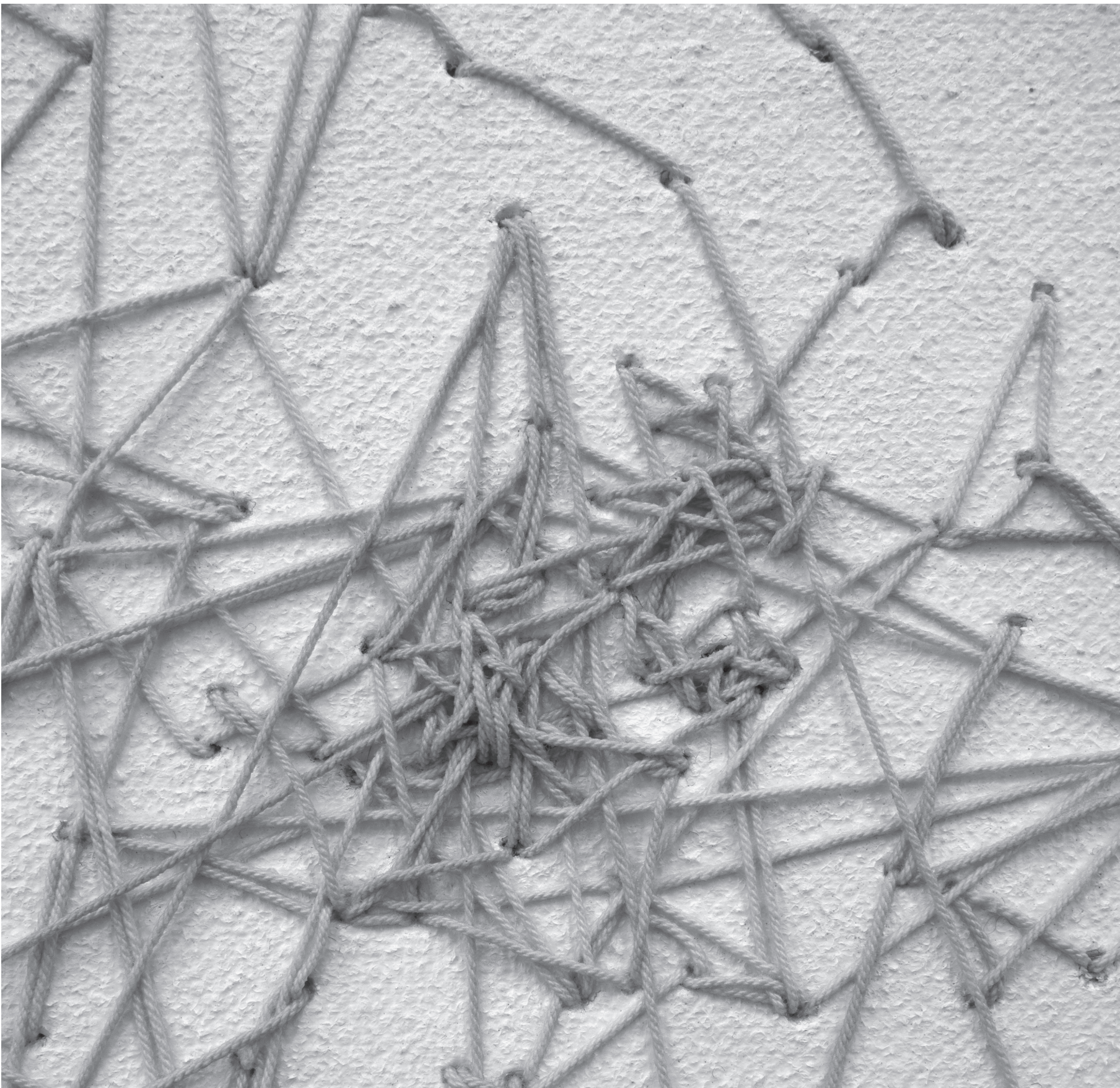


Jan S. Hansen
Populus

16.06 – 05.08 2018



CV

Jan S. Hansen (b. 1980) graduated from the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in 2010. He was part of the artist-run exhibition space IMO until 2014, and has participated in solo and group exhibitions in both Denmark and abroad at Huset for Kunst og Design, Holstebro; Galleri Jacob Bjørn, Aarhus; Kunsthall 44Møen, Askeby; IMO, Copenhagen; On Stellar Rays, New York, and Kunsthall Charlottenborg, Copenhagen. His most recent exhibition was at Marie Kirkegaard Gallery in Copenhagen.

