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CALCULATING THE PRICE OF EXILE

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IDEA HYPOTHESIS VISION

Summarize your project description. Which were your initial intentions/your vision? Were they technical, theoretical or thematic? What expectations did you have about the final result?

Even before I knew what I would do my project about, I had the vision of creating a sculpture installation, combined with audio, and either an artist book with illustrations or video accompanying it. Later it started developing in various directions that shifted and changed through the planning stages and the different actual work phases: I imagined a small room with four hanged sculptures of heads (three times bigger than a real sized head) made of paper mache, in which the audience can put their heads and listen to texts. These heads will be hung from the ceiling in a single room, each in a different height. I wanted to use three strings to hang each head so they won’t move around too much. I knew this would be logistically difficult as I didn’t have much experience in setting up such an installation, but I was looking forward to the process and knew I would learn a lot from it.

Inside each head I would place speakers, which will play different audio monologues in four different languages that I know and use (Georgian, Russian, Hebrew and English). I also intended on using texts by Bertold Brecht, Gertrude Stein and Jonathan Swift which I would utilize and adjust in different variations, and alongside each head I wanted to place an illustration book.

The vision was then both regarding technical matters, a specific vision of an installation that I wanted to achieve, theoretical conceptions of storytelling and the borders of illustration, and specific themes I wanted to deal with such as otherness, exile and multiculturalism. I wanted to incorporate literature, or what can be defined as classical poetic texts, into agendas with specific importance and significance on me, as both an artist and a person.

In short, I wished to check the borders and boundaries between auto-biography, aesthetic forms and socio-political discourse through storytelling.
RESEARCH

Research methods and choices? Summarize the essentials.
Literature and other sources? Evaluate the necessity of your research to the final outcome of your work. Conclusions?

As mentioned, I was inspired by Bertolt Brecht’s play “Refugee Conversations” (which takes place at the railway station in Helsinki, a part of Brecht’s “The Messingkauf Dialogues) and Jonathan Swift’s Gulliver’s Travels.

Brecht’s play is a reflection of two individuals/refugees who expose their situation, problems, and criticism about life, and so it seemed very relevant to me. The tone of the text is sarcastic, on the subtle border between tragedy and comedy. I felt great affinity with this text, as I myself am an immigrant who moved from Georgia to Israel, and since making that transition made some further transitions around the world, studying for long periods of time in Germany and currently in Sweden. Brecht’s style of writing and the topics he deals with seem almost prophetic in their depiction of the 21st century characteristic of mobility and multilayered cultural identity. I wanted to use Brecht’s text, adapting it so it would convey my own thoughts and feeling around these fascinating and challenging topics.

Swift’s well-known story provides the counter image of Brecht’s narrative; while the latter is focused on the point of view of the immigrant/stranger, the former, though written by the supposed “other”, the main point of view is that of a society dealing with a stranger who appears within it. So, the two texts seemed to me like they would compliment each other excellently.

It was obvious then that I wanted to deal with themes of exile, geo-political mobility, foreignness and otherness. After doing some further reading and research through the aforementioned literature, cinema and theater (Bergman’s “Wild Strawberries”, and “Rhinocéros” by Eugène Ionesco), scholarly theory (Edward Said, Sigmund Freud and Walter Benjamin) and art (Erwin Wurm, Ilya Kabakov, Michael Borremans and others) I decided to write my own diary of exile. This seemed to me like a way to allow myself to access myself, by first just pouring out my own experiences and structuring a more coherent narrative, which I hoped would then lead me to enable myself to examine the topic and dig into my own personal observations regarding living abroad and going through inter and multi cultural experiences.
This diary eventually served as the textual and thematic basis for my project. Therefore, I can say that the research process was crucial: it focused me, it broadened my interests, it influenced the content and form and it allowed me to create the synthesis I so much desired between emotional, artistic and socio-cultural discussions and representations.

**WORK PROCESS  CONCEPTION**

Your work process with an emphasis on the decisions of major importance for the final result. How did you start your work? Was tutorials helpful? Did you receive the support that you needed? How did your work develop or change throughout the work process? Did you run into problems that you had not expected? How well did you use the available time?

The first significant decision was to deal with exile, and from that decision everything else developed – this was the starting point and the most crucial phase. After that, a very significant mark was deciding to write an exile diary, which lead me to the most important decision I made: to use my own text for the final project and not any adaptation of other writers; be a summary of my diary and my observations as a stranger in different places, nations, societies and cultures.

After the writing part it was unclear how I want to depict the text: for sure it was going to include a sculpture installation, but will it contain sound, or maybe film, or both? I thought that the concept I came up with was quite clear, but as it developed it turned out that there were a lot of gaps that I needed to carefully fill, and this required a long time and an extended process of contemplation and experimentation, for example: I began to make tests in animation and filming as a background for the text, which later on served me but in a completely other manner than the one I envisioned at first.

