case of Genly Ai. Genly Ai wonders that there are no aeroplanes, but then muses that this is not

212 *The City* is discussed in more detail in the essay *At the Building Site*.

213 Discussion with Taina Rajanti, September 2009.

214 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Left_Hand_of_Darkness. Accessed 12.04.2018. "Throughout the novel Gethenians are described as 'he,' whatever their role in kemmer. This was also the case in Le Guin's pre-Left hand of Darkness short story "Winter's King" when it was originally published; but in the interests of equity, when it was republished in the collection *The Wind's Twelve Quarters*, it was rewritten so that all Gethenians are referred to as 'she'.The 50th anniversary edition I own is again written in the 'he' mode. I wonder how different the novel would be read in 'she'.

so weird, given that there are no airborne animals (birds) on the planet.[215] How would one think of an aeroplane if nothing has ever flown? Or to think of people gendered as men and women, if no such anomaly has ever been part of one's world experience.[216]

On Self-Othering

I am now examining these details, as they relate closely to Hal Foster's discussion about situating 'truth' in otherness – be it social or ethnic. [217] Genly Ai is from an alien universe which is dominant in the galaxy. Genly Ai is permanently male, but he is not white, so does not match with the 'white-western-male' power position of our own world. Genly Ai is described as darker skinned and taller than the Gethenians, he is not black, but coloured[218]. Le Guin when asked in an interview if she had meant this as a prophecy that in the future there would be a world with racial equality, but no equality between genders, Le Guin answered that in her lifetime she has seen much to change concerning race issues, but not so much between genders. She did not mean to provoke more than stating the fact of skin colour, but not to make an issue of it in any way. [219]

The Left Hand of Darkness is therefore also a '*bildungsroman*'. This time, it is not a disconnection from one's own culture and personality that forces the change. Genly Ai suddenly falls from favour in the capital, and is sent to a work camp in faraway lands, resembling a small ice age as in Iceland for example in the 18th century.[220] Stripped of his clothes, his freedom, all comfort and trust, Genly Ai is naked in every possible way. He becomes one of the prisoners who have no meaning anymore. They die on each other – and keep on living. In this extreme state, Genly Ai begins to understand the Gethenian ways, and as time goes by, he learns more and more about Gethenian philos-

215 Ursula K. Le Guin: *The Left Hand of Darkness,* SFBC Science Fiction Printing Waller and Company, NY, 2004, (original in1969)

216 In *The Left Hand of Darkness* gender is a central issue as gender is not constant. In *City of Illusions* gender is constant and it is not made an issue. For my thesis I have not considered gender to be an essential concept, so I have not commented on it further than I have.

217 Foster (1996), p. 173

218 Le Guin (1969), p. 25, quote: " Are they all as black as you?" Gethenians are yellow-brown, generally, but I have seen a good many as dark as myself, "Some are blacker,'' I said; "We come all colors".

219 Ligaya Mishan: *First Contact: A Talk with Ursula K. Le Guin*, article, The New Yorker, July 24, 2009. https://www.newyorker.com/books/book-club/first-contact-a-talk-with-ursula-k-le-guin. Accessed 18.06.2019

220 Little Ice Age, see https://www.eh-resources.org/little-ice-age/. Accessed 18.06.2019

ophy, myths, and religion. He spends much time with Estraven, of whom he was previously very suspicious being unable to think of him as either man or woman, and definitely not as both at once. With time, Genly Ai learns to understand Estraven, as he also learns to understand Gethen. In the end, Genly Ai learns to love Estraven, and then Estraven dies.[221]

The story is disrupted time and again with myths, stories, dreams, and texts from Gethenian philosophy, to take the reader alongside Genly Ai, inside the Gethenian mind. Le Guin's writing is so visual, especially in these short instalments, that it feels as though one has seen it all happen, if not in real life then on film. Besides this visual lure into alien thought and experience, *The Left Hand of Darkness* makes its own claim on the way to transformability. To accept strangeness, one needs to lose all sense of security, safety and certainty. With all this gone, one is open, at last. Then the really difficult thing begins again: the question of going home. What does one do with this newly established identity? The same is true for travels within our own planet.

Although Le Guin brings these issues forth through sci-fi fantasy, they relate very acutely to contemporary experiences of people living in two or more cultures simultaneously, or as urban nomads changing abode according to jobs or spouses. In most cases, as well as in artistic and ethnographic research projects in distant, alien cultures, the first thing that is experienced is the strangeness of a new place and culture. Then when one assimilates, partly by effort, partly without noticing – the true culture shock comes only after one goes back home. Was it like this all along? Was I like this? How will I be now? Le Guin's answers appear to get to grips with diversity and alterity, to accept difference, and to accept uncertainty.

Le Guin's novels are interesting in many ways: they address the requirements and the difficulties of alterity – and they also give answers of their own kind. It is quite obvious, I think, to see what connections I have experienced in Benjamin's storytelling and Le Guin's science fiction. I have created my distance in (s)/place and culture in relation to Mongolia. I have tested my identity changing and the coming and going between there and here. I have tried out being the one responsible and in control and I have let others to decide for me, or at least accepted that things just are the way they are, sometimes. I have been the alien and I have been the host. I have tried to do science (information) and I have, yet again, succumbed into storytelling.

Another writer – who has considered the difficulties and merits of quasi- ethnographic research and art – is an American art critic Hal Foster, especially in his essay *Artist as Ethnographer*[222]. Foster starts with Benjamin's

221 Le Guin (2004), p.194

222 Foster, (1996), *Artist as Ethnographer*, p.170-204

essay *The Author as Producer* (1934), where the position of the author trying to assimilate into proletariat is seen as one which is in danger of ending positing the place of ideological patron, not a friend of any kind at all. Benjamin asks: "And what kind of place is this? An impossible place…" Foster comments this as being a description "in words that still scathe".[223] Foster also explores the opposites that Benjamin's essay tried to overcome: aesthetic quality and political relevance, theory and practice as their positions have been changing through the decades. Foster claims in 1994 that these dichotomies are "as unfruitful as they were as long ago as 1934".[224]

In the 1930s, bourgeois culture was contested by a new proletarian culture, and transformative political differences were seen as economic relations. Foster writes of postmodern times, but aren't we in 2020 living in 'global contemporary times' already? Our time has changed economics to cultural identity. In this shift, art and anthropology have come close to each other, and crossed definition lines in many places. Foster regards the so-called 'ethnographic turn in art' as actually beginning with the anthropologists and ethnographers who initially developed artist-envy – and then the artists who initially developed ethnographer-envy. Whoever started it, the replacement of economics with culture and ethnicity, in relation to otherness and alterity, is significant.