EVENTS

Thursday 28 June 6-7pm

LECTURE

On occasion of the exhibition Overgaden has invited Finn Collin, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Copenhagen, who will talk about the Humanities as a scientific tradition and share his view on what role the sciences as well as concepts as ethics and moral play in society at large. The event will be in Danish.

Thursday 26 July 6-8pm

READING & CONCERT

This evening, the exhibition will set the scene for a reading by musician and poet Jonas Okholm who will recite previously published texts as well as excerpts from his forthcoming publication. Subsequently, the electronic duo Collisional Piledriver will perform an improvised live concert that adds a soundscape to the exhibition. The event will be in Danish.

THANK YOU

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This exhibition folder can be downloaded from: overgaden.org

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Design: Anni's

When Futures Present the Past

By Kasper Opstrup

Populus. Not a flowering plant with a large genetic diversity, but full of people. Like the genus of plants, people as genus are a homogenous concept. By being in this world they become singular and heterogeneous, divided by the separation from that state of homogeneity vibrating underneath our lives before birth and after death. All of a sudden there are too many definitions of people in the world. When faced with this apparent chaos, the human brain automatically responds with pattern recognition. The brain strives for a kind of understanding even when something cannot be understood. It acknowledges failures as signs and symbols of our limitations.

This inherent need to map some kind of order out of chaos, and the ability of the brain to perceive links between things, which rationally are not linked to each other, ties into Jung's idea of synchronicities, but also to concepts such as pareidolia; the type of recognition where one perceives a face in the clouds or fractured landscapes in abstract embroidery. Pareidolia was one of the favourite methods of the surrealist group, related to automatic drawing and its incorporation of chance into art. It is this drive towards generating stories out of fragments – narrative openings without endings, where the only limit is the limit of the visionary power of the human imagination – and its relation to art's attempt to create a new myth, bonding people together in their heterogeneity, that shall be explored in what is to come.

Surrealism can be seen as the major 20th century expression of symbolism. Both movements have always produced a great deal of unease due to their insistence on fictioning. The symbolists wanted to create new narratives through jumbles of associations, where connections would reveal themselves through non-linear jumps instead of causal scientific thinking. This became a way to open not only possibilities for the imagining of alternative futures, but also relates back to past practices of magic and altered states of consciousness, thus becoming 'other' to the dominant myths of modernity. The influence of symbolism on the imagination equals the casting of a spell. Modernity equalled for the German sociologist Max Weber what he called "the disenchantment of the world". This describes an inevitable and irreversible process during which rationalisation and capitalist systems become increasingly dominant. By detaching art from religion, it turned art into a sphere that could begin to compete with the declining religiosity. For many symbolists who wanted to transform past failures into a space of wonder, the aesthetic experience became equivalent with the mystical encounter of the transcendental.

The possibility of using art not only as a kind of fictioning, but also a form of religioning – more interested in forming spirituality than in expressing it – turned many artists towards exploring inner instead of outer space. They hoped to find a way to revitalise the latter in a transformative way. This turn is visible from symbolism and surrealism up through the 1960s when a general interest arose in creating a new mythology for the space age and onwards until our contemporary occultural and artistic scenes. The way to inner space leads through the creation of new states of mind as well as the construction of fresh symbols and language when the old cease to be valid. As such, the conjoining of futures and fictions is not only a political project that stems from long histories of forms of violence. It is also a return of magical thinking through which we switch equations for associations and use analogic instead of aristotelian logic. This does not mean that it is just a whimsical flight of fancy, rather that it might be perceived as a protest in the form of an invisible insurrection; a startling rupture that makes space for the new, but is more connected to self-transformation and hidden correspondences than to any party programme or event.