My second major decision was to make one head instead of several heads, a decision I reached after again much contemplation and experimentation. I started constructing models of the heads using an iron net, which I intended on covering up with Paper Mache. Paper Mache seemed to be the most fitting material for such a sculpture
installation and the small head models were quite successful, but when I started to make a large sized head (150 cm) in the scale of the eventual installation, a problem emerged; the net was too flexible and difficult to work with on such a scale, it simply did not hold itself in a single way as I wanted it to, and so the effect of the Paper Mache was lost.

I decided then to switch materials and use Styrofoam as the basic material for the installation, instead of the iron net. Styrofoam is also a light material, but absolutely different in the manipulations it allows me to do. I never worked with Styrofoam before and I was not sure if I can handle it or not, but from the first day of working with, it was clear that it was a good decision, as I felt very comfortable with it and quickly learned to manipulate it the way I wanted to.

The project was to be presented at Gallery Konstfack, as it was assigned by the decision of the exhibition curator Mia Zeeck. The head sculpture, which ended up being 160 cm tall and 120 cm wide, made of Styrofoam covered in color, was to be hung from the ceiling. Visitors could put their heads inside it, as there will be a hole within it making the head hollow, and within this hollow head they could see a short film done by myself and hear texts narrated by myself.

During this period I had (and still have) many concerns. This project is a very personal one for me: first of all it’s a part of my diary, and secondly I did (and still am) facing fears regarding its figure and concept every single day. I constantly felt that I was running out of time. This happened in all the different phases, for example during the writing I was worried that I need more time to write and the same happened with the filming tests, model construction etc.

However, eventually and retroactively I understand that I used the time well – I experimented, I challenged myself, I developed each and every idea I had and observed it from various perspectives. Eventually, I hope my project displays the unique process’s I went through.

The tutoring I have received was unique, important and supportive, both in the professional and personal senses. I have definitely received the support I needed.
The text of the project itself

I eventually wrote two texts: one was an auto-biographical poetic diary-like account of my own narrative as an immigrant in the midst of difficult but also inspiring multi-cultural experiences. It serves as the background for the project itself, and is not featured within the head, but rather as an accompanying text in a brochure I designed and printed and is placed outside the head. The second text is the one featured within the head in the animation film and as audio, read by myself; it is a poem-like critical and sarcastic observation on three cultures: Georgia, Israel and Sweden. It was very interesting for me to write it as I understood many things about the cultures themselves and my experiences within them, and then it was very interesting to see the reactions people had to them. I felt that for Swedish people it was generally quite “sharp” and so it lead to many interesting discussions about the ways Swedish society perceives foreigners within it. The few Israeli’s who saw it laughed and affirmed the sentiments I tried to convey. Georgians responded quietly, and were also then engaged in a discussion about some of the more seemingly “controversial” statements the text (and so, I) make about Georgian culture.

Here are the two texts:

Auto-biography of exile / diary of exile

I frequently think about Georgia; the thoughts are different and changing from time to time. Lately I question how would I be if I never left my hometown at the age of nineteen (in 1999)? How I would be if I was born in Israel, or in Sweden?

During the nineties in Georgia there were two wars, the civil war and the Abkhazian (inter-ethnical) war. During those years the country did not function economically and there were two ways of dealing with life: leaving the country or selling your own property in order to exist. I escaped corruption which was practically the life style in Georgia, even though people didn’t want it to be.

I moved to Israel, to the place where I could digest my years of youth, my education, wars, and friendships. Also, getting to know my own self. I was living in the desert, where there was nothing but white sun. I studied the language and twice a month I visited my sister, who lived in Jerusalem.

A long drive and a dry landscape scared me.
In September 2000 the second intifada started. It caused me to rethink everything again from a different angle.

In 2004 it was the first time I traveled to Europe.

Shortly after the first visit, I was an exchange student in Germany. I lived in Hamburg, Sankt Pauli, near Reeperbahn, which is in the city's red light district: strip clubs, table dance, Catholic Church and the Sex Museum. The street I was living is called The Grosse Freiheit, which means The Great Freedom. Every weekend the area looked like a crowded hell. On Monday mornings this hell was extinguished...it smelled like it was extinguished by beer.

In winter 2006 in Jerusalem I found a Russian store, with classical literature and films in low prices: I delved into Tarkovsky and Kurosawa.

At the same period I saw around eight films by Ingmar Bergman. In the film “Wild Strawberries”, a professor drives from Stockholm to Lund to receive an honorary degree from the Lund University. Bergman described how he came up with the idea while driving from Stockholm to Dalarna, stopping in Uppsala where he had been born and raised, and driving by his grandmother’s old house. There, he suddenly began to think about how it would be if he could open the door and inside it would be just as it had been during his childhood.

