

## Struggle

Simon Sheikh: In the previous sections, we have talked about structuring and becoming, through language and architecture, mostly, but also through sexualization. We have also talked about how this structuring, or socialization, if you will, is never complete and ideal. There are always inconsistencies, reversals, residues and surpluses. It is often a question of struggling to become socialized, subjectivized and sexed, of trying to attain a certain position, a specific speech, of living in-between buildings and meanings -- as if the subject strives to overcome a lack, to reach the missing 10% or so between the position you are in and the one you want to be in, between the body you are and the body you want, the person you and others think you are and the person you and others think you could become. However, there is also a drive towards the negation of these structures, of resistance to them, if you will. Both are important for the formation of political claims and identities, obviously, and I would like to ask you how you see this struggle in your works, both in the speaking subjects in your sound and video work and the altered architecture of your installation works -- a struggle between almost becoming the surrounding structures (as in the notion of 'psychasthenia', for instance) and refusing to be reduced to them (as in the notion of 'dérive', for instance)?

Knut Åsdam: This is a great question, and it summarizes much of what we have talked about in the other chapters. One struggles both with and against structures of power or a topic (which does not of course mean that you can ever be on the 'outside'). In the psychology of language, there is the struggle between working with language, taking it for one's own means, of making it 'meaningful' and the opposite pole, rendering language unintelligible and risking or wanting a decline of the 'self'. None of these strategies work in and of themselves, but in their conjunction or interplay we find the development and definition of struggle itself.

However, in the struggle towards the missing 10% of who you are and what you want to be, or articulate yourself as, there is also the simple recognition that everything we deal with in our everyday life entails a certain degree of performativity and depends on being reinscribed -- even conservative power needs to be re-inscribed daily. It means that everything is up for contestation. Sure, some things reseat themselves much in the same way as the day before (as, for example, your body) --but never in quite the same way. You might suddenly feel more tired or your back starts to ache. There is always something that is pulling even as you let go. So you need to rearticulate yourself, your thoughts, your participation in your society or within your family -- even if you aim at that totally unattainable "like it is everyday". If you are living in an urban complexity, there are even more claims on you in the everyday, in your workplace, your free time, your time with family and friends --

all that you will have to face one way or the other even in trying to stabilize your day. This is reflected also in the explosion of political struggles in contemporary urbanity because of the great differentiation of people and issues, and the difficult task of maintaining integrity within larger political entities like parties or unions.

I think many of my works share a formal similarity with this in terms of the different contestations within the work, the pose and the stain in Untitled: Pissing, or the city architecture and the subject in Filter City. More important to me is that I have had continued interest in ideas about struggle throughout my work. Whether it related to antiquated ideas of masculinity, to economic or political authority, or to definitions or claims upon the body; my investigations have always been focused on finding processes of crisis, deviation, or even symbiosis in order to clarify the politics of the situation or the proposition. In Come To Your Own, Legendary Psychasthenia and in Filter City we also find the enunciative struggle of the speaking subjects, a process that connects to what we were saying about 'speech': faced with an economic and social situation that is beyond her control one character in Filter City attempts a very affirmative and actionary language, the other loops language back into herself in a depressive speech. Whether verbally, bodily, or socially, the enunciative struggle -- bringing meaning into language or letting go of language -- (either through not speaking or by extremely elaborate 'meaningless' language) is, of

course, also a part of the subject's struggle to find a place within a society, an economic and social context. This is a struggle that starts in the commonplace everyday and stretches all the way to global media. Today, with the vast expansion of the United States' grip on the world, we desperately need a re-articulation of political speech and action, and with the multiplicity of media and the incredible ornamentation of depressed speech, this is a formidable struggle. However, in many ways, our distance from the agencies of power is so great. They have perhaps not been so distant since the beginning and flourishing of the worker's movements in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. So perhaps there are chances for great changes -- and here we desire a change much larger than 10%.

SS: It is interesting that you bring up the notion of articulation, which is crucial to the making of political identities. This notion of articulation, stemming from the Marxist tradition of Antonio Gramsci and seen today in the work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, among others, is naturally somewhat different from the notion of becoming stemming from Deleuze and Guattari's Mille Plateaux, in particular, but also somewhat at play in Hardt and Negri's Empire. I am curious how you see the role of art production -- as articulation, perhaps -- in this context? Can articulations be made that hegemonize, advance, and unite different struggles, and are such articulations to be seen as 'organic' work, that is, as participatory or as purely representational and in that sense educational? If

contemporary art is to be engaged in 'contemporary subjectivity' as you have named it, then it cannot be avant-garde, but must rather posit itself within the Gramscian definition of the organic intellectual, partaking in struggles. However, much of your work seems to focus on the moment before articulation, as presence rather than representation. This is what is, then, in a political sense at stake in early video works such as Come to Your Own and Untitled: Pissing both performative pieces dealing with emergence rather than emergency and with presence rather than representation. On the other hand, more recent works dealing with narrative rather than performance seem to come closer to notions of representation and articulation as opposed to presence and becoming -- here I am thinking of Notes Towards a Dissipation of Desire and Filter City.

