

*(The following text was published in the catalogue for the group exhibition "Survival of the fittest" at Accelerator, Stockholm, albeit heavily shortened due to lack of space - below is the full, uncut written interview conducted by curating student Elias Kautsky, 2020)*

1. ***You have been speaking about the uncanny during the process of this work, but also about empathy. How do these two connect?***

I think in a lot of discussions, the uncanny gets somewhat undervalued or written off as a near equivalent to fear, especially in terms of its modern usage which is perhaps more closely linked to robotics or computer-generated graphics rather than psychoanalysis or art theory. Additionally, in Swedish there isn't any one perfect translation of the term, the closest one being *kuslig* which to me feels more equivalent to *spooky*. In one sense most of my practice is built on a foundation of the uncanny as a psychological sensation, but this is also coming from the perspective that the term itself eludes any clear definition. To me, much of the attraction of the uncanny comes from its ambiguity, it's a lot more emotional than theoretical which is what keeps it exciting.

I use the word empathy as a way of defining our intrinsic drive for establishing emotional connections. What I find interesting is when one is able to (maybe by accident) form emotional bonds to unexpected things, like inanimate objects for example. A process which rationally should be reserved for building human relationships can sometimes go wrong, and in doing so, what is left is something like a hybrid between a dead object and a living creature. Maybe this is because our need for empathy is so instinctual that this process happens almost subconsciously, and thus we have no real control over it. To me, this is a highly uncanny situation, but not just in the sense of it being discomfoting or spooky. There is also something very emotionally gripping about the entire thing. It's a strange sort of indulgent mix of morbidness and sentimentality, like a child playing with a doll, or an old person with dementia having a one-sided conversation with an empty room. It speaks a lot about the frailty of our consciousness as well as general loneliness and insecurity. I suppose if empathy is an act of communication, when applied to the uncanny it's more like a failed attempt at such; a one-sided conversation, or at least some form of doubt as to whether anyone is really listening.

2. ***The dove in your work is reading a motivational speech to us, but the poor shape of the dove and the office chair is suggesting a decay. Is the motivational speech in vain, or is it the way forward, to make things better?***

The motivational thing is originally inspired by a tv-shop ad I saw in which it was trying to sell a set of CD's with a recording of a man reciting a speech toward a non-descript individual about how great they are. Basically it's a set of recorded generic compliments made to make you feel better if you're sad and lonely. I thought this was really beautiful, and despite its absurdity there's something really sincere about it. The scene with the bird and the office chair is a partial recreation of a memory from my old student halls in London, where in the spring, pigeons would occasionally come into my room and refuse to leave, causing a ruckus and fluttering wildly only to occasionally perch on my furniture, watching me with beady eyes. Actually it was a little bit terrifying in a subtle kind of way.

Later on I randomly came across a taxidermy mounted pigeon through the facebook group "Free Stuff Southeast London", and have since then included it in several contexts. The insertion of the motivational speech into the pigeon makes for a kind of psychological experiment in changing the social dynamic between the pigeon and human. Beyond that, since it's a "real" bird (aka taxidermy which i've reanimated through robotics) it's also kind of an attempt at a leveling of subject and object. The suggested motivational effort is not necessarily in vain, but maybe there's a hint of insincerity, or a failed attempt. Maybe the speech itself is sincere, but the absurdity of the speaker and the situation itself makes it detached. I think it's up to the viewer to decide since doubt is the most interesting emotion.

1. ***Can you tell us about the background of the noodle-eating man?***

I've been interested in recreating myself as a robot for a while now, and it has manifested in several different ways during the last few years. Firstly I made a head based on my own proportions with photos of my own

face pasted onto its surface. I then gave it a mechanical programmable mouth so that it could speak. Its first appearance was in a show at Skövde Konsthall, but there it was just coughing intermittently. Very annoying to everyone, but that was what made it fun. It kept interrupting the opening speech for the show. Excellent! Later on it was given a body, and in another show that year it was eating noodles. I'm really into making machines which replicate human behaviours that are completely detached from what we would generally consider as effective robot behaviour, ergo subservience and efficiency. For a robot, the eating of noodles—or even coughing for that matter— becomes a rebellious act, like a sad, pathetic uprising.

On a more general level, the implication of recreating myself as a robot becomes, much like taxidermy, an act of transcending death. Moreover it becomes a way of approaching several topics on the uncanny such as the valley, as well as the idea of the doppelganger, whilst also referencing themes of evolution, biology and posthumanism, albeit in a really precarious and crappy way due to its lackluster materiality, but that makes it more approachable as well.

1. ***Was there something particular that caught your attention during the visit to Museum of Natural History?***

I grew up in Örebro, but my father used to work in Stockholm for extended time periods when I was a kid, so I have some very fond memories of Naturhistoriska Riksmuseet dating back to my childhood. To be completely honest, one of my first thoughts which left an impression on me was how small it actually is compared to the hazy childhood memory portrait I'd had of the place. Another thing which caught me by surprise was how some of the exhibits seem to have remained largely the same since then. One particularly shocking experience was at the *Liv i vatten* exhibition, where one is able to "feed a fish", basically there's a sculptural fish head sticking out from the wall whereby the visitor is prompted to put blocks of wood symbolizing different forms of nutrition into its mouth, prompting the head to either say something like "Blä!" or "Mmm vad gott!". This is an interactive sculpture which teaches children about the dietary habits of fish. Very experimental! I had such a strong feeling of nostalgia when hearing the voice of the hungry fish that I was truly taken aback. Amazing how after all this time it was still buried within the depths of my subconscious. Beyond the fish sculpture I'm really into the scenographic qualities in some of the recreated natural environments behind glass, such as the detailed, dramatic imitations of forest scenes in which the taxidermy wolves are placed, and also the fact that some of the animals have been killed and preserved only to act as prey for another animal. What a horrible fate to be suspended indefinitely in a moment of being eaten alive! The space itself has an underlying sense of a kind of detachment from time, perhaps partially due to the stillness of the surrounding bodies which at a momentary glance we might perceive as living. Beyond the inherent contextual framing of science and education at Naturhistoriska, there also persists on an emotional plane something otherworldly about the building which is equally as wondrous as it is dreadful.