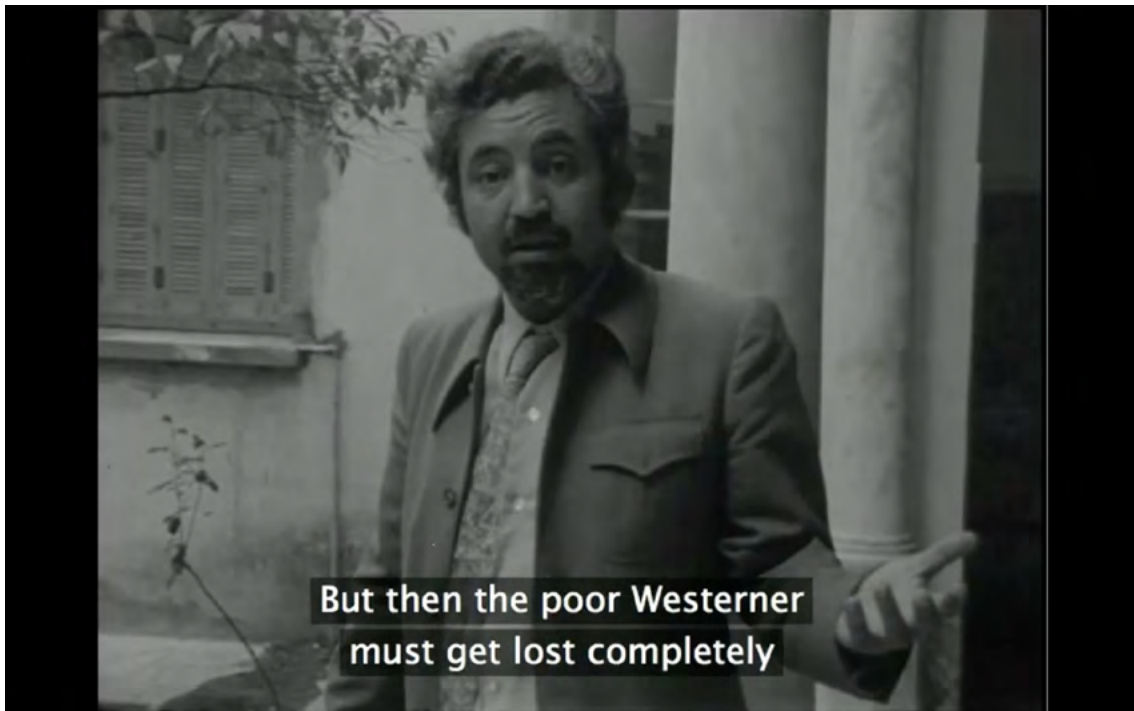


NINE STATEMENTS ON REALITY, DOCUMENTATION, ART, PHILOSOPHY, POLITICS, CRITIQUE, EXPERIMENT AND SUBJECTIVITY
For Eric M Nilsson

BY
MARCUS STEINWEG

www.svilova.org



ERIC M NILSSON, still image from *Viktig, viktigare, viktigast*, 1972, image courtesy of the artist and SVT.

First statement

If art is suited to anything, then it is to the destabilization of all fantasies that make the textures of our reality seem consistent. Art is the affirmation of their fragility and contingency.

Second statement

Right now, as a result of futurity, as opposed to the worship of the past or affirmation of today, art is that which already begins to be the past of the future. By future I mean that which tears open the texture of facts. As a tear in the web of facts, the future is present through the times. Contemporary art is art that entrusts itself to these tears, as opposed to their consensual denial. It is not therefore the privilege of today's art to be contemporary. All

art that opens up its present to an uncertain future, instead of walling itself in passively and despondently, opportunistically and inertly in figures that happen to be present, is contemporary art.