Anthropologists Anna Grimshaw and Amanda Ravetz comment on the 'ethnographic turn' and its followers as follows:

> What was long an uneasy relationship – and sometimes no relationship at all – has become a focus of renewed interest and debate. Much of the recent debate was framed – at least initially – by what leading commentators called 'the ethnographic turn' (Clifford 1988, Foster 1996). Subsequently, however, a number of different terms have come into play. Specifically, 'practices of making' (Ingold 2013) and 'ethnographic conceptualism' (Ssorin-Chaikov 2013a, 2013b) have been proposed as alternative ways of thinking about convergence between art and anthropology[225].

223 Ibidem p.171

224 Ibidem, p. 171-172

225 Anna Grimshaw & Amanda Ravetz: *The ethnographic turn – and after: a critical approach towards the realignment of art and anthropology*, 2015 https://is.muni.cz/el/1421/podzim2016/ETMB94/um/65509602/Grimshaw_et_al-2015-Social_Anthropology.pdf.. Accessed 18.06.2019. This article includes a thorough discussion of Hal Foster's and Richard Clifford's texts as well as a strong view from the perspective of anthropology/ethnography besides art.

Foster sees particular problems in the new assumptions about where to find 'truth'. Firstly, it assumes that the site of political transformation is also the site of artistic transformation. It assumes that "political vanguards locate artistic vanguards, and under certain circumstances, substitute for them". Secondly, there is an assumption that the site is always elsewhere, outside, in the field of the other. In Benjamin's time this elsewhere was social, the proletariat. Now it is the oppressed postcolonial, and subcultures of various kinds. Further, it is believed that this is the site from which the dominant culture will be transformed – or at least subverted. It is included in the assumption then, that if the assumed artist is not seen as socially or culturally other, (s)he has but limited access to this political alterity, and if (s)he has, then it is there for the taking.[226] With all these points being considered, Foster claims that the danger now, in 1994, is the same as it was in Benjamin's time: the artist-ethnographer may end up at the position of the ideological patron; dangerous all the more for the artist- ethnographer, as (s)he may have to stand in as informant, and as a native, alongside being taken as an ethnographer.[227] So begin the problematics of othering, self-othering, self-refurbishing and self-ethnography.

The combination of ethnography and art – and writing about art in ethnographic ways – is very pronounced in surrealism, particularly in the experiments of Georges Bataille and Michel Leiris. In surrealism, the cultural other was strongly associated with the unconscious, and thus includes the idea of the stranger inside each of us. This idea is based on a 'primitivist assumption' conjoined with a 'realist assumption'. These ideas mean that the cultural other is somehow, in reality – in a way that "white, western, educated etc." people never can be – the outsider, the other is always in the right. This is supposedly not current thinking in ethnography, but alongside with primitivist ideas – fantasies, as Foster terms them) of history-as-development and civilization-as-hierarchy, these ideas remain despite their racism.[228]

Foster lines up problems with these projections on the outside-other:

> It assumes that:
> Time is immanent to, hence coexistive with, the world (or nature, or the universe, depending on the argument);
> Relationships between parts of the world (in the widest sense of both natural and sociocultural entities) can be understood as temporal relations. … Space and time thus mapped on to each other,

226 Ibidem, p. 173

227 Ibidem, p. 173-174

228 Ibidem, p. 170-177

> "over-there" became "back then", and the most remote (as measured from some Greenwich Mean European Civilization) became the most primitive.[229]

This primitivist fantasy, associating the primitive, prehistoric and/or the pre-Oedipal other, may be revalued by psychoanalysis and surrealism. What it is not, however – according to Foster – is deconstructed. As long as the other and the unconscious remain tied together, all research into alterity will:

> 'other' the self in old ways, in which the other remains the foil of the self (however troubled this self may be in the process) more than 'selve' the other in new ways in which difference is allowed, even appreciated (perhaps through a recognition of alterity in the self).[230]

Returning to the idea of envy between ethnographers and artists, Foster considers the factors that have brought these two media so close together. Ethnographers saw artists as ideal interpreters of culture, and anthropology is the study of culture, 'elsewhere'. Classical anthropologists sometimes wanted to see entire cultures as collective artists or read them as aesthetic patterns of symbolic practices. They also tended to see themselves as collagists, semiologists, as part of the avant-garde... a romantic vision-projection of the ethnographer as artist.

But as Foster points out, they did all this projecting totally openly, whereas the new anthropology holds onto them, but thinks them to be critical and deconstructive. The idea of culture as text is supposed to subject 'ethnographic authority' to scrutiny, by bringing together diversities, and viewing them in dialogue with one another. Pierre Bourdieu, for one, pointed out that these types of decoding practices actually more often increase authoritative statements rather than decrease them.[231]

For the artists, anthropology was a dream-come-true, science combining practice and theory. Furthermore, it was equipping the artist not only with 'field-work' and 'participant observation' but also with interdisciplinarity, contextuality and a heavy emphasis on self-critique. All of these were warmly welcomed and filtered through in the 'ethnographic turn' in art, starting from the 1980s. But these crossings of fields did not come without problems. For one thing, artists hardly ever took notice of the agreed rules and limitations of participant observation of anthropologists, nor of the