KÅ: The question of articulation is very important, (and also a term I have used a lot instead of 'artwork' or 'piece' because articulation is connected to utterance, enunciation, composition, cultural dependence, subjectivity and temporality). I think that there is indeed a movement in my work over the last ten years similar to what you suggest. However, that movement is not as such a movement away from presencing and emergence, but was simply influenced by the understanding that presencing and emergence do not appear in a vacuum but in the interplay between processes of temporality, speed and conventions of everyday life. Emergence and presence are not worth looking for in isolated studies, but take place temporarily within

people's complex interrelations with the lived, the political and the everyday. So I am more into impure tactics here. But certainly, I am committed to working from how I experience and understand contemporary subjectivity, but within that you will also find desires for the future. Formally, in the new works I am not illustrating performance, but I am dealing with the performative, both in the characters and their articulation as such, but also in the sense that any claim is also performative. I have affection for the idea of the Gramscian organic intellectual, that it is necessary or even unavoidable to partake in struggles --one is living through the contestations that are made for your social group, your body, your relationships, your welfare or your profession, contestations that have resonances and alliances with others'. I am trying in my later works to narrate and articulate relations that are political in the way they relate to an everyday that can be recognized in many different urban settings. It might be small or big conversations, rather unimpressive meetings in an ordinary setting, but it is in the relations between all these things -- the architecture, the place, the subjects and characters -- that there is a political resonance, one that brings forth the social and economic uncertainties we have today. In these works there is a lot of transference going on too, the transference of similar social concerns to different locations. Architecturally, it could take place in many different countries and cities; the economic or social stress that is there could also be transferred in similar ways. Certainly the works are not purely

representational, but they have a metonymic tangent connecting them to social struggles, or politically contested desires, one can recognize a political and economic climate so to speak. And hopefully they show relations of interdependence and possibly counter-production that we can recognize or desire.

SS: Ah, speaking the language of desire! What I find crucial in a work like Filter City is the push-and-pull, the 'war of position', if you will, between resistance and surrender both in the languages of the city and the subjects. Even if we see one of the figures as surrendering to language, to the consciousness of language in her depressive speech, this surrender is nonetheless a resistance: a resistance to language itself -- to making it active, grammatical and meaningful. It is simultaneously spoken and circumvented, and desire constantly surfaces in this speech, as it does in the more constructive approach of the other character. But such notions of desire are integral to any truly political language, in invoking exactly desire and the imaginary rather than the rational and ideological. What I am aiming at here is that we should not try to separate desire from politics as in the modernist conception of democracy, but also ask for the impossible, as it were, always speak for and through desire, not just in so called sexual politics, but in all emancipatory politics. Which of course creates a central place for, and places a great responsibility on the role of art: speaking the language of desire, of the imaginary.

KÅ: I agree very much with not separating desire from politics, and that this is essential for political struggle and for what content we put into the 'social' and 'personal' -- and I also think this is how people experience the political of their own 'everyday', in people's own lives it is never separated from desire. Desire in this case is also what enables us to think what could be rather than what is. I am not sure though that I am able to posit 'new horizons' in my own work (that is a difficulty with the representational). However, within works like Filter City and Notes Towards a Dissipation of Desire I try to mention desires for different personal or political horizons through dialogues, monologues, and architectural scenes, although these possibilities might not be given in the work. Since I am already asking the viewer to enter into an imaginary of desire in relation to persons, groups, and a city, I hope that the leap to the political imaginary is not too big. This is where the poetic is useful. By juxtaposing the imaginary of the pieces with textual, pictorial, and even psychologically specific traits of social and economic features of today's West, as well as to the struggles of language, I hope to also create a resonance to an imaginary of a desired political field: although in this case this process happens in the viewer and not in the narrative of the work.

SS: The formulation of an other language that is not removed from the political field, but perhaps runs parallel to it -- and at best is

emancipating and engaging -- also requires a simultaneous deconstruction and reconstruction of the field of art as a public sphere, a sphere that is formative of subjectivity, modes of address, conceptions of audiences, constituencies, communities and as a place for exchange. Pierre Bourdieu and Hans Haacke famously described the art world as a battleground, and Alexander Kluge noted that the public sphere was a site where struggles were decided by other means than pure war. How would you place yourself in these struggles, and what conception do you have of your public as historical, fragmented, partial, community-based, or even counter-cultural? Can one be at all precise about one's conception of audience/community and subsequent modes of address in the contemporary multi-faceted, corporatized, and globalized art world?

KÅ: Perhaps with difficulty -- to answer the last question first. One has to attempt to understand one's audiences even though one does not have control of the way a piece is invested in other people or environments. The visual arts audience, for instance, is quite heterogeneous, but one could say that, sad as it seems, all that is keeping it together are the remnants of the bourgeois subject: the privileged, well-informed, well-cultured keepers of aesthetic and intellectual taste. The effectiveness of working in that sphere is crippled by a claustrophobic sense of self-referentiality in terms of audience and information. However, in each instance the audience is different: different artists and even different works have different

audiences -- and some artworks have different political resonance in different countries and different cities. But I don't think that the cultural and critical environments of your audiences are that hard to appreciate -- you can understand quite a lot of what is going on and the institutional and critical limitations of your work and its reception. It has been very interesting to me to move between different institutional frameworks of working. To move, for instance, from doing site specific works, to gallery or museum-based works, to radio and graffiti works and to works that are able to move across several institutional and audience frameworks -- such as film and video that go from a museum to a film festival or even television. To me a plural of audience is very attractive and motivating. The reason for that is that you have to put aside some of the very institutional or field-based references or functions of your work, and see what survives the transfer in audiences. The art world is already such a small world that the contestations that take place there seem so unimportant if they do not have the possibility of being transferred to some degree. This is to me extremely interesting, and is not just about making work that is shown in different contexts, but particularly about building collaborations and networks with people that are active in areas outside the art world. That is another way of contributing with the discussions from the art world into a larger context of cultural, social, or political producers or audiences. This means that I am not interested as a producer to maintain a cultural autonomy for the artwork -- but I do think it is important

to keep the autonomy of the cultural institutions, otherwise there will not be room for difference within cultural political dispositions.