

The Orgon art of Marianne Heske
- In the wake of Wilhelm Reich

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In 1913 Marcel Duchamp developed the concept *objet trouvé*, which translates into *found object*. The idea behind it all was that art just as well may be a found object, instead of the traditional conception that art ought to be a manufactured object. In the same fashion as most of Marcel Duchamp's projects this concept had several different functions and meanings. Of all these layers of meanings none of them could be singled out as *the* right or *the* correct interpretation. The expression itself is an allegory over the French expression for lost property. At any French railway station there are specially designed areas, little rooms marked with a sign stating "objet trouvé". This is where a scarf, a cap, as well as bags and other items people tend to forget somehow end up. Usually these things are not, of course, considered important works of art. But Duchamp believed that the object found was an artistic expression. He believed this cult actually to be older even than the ancient cave paintings. At all times man had chosen certain objects and then cherished them. This he had done not only for functional reasons, but just as well for esthetical or maybe even religious purposes. The item in question might be a bough, grown or twisted into a certain shape, a stone carrying a particular pattern or something else that just happened to be pointing itself out. As time went on Duchamp put forth a new concept, *the readymade*. The readymade is a particular case of the found object. It is a found object which at the same time is both mass-produced and machine made, a work that carries no trace of the human hand whatsoever.

Duchamp and fellow surrealist were a huge inspiration when several conceptual art-movements appeared in Europe and the United States in the sixties and seventies. Duchamp is normally credited with the honour of being the artist who began to make art in different ways, not using the traditional forms of sculpture, painting, graphics and

drawings. Today this practise is more of a rule than an exception among young artists. This is also the case for some artists in a more ripe age. Along with Kjartan Slettmark, Marianne Heske is among the pioneers in Norwegian artistic life, especially when the issue at stake is to transgress traditional patterns for making art. Marianne Heske lived in Paris throughout the first half of the seventies and is among those who defined video art, and this at a time when the very same art form was just emerging. She is most renown for having moved a “laftet”ⁱ 17-centry barn from Tafordⁱⁱ to the Georges Pompidou Centre in Paris, in 1980. The barn caused a great stir at the Paris exhibition and people appeared in droves not just to see it, but also to inscribe their names in the old timber. This practise was strongly encouraged by Heske. The barn was not machine made or mass-produced, far from it, but when Heskes art is linked to international artistic currents this barn is more often than not classified as a ready-made. A substantial point for Heske was that she insisted on moving the barn back again to the farm where it originates from. There it stands still and people peregrinate to inscribe their names.

Not all of Heskes artistic projects are based on a the idea of the found object. At lot of her art is concerned with light and energy. Heske has pointed to how the video graphic medium has a particular ability to *catch* the light. Light are electromagnetic rays and the video conveys this directly by magnetically charging the video-tape. In pure photographic filming you have to take a detour – you have to use the negative. In physics you use the expression *light* about all electro magnetic radiation. This includes the radiation who is found outside the spectre of what man is able to see with his bare eyes, in the same way it includes infrared warm radiation, which all living organisms transmit, as well as low frequency radio waves or deadly gamma radiation, the one discharged in the atomic bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

When Marianne Heske made her fame in the early seventies, she entered into the art

world by video stills, and these stills were transferred to other forms with the help of computers. The video films that were the starting point for those styled and accomplished images were all shot in the nature in Norway. Heske has on several occasions stressed, somewhat mockingly, that she, camera in hand, sucks out the force hidden inside the mountains and then transforms its power to a graphical expression.

From the early nineties Heske has also involved herself in several projects concerning the Austrian philosopher and psychiatric Wilhelm Reich. Reich, who started his career under the wings of Freud back in the twenties, was building his thoughts on an idea, dating back to earlier epochs, about a peculiar form of energy working in man and all living beings. In the 18th and 19th century theories about this life force, so to be called, abounded. Conceptions such as these were very commonplace among scientists, who tended to include it in their speculations about man and the living. To give an example: it was long believed that organic connections within chemistry - this meaning substances consisting of molecules who possess one or more carbon atoms - only could emerge by interception of the life-force. In 19th century physiology it was believed that this life force also was of vital importance to the movements of the human body, especially considering the link between intention and the carrying out of actions. If you picture yourself spontaneously and lustfully stretching out your arm to get hold of something tempting, you should have an adequate example. Reich fuses this with Freud's concept *the libido*, which is the energy of the drives, since he believed that both of these concepts were referring to a certain energy. This energy he called *orgon*. Reich sustained all of this, knowing very well that many different theories concerning the matter had been refuted and that most scientists considered the life force to be but metaphysical speculation.

Falseness

Reich first studied the orgon through its manifestations in bodily expressions of emotions. Freud and others in psychoanalysis were concerned with the issue of what happens when emotions, be they anger, mere grief or pure lust, are withheld. Reich discovered that emotions actually are processes of the body involving muscular wave movements – from the centre of the body on out all the way to the periphery. A warm smile is something being born in the chest, then spreading out for finally to emerge in the face. Reich also discovered that the way emotions are withheld happens by tightening the muscles, so that this very movement actually comes to an abrupt end. This people, unfortunately, are thought from early childhood and this contractions of muscles end up being an automatic and unconscious process. When you for instance say “to swallow your crying” then this is to be understood with the utmost literality: the muscle contractions in the throat block the expression of the cry. In physics wave movements are understood as energy transformations by means of a medium. However, an exception is here to be made for the light, which, according to contemporary dominant theories, moves in a vacuum. Emotions are, according to Reich, wave movements who are transforming themselves through the muscle tissues of the human body. The energy in question is the orgon. Reich named such wave movements pulsation, and then he argued that pulsation is the very definition of life itself. Emotions then, concluding, are a defining characteristics of life.