229 Ibidem, p. 177

230 Ibidem, p. 178

231 Ibidem, p. 180-181

agreed rules and limitations for field- work. The most common way to practice quasi-anthropological art, according to Foster, became the one visit to a foreign (faraway) culture, quasi-communal, quasi-collaborative work with locals, and then off to the next place. Foster comments: "Who would not have witnessed the testimonies of the new empathetic intellectual or the flâneries of the new nomadic artist?"[232]

Anthropology is the compromise discourse of choice. Foster sums up and somewhat cynically concludes: "With…anthropology, artists and critics can resolve contradictory models magically: they can take up the guises of cultural semiologist and contextual fieldworker, they can continue and condemn critical theory, they can relativize and recenter the subject, all at the same time".[233] Besides being wont to see problems and boogie men round every corner, Foster also emphasises the possibilities of meaningful results of all these endeavours; to transform identities, cultures, art and the unconscious. He states that ideologically standing next to the 'other' is not always ideological patronage – the impossible position for Benjamin. Foster notes that recently, in 1996, postcolonial artists and critics have "pushed theory and practice from binary positions of otherness to relational models of difference, from discrete space-times to mixed border zones".[234] Although this is true up to a point in theory there lurks the danger that the hybrid is assumed to be something original, something pure to start with. This is the same problem for which Bruno Latour has fought many a battle, in his theories of the intertwining and mixing of things, human and inhuman. Calling anything a hybrid does suggest that there would have been two separate things to start with, but all is hybrid always, the circle or rhizome, in Deleuzian terms, is eternal.[235] Foster also gives the idea of critical distance a thorough treatment, and ends up, despite much haranguing against it, with that it is better to give in to self-othering rather than to disidentification. Critical distance, after all, is a good thing to have around.[236]

> I'll make my report as if I told a story, for I was taught as a child on [sic] my homeworld that Truth is a matter of the imagination. The soundest fact may fail or prevail in the style of its telling: like that singular organic jewel of our seas, which grows brighter as one woman wears it and, worn by another, dulls and goes to dust.

232 Ibidem, p. 180-182

233 Ibidem, p. 183

234 Ibidem, p. 178

235 Latour (1993)

236 Foster (1996), p. 203

> Facts are no more solid, coherent, round, and real than pearls are. But both are sensitive.
>
> The story is not all mine, nor told by me alone. Indeed, I am not sure whose story it is; you can judge better. But it is all one, and if at moments the facts seem to alter with an altered voice, why then you can choose the fact you like best; yet none of them are false, and it is all one story.
>
> Ursula K. Le Guin: *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969)

Reading these opening sentences of Ursula K. Le Guin's *the Left Hand of Darkness* I felt awed, I thought to myself: That's just it, said in all its simplicity – and of course complexity. I have, of course, had my own balancing moments with ethno/anthropology and art both as fields of study and reacting in relation to the world. I have found a lot in being 'elsewhere' and in being with people in a culture that I do not understand. I have also dappled with both ethnographic (auto-biographical) writing and visual anthropology. I have found as my most true-ringing identity to be a photographing storyteller.

On Writing - Myself

The three essays I wrote for exhibition publications are present in this dissertation because they tell stories about Mongolia and provide the context of the project. They clearly show my research interests, my research questions, and the answers I build – and how they have changed, and lived quite a wild life through the timespan of five years between the three essays. They show different attempts at research methods, and styles of writing to convey what I learned. The first essay, *In Search of the City/ Nomad/ Understanding Freedom*, attempts to bring together childhood fantasies with more recent fantasies: different ideas about freedom and how they appeared in the context of the Mongolia project. The second essay *Nomadic Urbanism and Other Oxymorons to Learn from*, set out to describe urban change in Ulaanbaatar, in the context of urban planning issues in general. In both essays, there were some documentary photographs, both had quite large sections referring to interviews. I felt it was important to relate the stories of 'other' people, the interviewed artists and other professionals and residents.[237]

237 I don't have written contracts about the interviews. It was not something anyone was thinking about at the time. Almost all the interviews were filmed on video, there was always an interpreter present, and the interviewees were conscious that the interviews were to be shown in the exhibition (artists in the Kerava Art Museum exhibition) and that they were part of my doctoral research. This video material is in existence and attainable at request.

These 'stories' tell about the ideas recreated from our mutual experiences of books, images, symbols, theories of others. To the existent literature, I added my own experience, my records of participant observation, and many interview materials. The stories illustrate the development I underwent in thinking about Mongolia and this research project. The first one, *In Search of the City/Nomad/ Understanding Freedom*[238] which is from 2008, when I had been to Mongolia four times and been seduced by its utopian aspects. The second one, *On Urban Nomadism and Other Oxymorons to Learn From*.[239] is from 2010 when I had become more and more lured into urbanism and wanted to see my own project as urbanism research. I conducted many interviews and photographed and filmed all over Ulaanbaatar. The interviews were not scientific in any sociological sense. They were meetings with people in varying relations with the city. Many of them I had met many times and they became my urban network in Ulaanbaatar. I learned a lot doing these interviews: about presence and intensity, especially. I also learned about the transition from being an interviewer and visitor to becoming a friend. It meant giving a lot of presents in the proper Asian fashion[240]. In the case of my long time interpreter, Otgoo, it meant that she refused to take money for her work. Instead, we cooked together, and I sent her winter clothes from Finland for her children as a gift.