Since 1999 I visited Georgia several times. In one of these visits, my friend and I went to the flea market, to buy antique soviet broaches. This friend tries to lower bargain for the broaches we want to buy, and says that it’s for a guest. Ten years of exile made me guest in the place where I was born.

Can I ever open a door and walk in a different period of my existence?

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If I was Georgian I would have a significant nose, I would be restless in my youth but would never show it. The Georgian open minded society would love to educate me as a “good girl” – never provoking or arguing, faking feelings and hiding criticism. If I was Georgian, I would be a virgin till my late twenties; I would cry every night about it, asking God to change my life. As I would be a “good” girl I would find some nice job, I could earn money towards solving my virginity problem.
I would go to the famous surgeon Boris Kipiani, who would do some plastic surgery on my nose.

If I was Swedish, I would have a non significant nose. Strangers will think that I have a small, beautiful nose, but very snobbish, as I raise it high up and avoid saying hi... but actually they would not know that I was just hiding my runny nose.

The Swedish open minded society would love to educate me as a “nice person” – never provoking or arguing, faking feelings and hiding criticism. I would be depressed for the whole winter and happy in the summer. I would concentrate on working while it’s dark – I would be ambitious. Actually, I would probably hide my ambition; I won’t allow myself to depict any of the dark sides of my personality – slightly devious, somewhat of a control freak, and always avoiding any conflict with the world. My slogan would be PEACE.

If I was Israeli I would have dyslexia. I would never read, but would have the best excuse - dyslexia.

Despite suffering from this learning disorder, I would understand science perfectly, but would never remember how to spell the names of scientists; my diagnosis will help me to pass examinations easily in high school and university.

The Israeli open minded society would love to educate me as a “fighter” – provoking, arguing, talking straightforwardly and critically. I would be assertive, and would think how to abuse, while not being abused.

Scorn others to defend myself.

Scream louder to be heard.

I would never be sensitive, except on national Memorial Days.
The Film

Quite early one I decided that I want to do some sort of stop-motion animation film, that would be presented within the head in such a way that it would simulate for the person inside the head the experience of looking. I made a lot of experiments with various images, objects, illustrations, editing forms, music and sound background etc. I debated with myself and with my surroundings what exactly should I do, and this was a difficult decision.

Eventually, after watching a film by Iranian director Kiarostami in which a story is “simply” told in a very straightforward, powerful and poetic manner, I decided that I too should “just” tell my story. This meant that the movie would contain the text itself, accompanied by the sound of me reading the text itself. Very “simple”, very to the point, but also very hard to achieve in a way that wouldn’t be too simple and too to the point.

I recorded myself several times in several formats: reading fluently the whole text, reading fragments and then editing it together, recording it in a professional sound studio, recording it with a simple digital recorder, whispering, talking, singing etc. Eventually I used a version which I recorded at a late stage with a simple digital recorder, “whispering loudly”. This was used as the background for stop-motion animation depicting two hands unfolding a single paper on which the text is written.
THE EXAMINATION

How did you present your work? Were you finished at the time of the examination? Did the work that you presented meet up to your own expectations? Were you satisfied with the response from your opponent, professors, audience etc? Were you satisfied with your opponent in general?

Calculating the price of exile is a large scale sculpture, including video and sound installation. At the examination we had to present a digital version of our works, and provide information regarding our sources of inspiration, explanation about the starting points for the project, sketches, documentation of the working process and description of the next steps - how it will work during the spring exhibition which opened several weeks after the exam itself.

I decided to show the actual sculpture in the examination, as I thought it would be important to show the sculpture itself to better explain and depict what I envisioned. So, I brought the sculpture to the examination room (Mandelgren). The other parts of the degree project (like the stop motion film and sound) were presented on the digital pdf version of the presentation which I read from and was screened behind me.

It was so important to show the sculpture also because it would allow the people attending the exam better to react and I hoped it would lead to a stimulating discussion.

At the time of the presentation, the sculpture was in the last stage of the work on, just before closing (glueing together) two divided parts and coloring it. The video and audio material were as well in the last phases of work, just before final editing. I was happy that before the exam I was in the last stages of work, since then it would be easier for me to display during the examination not only what the process I went through, but also the work itself. I think then that my decision to bring the sculpture to the examination room was correct; if the work is three dimensional it is important to present it not just in digital form.

The discussion which was lead by my “opponent” Pia Kristoffersson was extremely important to me and I thought it was very interesting. She had very positive feedback and comments regarding my work. Mrs. Kristoffersson highlighted various aspects in the project that I didn’t really acknowledge or paid attention to until she brought them up. These aspects included: the borders between private and
personal (which is significant in my work in general, no only in this project), absurdism and humor. Mrs. Kristoffersson asked relevant questions and the dialogue was enriching and interesting. I was happy that my internal tutor successfully chose my opponent and I feel very good about it.