Third statement

Artistic thought, like philosophical thought, intensifies its relation to reality by ceasing to trust in reality. This succeeds only through reference to its contingency: reality is how it is but does not have to be how it is. It could also be otherwise; just as history in general could also have turned out otherwise, other than in fact it did. Inherent in thinking is the practice of continuously distancing ourselves from narratives that we too often suppose to be reliable and necessary. Our thought is always threatened

by stereotypes constructed around a single cause and from a single perspective, diverting attention away from the inconsistent, unreal, contingent and incommensurable aspects of reality. To deal with history (or with what we call history; because it is in no way a coherent structure with a given meaning that develops in accordance with a strict causality) is always to deal with constructs and reconstructions of history. No historian can avoid being a translator. What he translates will already be the product of translations of which he may not be aware, by other translators. We are concerned here with translations of translations: in thought, in art, in that which we might call speculative historiography, in which art and philosophy are necessarily involved, since of course they operate in the midst of reality and its history, using the materials that these have to offer. There is no outside because there is no panoptical gaze that would allow for a definite, all-embracing order or even the classification of materials according to a given set of meanings. Meaning fails to materialize. Or: we have nothing but a glut of meaning, an excess of interpretations, analyses, judgments, manipulations, deconstructions, instrumentalizations, evaluations of the empirico-material facts. To move in thought – and here I emphatically include the artistic practice of on-going configurations of reality – around the space of constituted reality means – in a sense that is itself contaminated and affected by the same space – to leave behind traces. One could speak of mutual determination, were it not that the word determination corresponds far too much with a closed concept of reality that leaves no breathing space for freedom and contingencies. The space of facts is not closed, it is not conclusively determined. It contains zones of indeterminacy and free-

dom, the product of the collision of a subject with dominant narratives and evidence. To think means to summon courage, to stop trusting in evidence (that suggests and acts out its own naturalness, that is, its indisputability), which amounts to ceasing to submit to the authority of evidence, to drag it into the whirlpool of its transformation, re-translation, reconfiguration or, as Deleuze would have said, becoming, which is not simply historical (in the sense of a linear history), but that can be considered as transhistorical, in the midst of history. This has nothing to do with idealism. It would be the opposite to any kind of idealism, if it did not typically appear (in a way that is always under-examined) as realism, without one noticing that what we call realism mostly constitutes nothing other than an additional idealism that one can call the idealism of facts or a religious belief in reality. It is more complicated: we have no stable reality whatsoever at our disposal. The subject floats in the overabundance of the existent, as in ontological disparities, in a kind of stream of contingency.

Fourth statement

As a textured setting, codified in many layers, reality is overdetermined and exceedingly complex. In the sphere of this over-determination and over-complexity, the subject traverses structures that inform his thinking and actions. And there are moments where there is a critical lack of orientation. In these moments the subject experiences the inconsistency of the contingent web of consistency that is his reality. There is philosophy merely as the experience of the porosity of the system of facts.



ERIC M NILSSON, still image from *Vad som helst till synes*, 1977, image courtesy of the artist and SVT.

Fifth statement

Clinging to empirical facts is already an expression of a certain reaction. It is the first step toward that utter dependence on authority that we call realism. The heightened realism of art and thought on the other hand reveals itself in refuting the dominance of facts. New, unforeseen or forbidden relations are established. What is usually considered separate and kept apart enters into explosive symbiosis. In the mixing of earnestness and play, for example. Without a playful element, all seriousness becomes ridiculous authoritarianism. Play plays with chance. In play, the subject opens up to the instability of his reality and must confront his own fundamental impotency. Taking a positive attitude to the limits of one's own assets is prerequisite for a certain subjectivity. Only in relation to his impossibility can the subject experience himself as the agent of his actions and his decisions. This in no

way concerns an autotransparent self and monadic selfness. Ultimately, the subject answers for himself without knowing himself. He is a foreigner to himself though he does not dissolve into air. His self-reference plays with his precarious identity in the space of facts and with all realities that continuously submerge the subject. There are causalities, principles, probabilities and rules, but nothing to indicate that these accord with some sort of ultimate necessity. There is nothing – in art or in thought – to hinder us from continuing to play with the most stable realities, or with improbabilities.