The third essay, *At the Building Site*[241],was written in 2012, after the last exhibitions in Ulaanbaatar in 2011. I had spent six months in Mongolia curating and organising two exhibitions after I had had a very bad riding accident. It had been quite horrible. I hated so many things in Ulaanbaatar that it had become difficult to control my frequent aggressive impulses. It was the traffic; it was the impossibility of so many things in the city. In Ulaanbaatar, the car driver is always the one in the right. I found that if I wanted to cross a road, I must wait kindly, often waiting to be a crowd of 'girls' be-

238 Annu Wilenius: *In Search of City / Nomad/ Understanding / Freedom* in Saara Hacklin & Annu Wilenius [Ed:s]: *Mongolia: Perception and Utopia*, Kerava Art Museum, 2008

239 Annu Wilenius: *On Nomadic Urbanism and Other Oxymorons to Learn from in Bare house. Pori-Rotterdam-Ulaanbaatar,* Pori Art Museum / Aalto University, 2011

240 There are two main aspects in Asian politeness in context here: First if you are given a present, you need to give one back, too. Second, you of course have to admire everything, but when it comes to small (or smallish) objects one should be careful on the amount of enthusiasm, or you will be given them as gifts. Sometimes this is wonderful, though. In an artist-in-residence in Yamanashi, Japan I had a small shoji table (Japanese chess) in my room, no other furniture save the tatami. I used it as my work table as it is just the size of my computer. I enthused about it to the owner – and so it was mine. And is still in fond use. As a return gift I arranged her and two other ladies from the residency to a residency period at Stichting Kaus Australis in Rotterdam.

241 Annu Wilenius [Ed.]: *At the Building Site* in *Bare house. Ulaanbaatar,* Aalto University, 2014

fore daring to cross. I felt so infuriated that I often wanted to kick the cars, but I was well aware that if I did, the (male) drivers would have gotten out of their cars and beaten me. There would have been nothing for me to do or say about it.

When I was writing afterwards, I found my way back to describing myself as a storyteller – and I used children's literature and science fiction as models of reflection. I wrote more about the art works as sources of information and experience than I had done before. I also felt that I was genuinely writing for the Mongolian 'audience' – never-minding that they probably would never read it. I felt the need to include a photo essay depicting the six months I had spent waiting for the Mongolian winter – and then my experiencing it quite to my full content. Text alone didn't feel to be enough on its own. The essay attempts to draw parallels between building cities, exhibitions and identities.

In these essays, attached to the documentation, the texts are unaltered from the way they were when published, but I have added some footnotes, to mark notions that have altered in my experience since writing them. I was happy with the first one, *In Search of the City/ Nomad/ Understanding/ Freedom*. Freedom is an essential concept for me, and childhood literature an essential source. The second *On Nomadic Urbanism and Other Oxymorons to Learn from*, I think, I was trying to be someone other than I am and the text feels a bit strange. In the third essay I was back to myself and childhood literature and art. Writing these essays taught me several things: about the way of life in Mongolia, about the strengths and weaknesses of my techniques of interviewing, about the nature of art, about my identity and how I was locally regarded /perceived as a foreigner, about my writing.

I am no diary keeper and my notebooks regarding the Mongolia-project have an interesting collection of random notions and very random sudden bursts of reflection – and reminiscences of dreams, and a lot contact information. Almost all that I have written in this dissertation I write from memory. The interviews I have on video, but I don't really need to watch them. I remember. But, of course, there are things one forgets, and things one remembers with a bias. This can hardly be avoided in any case in self-reflective writing. Remembering is always half fictional. Then again I would not be so sure research diary entries are something else. This dissertation is my story on Mongolia and what became of that adventure.

This chapter is about writing, reading and listening: storytelling. It is about the very important point that Benjamin makes about magic, and Le Guin about fantasy (sci-fi). We need some spheres without restrictions of reality, not necessarily in order to be happy as Benjamin puts it, but possibly to remain sane. For me Mongolia was 'magic' enough to make life worth living, to dramatise a little. Then again much of what Foster critiques about

artists parading as ethnographers hits the nail in the head in my case in relation to Mongolia. Somehow it still fails to scathe me in any way. What he says is very true, but it doesn't mean it wouldn't be an interesting way of working, both for the artist-curator and the audience.

CONCLUSIONS - Reflections

What became theoretically important to me during this research project was the idea of radical alterity. It is the idea that understanding is not an innocent act, and the fact of not understanding, but co-existing and appreciating what one cannot understand is, actually, the desired thing.

In curating, the most inspiring texts for me have been those of Paul O'Neill et al., on forming the extended field of curating into the curatorial. Not merely exhibition-making, but so much more, and so going into difficult territory. A change in the curatorial, in the multifaceted roles of art professionals, has become reality. O'Neill describes the change rather ironically, stating: "It seems that no one in the art world is just one thing anymore. We are all some hybrid variation of the hyphenated multiplex artist-curator-critic-theorist-activist-historian-model-actor."[242] Although this may sound mean, he concludes the statement by claiming that, since the 1980s, curatorship has become an independent field of critical inquiry.[243]

This hyphenated identity was what I went in search of. And found it, which I think is a good result. I was making true for myself that curating – the curatorial – is so much more than just making exhibitions. These projects were never simply choosing works for a premeditated theme, but living and thinking new concepts and contexts.

This project with Mongolia has made me aware of the quality of my position as photographer, curator, editor, organizer. I set out to explore what one could find out about the world by following fantasies; by personally experiencing what the things and places one thought of as magical could be. Mongolia was one fantasy, curating was a method through which to approach it – and it is a method by which to approach many other things besides. I wanted to make dreams come true. And I did. I did more than that – I facilitated for many artists to make new works and exhibit them. I led artists to Mongolia, and led Mongolian artists to Europe. Being part of these artists' creative processes during these years has been very meaningful for me, and I have learned a lot from them. I have also learned from the different positions I have taken or been given in the various projects.

For international projects like this I feel that it is essential that the projects continue. If you just come and go; then it is exploitation, exoticism. If you keep on coming back and bring your 'subjects' back home with you, it is different, challenging, moving. I like to think so, at least. When Enkhbold, Batzorig and Ganzug were in Helsinki during their residency in Finland, I took them to my mother's place in the suburbs. We had a sauna and

242 O'Neill, Wilson [Eds]: (2015), p.13

243 Ibidem

grilled steaks on open wood fire in the garden. Then we looked at the family photo albums where, for example, my brother and I posed on my mother's bare thighs after sauna in front of a huge Lenin poster. They had a lot of fun with that.