As the years went on Reich also studied the orgon outside the human organism. He reached upon the conclusion that the orgon was omnipresent and believed he could collect and comprise the energy in specially constructed orgon accumulators which, colloquially speaking, were called orgon lockers. An orgon locker is a metallic box with organic tissue, wire wool and wood, all placed in different layers. By sitting in this locker between twenty and thirty minutes most people, yet again according to Reich, will experience an increase in the overall energy in the body. The organism will enter into a more open mode towards the

outer world and the muscle contractions, which always exist in some form or another in the body, will tend to somehow loosen up. A secondary effect might then be a sudden rash of fantasies, mental pictures, as well as associations.

Marianne Heske has since the early nineties made a total of six orgon lockers. Two of these were recently on display at Den nasjonale sceneⁱⁱⁱ. Two more form part of a permanent art exhibition in a French chateau, and finally two of them are, for the moment, exhibited at The Institute For Psychology at the University of Oslo. Reich lived in Norway between 1934 and 1935 and is definitely among those who have left a lasting influence in Norwegian psychology, especially when you are referring to child and adolescent psychology. This was achieved by his cooperation with Nic Wall, the founder of the Nic Wall institute in Oslo.

Apart from following the orgon designs made by Reich himself, Heske has worked on the lockers by sand-blasting the external wooden frame and the enamel of the metal on the inside. The external sand-blasting is done to open up the wood, so that to a larger extent the wood will appear like skin. Skin is an apparatus of the senses not commonly acknowledged when we talk about how man is responding and interacting with the material world. Moving in darkness and reaching upon an object, be it a wall or another human being, the presence of wall or man will be noticed before actual physical contact is made between man and wall or man and the other man. In Reich literature this faculty is called field interaction. In blind people we tend to find this well devolved. Reich made several skin experiments in the early thirties and thus discovered that skin is an electrically charged membrane. The charges are modified according to a persons attitude towards his surroundings. Being frightened the surface tension will fall to an absolute minimum. In a sexually aroused person the tension will increase and accumulate in the erogenous zones. Reich believed he could read a persons health if he studied the variety in these surface tensions.

Bluish light.

At the inside the lockers of Heske there are to be found patterns based on video stills of the Norwegian mountainous core. Reich claimed that you can observe the orgon as a form of bluish light in the landscape. This form of light is often to be found in valleys and hillsides. Traditional optics tends to explain all of this very differently, but the light is there anyway, regardless of how you may choose to interpret it. In one way or another the pictures who form the insides of Heskes lockers are huge extensions of a certain form of bluish light. It then turns that the blue-shimmering light consists of a lot of small unities, patches of light with almost identical form and shape. Heske has used pictures based on this type of video stills as a foundation for her decoration of the Manheller Road Tunnel and the new Norwegian national hospital^{iv}. The inside patterns are made by the aid of complementary colours, and this may help the spectator to make *after images*. The *after image* phenomenon was first described systemically by Goethe. If you look at a green dot on a white sheet and then close your eyes an after image in the shape of the dot, but this time in red, will appear. Red being, of course, complementary colour of green. The complementary effect, if you will, makes after while the dots inside move, jump and bounce, you might say that they pulsate. To strengthen this effect Heske has also set up a colour light in the lockers. The air-window, which Reich had in his lockers, is removed, so that that no light from the outside will enter. The sensation in Heske lockers can also be linked to what you experience in the so called orgon darkroom. An orgon darkroom is an orgon locker in the shape of a room, where you can experience light phenomenon linked to the orgon energy. Reich makes a thorough description of this in his book *Cancer Biopathy*.

What transforms Heskes orgon lockers into fine art? This question might be easier posed than answered. In a interview with Bergen Tidene^v Heske informs us that her idea is to, quote: "Fuse orgon energy and artistic energy. In a way, it is the same form of energy. You

might be feeling light at heart listening to music, or enjoying a sensation of well-being by experiencing good art". It might seem that for Heske the main point is to give the artistic user an experience of the senses. This is very interesting since the conceptual tradition, and that is where Heske is usually placed, originating in Duchamp is understood by and large as an anti-sensual tradition. It is quite commonplace to believe that conceptual art to a larger degree is seeking to influence the art viewer at the mental rather than sensual level. If so be the case, then Heske is a strange conceptual artist. At the same time it is evident that Heske Orgon lockers also call out to the knowledge curiosity in the spectators. Reich's orgon theory is, usually, dismissed as fantasy based rubbish among traditionally minded doctors, psychologists and physicians. Does Marianne Heske really endorse this theory or is she just teasing us? The strange sensual sentiments you experience in the orgon locker, is that because of the orgon effect or are you just deluding yourself? These are questions Heske wants us to pose ourselves upon entering the orgon lockers, which she herself has named orgon houses. And these questions, contrary here to Wilhelm Reich, she does want to answer. Not having to answer them shall be her artistic privilege.

Ingress:

For almost forty years Marianne Heske has used a video camera to suck out the energy from the Norwegian mountains. Her films have then been used as a starting point several graphical expressions. It is less known that she has also worked in depth with the so called Orgon energy, the universal life force, who the controversial Wilhelm Reich claimed to have discovered in his laboratory in Oslo in 1939

ⁱ This word is referring to an old Norwegian technique for making houses out of timber. A certain skill is required for this craft

ⁱⁱ Place on northern shores of western Norway

ⁱⁱⁱ The grand theatre in Bergen, western Norway

^{iv} The Manheller tunnel is located in Sogn og fjordane county, on the Norwegian West Coast, the new National hospital is in Oslo

^v Norwegian daily, based in Bergen. Interview published the fifteenth of November last year