Beyond the dialogue with the opponent, the input from all the attending and accompanying professors was positive and important, which then helped me in finalizing the project in a solid and thorough manner. As I had a clear vision regarding how the final form and content, I think I displayed it during the examination and in a very clear way. It was important to hear the reactions from the audience in the exam, even if just by viewing how they react to my work and what associations they have following it.

Unfortunately in my examination there were less people in attendance than in the presentation segment itself, which I guess happened in most of the discussions and not only in my own. Different reasons caused this, I think; one of them is probably the break, which is 20 minutes long. Secondly, the examination itself is 45 minutes which is a little bit long for the audience, especially when there are three examination during three days. And so in the last examination (which was mine) there were not lots of people, while the first examinations got lots of audience.
FINAL RESULT

Summarize the result of your work. What knowledge have you gained that you previously did not have? Are you satisfied with the work that you showed at the Spring Exhibition? Are you happy with the work process in general? If you knew then (when you started your work) what you know now, would you have done things differently? Reflect on your exam work in the context of contemporary work of its kind.

The final degree work is not a kind of that “just has to be done”; it is a source for future reference, an experience that shapes the student as an artist and as a person, a crucial stepping stone that helps the student learn so many things on so many levels in so many fields. I felt this through the whole process, for good and also for bad: I learned so much, but I also struggled with my own high expectations and ambitions, which is something I learned from as well.

Specifically, it was important for me to “touch” new forms of expression, stop-motion and more importantly and significally sculpture. I learned so much about sculpture, technically and otherwise: how to make a large scale sculpture, experimenting with different materials (paper mache, plaster, styrofoam), incorporating media and illustration with sculpture, how to organize the hanging procedure, communicating and leading people who were helping me to set up the installation etc. Just to finally achieve a succesful completion of this project is extremely important for my personal development, and it feels I gained immensly important experience.

It was a very challenging process: all the steps through it were challenging for various reasons - because of the subject that is personal and emotional, because of the experimentation with different materials and forms and because of the time limit.

During the exhibition opening, it was exciting to see how people interact with the work itself for the first time, and it included many aspects I didn't think of: many people were going inside the head, making it seem like for them it was an interesting experience. I was happy that people stayed longer inside the head and listened and watched the stop-motion film.

In general I am happy about the outcome, even though the process was very hard. I am very proud of it. I wish it was an easier process, but I do not regret it: I learned a
lot and in the future I know I can take on large scale projects such as this, and it would (hopefully) be easier to do.

As for my own work’s position in the contemporary art world, it is hard for me to judge. Contemporary artists that influenced me and I noted before (such as Erwin Wurm) do not necessarily deal with personal matters in such a straightforward manner, while other artists such as Sophie Calle do incorporate social criticism with auto-biographical aspects, but not in forms that resemble what I did. I hope then that my work stands out as unique, but I am not the one to judge this, and only time will tell.
REFERENCES AND INSPIRATIONS

Ilya Kabakov
Guy Ben Ner
Refugee Conversations by Bertolt Brecht
Am I a house? by Erwin Wurm
Gulliver’s Travels by Jonathan Swift
Rhinocéros by Eugène Ionesco,
Texts by Gertrude Stein
http://tate.org.uk/britain/exhibitions/altermodern/
http://www.museomagazine.com/issue-10/erwin-wurm

“The best school for dialectics is emigration. The most penetrating dialecticians are exiles. There are changes that have forced them into exile, and they are interested only in changes. From minute signs they deduce the most fantastic events, on condition, of course, that they are able to reflect on them. If their adversaries win the day, the exiles calculate the price that they will have to pay for that victory, and the contradictions they have unwittingly brought to light.” Bertolt Brecht, Refugee Conversations

PUBLICATIONS

Stockholm Metro newspaper 21.05.2010
P1 Cutural Review, with Måns Hirschfeldt, Kulturnytt, Sveriges Radio, 27.05.2010

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DOCUMENTATION OF THE WORKING PROCESS, SEQUENCES FROM THE STOPMOTION ANIMATION FILM AND THE FINAL, SPRING EXHIBITION
I would be restless in my youth but never show it.

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Near provoking or arguing, taking foolishness and hiding criticism.

If I was Georgian, I would be virgin till my late twenties. I would cry every night about it, asking God to change my life. As I would be a good girl I would find some job. I could earn money towards solving my virginity problem.

I would go to the hairdresser several times a week to cut, wash, plait, comb, or put in my hair.
Ebb i kassan? Här är helgens bästa gratistips

Våren tillstös på Kongsflock

Kutta filmen klara hänga

Franstibben tur och röret

Relativt gympa