I set out supposing that there is no difference between peoples and cultures. We live different lives with different histories but basically we are the same. Art speaks to everyone, and provides a language for us to communicate. After these fifteen years living and working with Mongolia, I would say that the difference between peoples and cultures is real, but it is possible to work with it. Not in a sense to mend it, to make it go away, but to accept and appreciate it. I love you, not because you are the same as me, but because you are different and I will never understand you, in Segalen's spirit.

More about adventures. Adventures can be great; they can also be lethal. I have done many a crazy thing in my life. I have had adventures like Greenland, where I ended up on a free-floating ice raft without anybody knowing where I was. I was exposed to the possibility of being infected with bird-flu at Lake Khuvsgol, Mongolia – but nothing serious ever happened to me. I paddled to shore in Greenland with a piece of driftwood thinking of MacGyver and although I was sick for a week after Khuvsgol, it was not bird-flu. I never learned to be careful, I never learned that there are limits to what one can do and what not. That was also the idea of going to Mongolia in the first place – the 'original' Mongolia project with Tiina Mielonen and Saara Hacklin. Go where you've never been, do what you don't know how to do, what you don't know if you can! It can be great – and it can be as said (nearly) lethal.

What kind of a research perspective – or life to that matter – does one gain from being a travelling artist, and being a curator? Being a travelling artist, especially being a residency-hopping travelling artist, is an amazing way of experimenting with your life in general, as well as with your artistic and social practice. Overwhelmed by new people, circumstances and interests: something new will always happen to you. You will reconnect also with what you already are, but you can never know how. This can be great – and it can be very difficult. Being a curator creates a different relation between the artists and yourself, even if you are also one of the artists. A curator creates a different relation between the artists and (him)herself. (S)he promises them things, (s)he arranges things, possibly most important of all, (s)he believes in them – and in return they give these things back, but in a different way. Still (s)he is the one responsible, as (s)he should be. If this Mongolia-project had evolved into a genuinely group-curating project – as we imagined it in the beginning – the result might have become something quite different. Curating is currently a many-faceted practice, evolving and transmogrifying in recent years. Who knows what it will end up as in the end? Mongolia became my project.

To reflect now at the end of the project on these questions I put forth in the beginning: How were things done? How were things agreed upon? What did it do to me (and us)? The main things that come to mind are two heavy words: trust and respect.

A much appreciated colleague of mine never stops repeating these words in half-accusatory voice. These are the elements that make things work out. Belief and forgiving are also useful. These all work together. Lose any one of them – and you'll have a disaster in your hands. Within the Mongolia project there were many widely varying situations for complex emotions. There was as much misunderstanding as there was understanding. There was trust without contracts, and also lack of trust despite having a contract. Everything was muddled through and through though, one way or the other, so I would say we did pretty well.

I thought all along that I was responsible, but at the same time I felt quite left out and alone. Whether that was something I created myself, or whether it was permanently 'extant', I cannot really know. I wanted to do this project in order to be together with people, to do art and philosophy together. Sometimes I wonder if my determination, which made a lot of things possible in this project come true, actually left me quite solitary – at the centre of the group, the crowd, I felt I had 'created'. I remember one evening a chat with a friend saying to her: "Maybe they just weren't my kind of a crowd." (This was not about Mongolia.) And she answered with a smile: "I don't think you are really a crowd-kind-of-a-person." I suppose not, in the end.

Back to Mongolia. One personal dream I was realising in Mongolia, besides curating, was riding a horse over the steppes. Over the years, I had many different kinds of horseback riding experiences. Some were amazing, some just difficult and bothersome. The last one was tragic. In the morning we set out to hike over the mountains (hills) to Manzhushir monastery from Ulaanbaatar (40 km) together with Saara Hacklin and her spouse Jonne Savolainen who had come to visit for a few weeks. I had a feeling that now everything was going to be great. Not just the hike and the horses, but everything. Life would begin anew from this. What actually happened was that we got lost on the hike and the following day my horse had a fit and started suddenly galloping down the mountain – off I flew and hurt myself very badly. Hospital confirmed a very serious concussion but let me go home the next day. I was terribly weird for months and in varying amounts ever since. In later examinations I have been diagnosed with PTSD and with diffuse brain damage. I don't believe everything to be possible any more. Probably a good thing to realise as most probably true.

To conclude I would like to say that it is important to acknowledge – with tenderness – that there are parts of the world and of the self that cannot be conquered, ever. And to cherish that.

LIST OF ARTISTS AND ARCHITECTS

Damdinsurengiin Bat-Erdene, Myanmariin Bayarmagnai, Bayanbatiin Chinbat, Yondonjunain Dalkh-Ochir, Ser-Odin Dolgor, Togmidshiirevin Enkhbold, Ser-Odin Sarantsatsralt, Sedbazariin Ganzug, Dugarsuren Batzorig, Dugarsuren Batkholboo, Ganbat Enkhjargal, MGL, Agnes Domke, GER, Rasmus Kjellberg, SE, Sonia Leimer, GER/AUS, Chstian Mayer, GER/AUS, Tiina Mielonen, FIN, PinkTwins, FIN, Ráðhildur Ingadóttír, IS, Christian Richer, GER, Marc Soosar, EST, Annu Wilenius, FIN, Chris van Mulligen, NL, Christine Saalfeld, GER/NL, Oula Salokannel, FIN,Aletta de JOng, NL, Ana Rewakowicz, CAN, Gregory Cowan, AU/UK, Clare Hill, AU/UK, Katrin Hornek, AUS, Michael Fürst, AUS, Ulu Braun, GER, Karin Suter, CH/NL

LIST OF EXHIBITIONS AND PUBLICATIONS 2005–2014

Exhibitions

Saara Hacklin [curator]: *Here is Not There, Here You Always Bring with You*, UMA Gallery, Ulaanbaatar, 2005

Marc Schmitz /Saara Hacklin, Annu Wilenius [curators]: *Transitory Operations/ Landscape: Perception and Utopia*, UMA Gallery, Ulaanbaatar, 2006