Sixth statement

The relation between art and critique is an expression of tension and difference. It is like the relation between siblings too, since critical consciousness, like the consciousness of the critical and its limits, is inherent to art,

which evades the most crucial evidence by revealing its arbitrariness. At the same time, criticism borrows art's capital in order to be convincingly critical, as opposed to merely acting out the critical. Criticism itself must become art, that is, borrow in the face of an uncertain future. "As long as criticism is not an art alongside the other arts, it will remain petty, biased, unjust and trivial", Rilke once wrote. Criticism is critical when it is self-critical, which implies active self-destabilization. Criticism's judgement hovers above innumerable blind hypotheses. It exists only as a blind practice conducted on the basis of a mortgage, the terms of which have yet to be finalized.

Seventh statement

Let us call the consideration of the real its coming into contact with thought that can be artistic, philosophical, scientific, while this thought experiences reality as the promise of consistency that will not be kept. The real – to speak with Lacan – is not the reality. It is the reality – the universe of established certainties, evidence and constants –, in which the real indexes their ontological uncertainty and fragility. Reality is the textured setting, diversely coded, which is our shared world without *Hinterwelt*: the brittle zone of facts that is dependent upon conventions and devoid of any definitive foundation in absolute reason. This is the ground that is no longer grounded, that constitutes our Logos universe – the domain of instituted horizons of sense and promises of meaning. Here the subject moves as if on thin but not entirely treacherous ice. The ice can break. In order for it to break, a sheet must form on which the subject can, for a moment, move with certainty. It is this brittle ground

that bequeathed Nietzsche's formula of the death of God to the self-awareness of the subject. Nietzsche bequeathed to his future a ground without ground. That the ground is without ground means that the ground is a flying carpet, on which one can hover above the abyss of ontological inconsistency. I call reality that web of consistency that remains permeable to inconsistency, which Nietzsche called the Dionysian *Ungrund*, Sartre the hole of freedom, Deleuze and Guattari chaos, Lacan the real. Reality is once again the index of its own fragility. In Wittgenstein's thought it is addressed as a language game and way of life and equates to what Lacan calls symbolic order. The subject is admitted to reality as to a milieu to which there is no alternative. That there is no alternative to reality does not mean that reality as it stands is necessary. The truth of reality is its historicity and contingency.

Eighth statement

If there is contingency then there is politics. Politics actually means chances of change in the current texture of facts. Politics, which is more than the administration of the political *status quo*, creates a cut in the web of facts. It tears the texture. It does this by means of resistance and affirmation. It is resistant to the given – the power of the existing order as Adorno and Horkheimer call it. The affirmations of politics do not affirm what is. They affirm what is not or what could be, while the authority of facts declare this impossible. The political affirmation of the impossible affirms the oppressed and invisible aspects of established reality. The latter opposes the sense of the possible that is compatible with the promise of peace or of order.



We make ourselves an image.

*ERIC M NILSSON, still image from **Jag såg**, 2013, image courtesy of the artist and SVT.*

Ninth statement

Art and philosophy can articulate themselves in terms of staggering and rushing on ahead. They become bound up with a movement that leads the subject out of himself toward the new. Inherent to their insecurity is the willingness to risk experiments where procedures and results remain open. The subject drills a hole in the present. He crawls through it without knowing where the journey leads. Therefore – on the basis of this well-nigh light-headed movement – he must proceed as precisely as possible. There is no contradiction at all between rushing on ahead and precision. On the contrary, they determine one another. He who avoids rushing into things does not think. An openness to not knowing is inherent in artistic thought, just as it is in philosophical thought. Thinking is to be, in a very precise way, mad.

ABOUT THE WRITER

Marcus Steinweg, b. in Germany 1971, is a philosopher based in Berlin. He has worked extensively with the cross-fertilization of philosophy and art, collaborating with artists, including Thomas Hirschhorn and Rosemarie Trockel, curating and participating in exhibitions, editing journals and lecturing internationally. He is editor at *The Journal Inaesthetics*.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Eric M Nilsson, b. in Brussels 1935, is a Swedish film maker. Nilsson has his education from the film school IDHEC in Paris. Eric M Nilsson was an early member of the Swedish Television documentary film editorial staff, and his many distinctive films from the 1960s onward have come to fascinate and challenge a wide audience. He has received multiple awards and honors for his films.

more info:
www.svilova.org
info@svilova.org



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VÄSTRA
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