Blue Sun Art Camp Exhibition, Zanabazaar Fine Art Museum, 2007

Blue Sun Art Camp Exhibition, Blue Sun Gallery, 2008

Stories of Artistic Practice in Mongolia, HIAP Project Space, Helsinki, 2008

Saara Hacklin, Pirkko Siitari, Annu Wilenius [curators]: *Mongolia: Perception and Utopia*, Kerava Art Museum, 2008, Rovaniemi Art Museum, 2009, Pärnu Uue Kunsti Museum, 2009

Blue Sun Art Camp Exhibition, Xanadu Gallery, Ulaanbaatar, 2009

Annu Wilenius [curator]: *Bare house. Pori-Rotterdam-Ulaanbaatar*, Pori Art Museum & Poriginal Gallery & Porin Puuvilla, Pori, 2010

Blue Sun Art Camp Exhibition, Black Box Gallery, Ulaanbaatar, 2011

Annu Wilenius [curator]: *Bare house. Ulaanbaatar*, Zanabazaar Fine Art Museum, Ulaanbaatar, 2011

Galleria Huuto: AARGH!!! 10 Years, L3, Jätkäsaari, Helsinki, 2012 Ilona Valkonen [curator]: Finders Keepers, Mänttä Art Festival, 2012

Publications

Saara Hacklin & Annu Wilenius [Ed:s): *Mongolia: Perception and Utopia*, Kerava Art Museum, Tampere, 2008

Melitta Kuglitsch & Annu Wilenius: *Neighbours and Gardens: Social and Environmental Change in the Ulaanbaatar Ger District of Bayanzurkh,* article in *Great Wall – Architecture and Identity in China and Mongolia,* Vienna Technical University, 2009

Annu Wilenius: *On Nomadic Urbanism and Other Oxymorons to Learn from*, article, Libertine Magazine, Vienna, 2010

Annu Wilenius [Ed.]: *Bare house. Pori-Rotterdam-Ulaanbaatar*, Pori Art Museum, Aalto University, Tampere, 2011

Annu Wilenius [Ed.]: *Bare house. Ulaanbaatar- At the Building Site*, Aalto University, Ulaanbaatar, 2014

LIST OF RESIDENCIES

2008 Pori AiR, Ana Rewakowicz, 6 months
2009 Stichting Kaus Australis, Sedbazarin Ganzug and Togmidshiirevin Enkhbold, 3 months, Annu Wilenius, 1 month
2010 Pori AiR, Christine Saalfeld, 1 month Christian Mayer and Sonia Leimer, 1 month
Ser-Odin Dolgor, Togmidshiirevin Enkhbold, Sedbazarin Ganzug, Dugarsuren Batzorig, 1 month
During their residency period Ana Rewakowicz, Christine Saalfeld and Dolgor Ser-Odin held workshops for the Department of Art and Media Pori. All the resident artists gave a lecture on their own artistic practice to the students.
Architects Gregory Cowan and Michael Fürst came to Pori for shorter periods, stayed at Pori AiR and gave lectures at the Aalto University, Department of Art and Media.
Everybody (save for Yo. Dalkh-Ochir) came to Pori for approximately two weeks to build the exhibition *Bare house. Pori-Rotterdam-Ulaanbaatar* in May 2010.

LIST OF BLUE SUN ART CAMPS 2006-2011 AS PART OF NOMADIC SCIENCE FICTION

Here I only list the artists that participated in this project at hand. There were obviously many more Mongolian artists participating in the art camps.

2006 Undur Ulaan, exhibition at UMA Gallery, Ulaanbaatar

Participant artists Ráðhildur Ingadóttir, Christian Mayer, Sonia Leimer, Christian Richter, Rasmus Kjellberg, Saara Hacklin, Tiina Mielonen, Vesa Vehviläinen, Agnes Domke, Annu Wilenius and Mongolian artists Yo. Dalkh-Ochir, Baynbat Chinbat et al.

Tiina Mielonen and Annu staying as Blue Sun 'guests' for 6 weeks paid 600 dollars, which included a trip to the Gobi in which trip participated also a Canadian artist Dennis Evans and Blue Sun manager Zolbayar. For the actual Blue Sun Art Camp at Undur Ulaan the 'fees' paid by visiting artists were used for the costs of everyone's travel and exhibition costs.

2007 Undur Ulaan, exhibition at Zanabazaar Fine Arts Museum, Ulaanbaatar

Participant artists Christian Mayer, Sonia Leimer, Annu Wilenius, Yo. Dalkh-Ochir, Bayanbat Chinbat, Togmidshiirev Enkhbold, Sedbazarin Ganzug et al. Also an Irish artist, Carol Kavanagh, who had come to Blue Sun through the Open Academy project of Jay Koh, participated.

For the art camp the visiting artists paid a fee that was used for everyone's expenses. Together with Karin Suter, Carol Kavanagh, Batbileg and Chinbat we also made a trip to Lake Khuvsgol in the North. This was paid by the visiting artists.

2008 Arkhangai province
Participant artists Ana Rewakowicz, Annu Wilenius, Gregory Cowan (architect), Yo. Dalkh-Ochir, Bayanbat Chinbat, Togmidshiirev Enkhbold, Sedbazarin Ganzug, Dugarsuren Batkholboo, Dugarsuren Batzorig et al.

This *'plein air'* art camp was organised for Blue Sun by the gallerist Jargalan from the Xanadu Gallery. She wanted the Mongolian artists to travel around the Arkhangai province (where she is from) and paint certain landscapes, especially certain mountains. She paid the costs for the Mongolian artists, visiting artists paid for themselves.

There was no group exhibition, but a solo show for Ana Rewakowicz was arranged at the Blue Sun Gallery, Ulaanbaatar.

2009 Undur Ulaan, exhibition at Xanadu Gallery, Ulaanbaatar
Participant artists Christine Saalfeld (& Bart van Lieshout, not an artist), Annu Wilenius, Yo. Dalkh-Ochir, Bayanbat Chinbat, Dugarsuren Batkholboo, Dugarsuren Batzorig et al.

Visiting artists paid a fee for the art camp, which was used for everyone's travel and exhibition costs. Together with Sedbazarin Ganzug and Togmidshiirevin Enhkbold we also made a two-week journey to Zavkhan in Western Mongolia, for this I paid all costs. Christine Saalfeld and Bart van Lieshout made their own travel plans in the vicinity of Ulaanbaatar. Together with them I also went to Terelj Nature Reserve, near Ulaanbaatar.

2011 Near Kharkhorin, exhibition at Black Box Gallery, Ulaanbaatar
Participant artists Ulu Braun, Oula Salokannel, Annu Wilenius, Yo. Dalkh-Ochir, Sedbazarin Ganzug, Togmidshiirevin Enkhbold, Dugarsuren Batkholboo, Dugarsuren Batzorig et al.

This time arrangements were paid by Blue Sun and the visiting artists only paid for themselves.

LIST OF INTERVIEWS

Interviews on video with interpreter
Dugarsuuriin Bat-Erdene, artist, 13.07.2007
Ser-Odin Sarantsatsralt, artist, 13.07.2007
Togmidshiireviin Enkhbold, artist, 27.07.2007
Bayanbatiin Chinbat, artist, 10.07.2007
Myanmar Magnai, artist, 01.08.2007
Yo. Dalkh-Ochir, artist, 02.08.2007
Ser-Odin Dolgor, artist, 25.07.2007
Narangerel, Urban Planning Office, 27.07.2007
B. Daajav, architecture historian, at the Ulaanbaatar City Museum, 29.07.2007
Tsetserleg Town Planning Office, director, Tsetserleg, 14.08.2007

Dolgor and her husband Daajabab, *ger* district residents at Dar-Ekh, Bayanzurkh, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2011
Adya and her husband, *ger* district residents at Dar-Ekh, Bayanzurkh, 2008, 2009, 2011
Finnish journalist Irma, living in Ulaanbaatar for 20 years, 20.07.2007

Walking 'interviews'
I was photographing the environments and architecture, as the interviewees were showing their childhood places.
Ser-Odin Dolgor, artist, ger district resident in her childhood, visited Chingeltei and Bayangol, 10-14. 07.2007
Bayanbatiin Chinbat, artist, ger district resident in his childhood, visited Yarmag, 26.07.2007
Tuya, City Centre resident in her childhood, walked and drove around most of Ulaanbaatar City Centre, especially Sukhbaatar, July 2008

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Photographs by Annu Wilenius when not otherwise stated. Editors' note: Photographs by other authors come from various sources and are not always of high quality, but we have wanted to include them since they are relevant for the argumentation of the thesis.

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11. Blue Sun Art Camp Exhibition at Zanabazaar Fine Art Museum, Tiina Mielonen: *Green Mountains*, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, 2006
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70. Friedl Kubelka: *Vue Tactile*, 2007
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APPENDIXES

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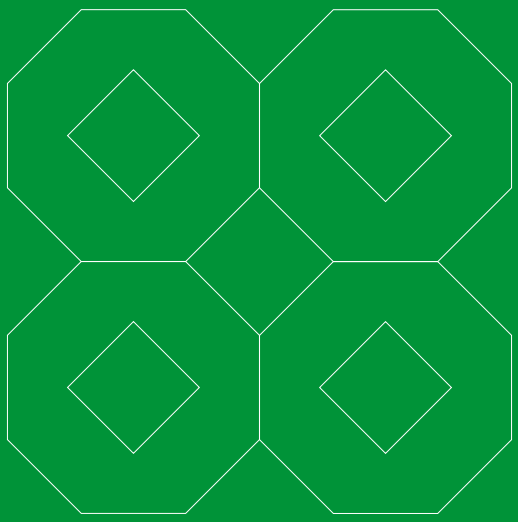

Pauline von Bonsdorff

Post examination. Annu Wilenius, intimate traveller

I remember visiting an exhibition at the local art museum in Kerava, a small Finnish town some 30 kilometres north of Helsinki in 2008. Two pieces stand forth in my memory: an installation with photographs and audio narration about childhood places and a childhood home, and a small yurt standing in the middle of the floor. The first I remember as an intimate piece, somehow speaking directly to the visitor's heart; a heart that dwells in touch with the world, remembering similar places. The other one put in motion imaginings about the cave-like protection of tents, particularly round ones, as structures that encompass us and give room for eating, sleeping and talking, yet presuppose that active life takes place in the landscape. That is, according to my understanding, what nomadism is: not rootlessness but living intimately in the land.

The installation was by Annu Wilenius, from the group exhibition *Mongolia. Perception and Utopia* she co-curated with Saara Hacklin and Pirkko Siitari. A reason I remember it is that I had been asked to act as her pre-examiner. I looked at her work with a curious and reflective, perhaps slightly distanced eye, pondering what I could say in a report, and at the same time accepting the work's invitation. The installation was part of her doctoral project, which would later find its final form, retaining the qualities of intimacy and home as well as the vast and unbounded character of Mongolian landscapes, and the boldness and adventure of going there. Even more strongly than then, I now see her own work as gaining strength and meaning from its own context, which was specific to it and one she had been instrumental in creating.

Annu writes in the Introduction: "I am the narrator all the way". There is a very straightforward quality to her narrative voice throughout the thesis. It gives rise to a feeling of being invited to walk at her side through the stories she tells, just as in the installation from 2008. This is why it feels natural for me to use the third person singular in this text, although I never met Annu Wilenius. Using her first name is a way to honour her as an individual, as a singular human being.

In the Introduction, Annu also declares that her thesis is about travelling, and she writes about travelling as a method. Travelling is, then, both the subject and the method of her work, but what this means is shown rather than told in the thesis. From a scholarly point of view, this is a weakness; from the general reader's point of view, not necessarily so. Her way of writ-

ing and putting together the thesis seems to have been to present important storylines, events and readings, and to some extent leave to the reader the task of laying bare and discovering the deeper connections. Art often functions in this way, putting our minds into motion without giving ready-made directions and conclusions, whereas academic texts are supposed to be more explicit in their self-positioning and -reflection. I would have liked to discuss this with her.

To learn from her thesis, one has to travel with Annu through the physical and mental landscapes as she presents them. One has to read according to an idea of travelling as self-education through encountering unsuspected places and ways of life. She states that travelling is "a way of thinking" and that "travelling by reading" is an "essential point" of the research. Travelling is more than the physical dislocation from one place to another; it is also a movement through intellectual landscapes created by others, feeding on real experiences and observations glued together by interpretation and imagination.

Annu's statements on travelling as a method are important but brief. What more could be said? What do they mean in the context of this work? What is travelling as a method in the work of Annu, who described herself as a narrator and a photographer? Travelling here is definitely not comparable to business travel, with its specific aims and schedules, nor is it like touristic travel, characterised by an open but somewhat shallow curiosity. It has more in common with the travels of explorers in different fields of arts and sciences. On the other hand, many explorers tend to have specific topic and theoretical frames, through which whatever they study become objects for them. However, there is also a tradition of curiosity-driven travelling, combined with openness and respect for the unknown and different that comes in one's way. It is in that kind of travelling that going to "the strangest place" is also travelling to one's self, as Annu, again very briefly, states.

With the easiness and ubiquity of travelling today, we sometime forget that there is a moral value of certain forms of travelling – "moral" here meaning rationally defendable – that has little to do with hedonism or physical recreation. This goes back to the idea of *Bildungsreise* or educational journey from the eighteenth century, as it included on the one hand getting acquainted with cultures one did not know, acquiring new knowledge and, on the other hand, maturing as an individual. The educational journey implies self-formation through travelling. To attain this, the traveller must have an active and (self)reflective relationship to travelling, for instance through keeping a diary, drawing, or taking photographs.

The educational journey provides an intrinsic connection between travelling and art as ways of acting upon the world and transforming our ways

of apprehending it and ourselves. Contemporary artistic practice and curating are two important dimensions of the work Annu describes. Here "contemporary art" would be misleading, as it seems to imply an unquestioned Western bias within the trend of globalisation. In other words, the global art world is still owned, both literally and especially in terms of cultural hegemony, by the West and its cultural models.

The bottom-up approach to art in Annu's work is refreshing. She meets Mongolian artists who practice art very much in the contemporary world they inhabit. They are firmly rooted, but by no means bounded by their cultural traditions. Her work, with their work, enables us to problematize the contemporary and ask: "whose contemporary?" Here we arrive at a point where art theory or history could scarcely have taken us. Mostly these are too restricted by their own traditions and conceptual demarcations. But as a field of practice, perhaps due to a spirit of experimentalism and freedom, art harbours a potential to bring about the unexpected.

I see in Annu's work a trust in art, as we have it today, as providing working methods, but at the same time an implicit critique of contemporary art's structures, especially when it comes to cultural power and hegemony. The question "whose contemporary" comes hand in hand with decentring and pluralising art as a concept and system. This goes for artists as well as for audiences: new dimensions of understanding and misunderstanding open up.

"Nomadic science fiction" balances between tradition and utopia. The text and the images are often concrete, down-to-earth and easy to follow. Alongside these, there are briefly stated key passages, more like suggestions than explanations, with ideas that are big if not fathomless. Science fiction here stands for fantasy rather than science. Science is however also a fantasy, as is culture: a belief system that we have become used to believing in. This indicates the possibility, even reality, of change and alterity.

Annu's thesis is a bold thematisation not only of space but also of time. She describes the nomadic way of a life as one where certain things stay the same although there is also change. Moving in a landscape one knows intimately, to which one was born, however implies change of a very different kind than the one urbanism brings about, which in its heaviest versions changes landscapes irrevocably. Annu moves on the borders, in the suburban districts where people live in gers, and where lack of infrastructure can mean both poverty and respect for the land.

The skeletal remains of horses, skulls and bones, lying on the land, is an image her work firmly planted in me. It may be a grim and sombre image to a Westerner; yet it harbours a different and in many respects better ethical relationship to the land, with all kinds of fellow organisms and animals, than the one of techno-scientific culture. According to the Mongo-

lian worldview, we should not dig into the land. We live on it. Thus no burial. The horse, rather than being an object of consumption or a provider of spare-time services, is an intimate companion in that life. The skulls in the landscape indicate death but also life, which is the larger, in fact infinite, context that we share with uncountable others, where each of us is a briefly passing moment – however, re-countable to others.

◆

Annu Wilenius' thesis was examined and approved but never discussed at a public defence. This does not diminish its quality. On the contrary, it sets the work free to stand on its own, and it frees its discussion from academic rules without taking away the ethos of research as a sincere quest for new forms and areas of knowledge, and a way of "acting upon the world". The work is now "post" rather than "past" examination. It is no longer a specimen for an academic degree, and the ritual never took place.

Nomadic Science Fiction is a travel book and a Bildungsroman. What started as a personal adventure with a few friends developed into a decade-long series of cultural encounters, ethnographic studies, artworks, exhibitions, publications, residencies, and transdisciplinary exchanges between Western countries and Mongolia.

The book narrates the experience of travelling in strange lands and inhabiting different roles in the world of artistic production. It gives an account of nomadism and urbanization in Mongolia, as seen by an artist, a curator and a researcher. For Wilenius "Mongolian elegance" refers to the fluid life patterns that create wonderful practical and aesthetic compositions in an infinite universe of new possibilities. Both nomadism and science fiction lead to radical alterity and hybridity: towards acceptance of unsurmountable difference and strangeness in others and in oneself. "Things come together in the most unexpected ways and suddenly they make 'perfect sense' and thus great works of art and great exhibitions come to being."

The book was intended as Annu Wilenius' (1974–2020) doctoral thesis for the Department of Art of Aalto University.

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