It is a speculative approach. It is built on failure, and it is fundamentally surreal. Its basic technique is to juxtapose heterogeneous elements to see what happens in order to make it happen. It is in this encounter and exchange between communicating vessels that the new can reveal itself. It further involves a certain manipulation of the real or, at least, the exploration of perceptions outside the consensual. By this, it challenges knowledge forms. Is it really possible to walk through walls? If we are being controlled by narratives, images and stories, we also have the power to escape control through cutting these stories and images up and reassemble them in another way to tell another story. This type of thought form becomes a concept that is recognisable through the practice of its technique, another type of sensation based on the internal regions of memory and desire in which the external world can be transformed and made anew by the human imagination. Its weapon is the power of myth and image. If nothing else, it acknowledges that our search for understanding worlds beyond our own cannot always be found in science or religion. It points to an alternative path for an exploration of the numinous and a more speculative, ecological consciousness where the human is not at the centre of the universe. Instead of depicting the old world of failures, it is making a new world of potentiality.

The danger today seems to lie in how there is no jolt

out of the dream-state of state-produced fictions and hallucinations. Myths, fictions, discourses are powerful means of social control but they are also strategies for overturning the grip of authority. This raises central questions of how control – another word for how fiction is used by the state – basically conditions us and propels us to act in a given way which is already scripted; but also how both the individual and the group are capable of reclaiming a sense of agency, and are thus not just clay figures shaped and organised from above. Control operates through a sort of viral image politics. As the German philosopher Ernst Cassirer has pointed out, myth is an expression of feelings in the shape of an image. Therein lies its mobilising and revitalising power. It is an image that due to its symbolic form, like art and poetry, can create connections between all aspects of life and which is able to unite our feelings and rouse us from slumber.

Even though they are images, fuelled by a kind of dramatic simplicity as known from French anarcho-syndicalist Georges Sorel's 'social myth' – envisioned as a way of acting upon the present to transform it in a manner that breaks with the past but is also free of any aspirations regarding future social organisation – myths are not lies. They are imaginative patterns, networks of powerful symbols that suggest particular ways of interpreting and give meaning to the world. The British philosopher Mary Midgley has explored how such symbolism is an integral part of our thought structure. She finds that the ways we imagine the world determine what we think is important in it. It is the structure from which we select information and facts from the constant barrage of fake news and vested interests we are presented with through online existence. The myths we construct or accept are thus patterns that shape the mental maps we refer to when we want to place something. Metaphorical concepts become the matrix of thought, the background that shape our mental habits and provide the tools with which we organise the mass of incoming data.

Linear time and empirical testimony have failed to adequately address the chronic political and social crises from the long 20th century. Art and visual culture have the capacity to draw our attention to non-linear conceptions of time and inspire our theorisation of futurity as alternative space-times by collapsing the supposedly distinct categories of past, present and future. Already the surrealists experimented with how random interruptions and provoked accidents could alter memory and thus give us the opportunity to not only invoke other futures, but also rewrite the past. This is how the future presents the past presenting

the future. If we want to survive these crises we must find new ways to inhabit space and time. One such way is integrating the thought forms of magic and science uniting the opposites of analogic vs. aristotelian logic while maintaining both poles. Here, artistic practises that engage with how the production of myths shapes who we are can play a role. This is not only fictioning, it is also a form of religioning – and here I am thinking about religion in its etymological sense as that which binds people together, in short, social glue. It always occupies two terrains at the same time.

Art practices can represent these other future fictions. They also involve the presentation of them in the here and now as possible ways of thinking and acting. It is this aspect of art's world-making potential that I have wanted to highlight in this text: art strategies that propose different forms of being in the world by disrupting familiar lines of association and reassembling new worlds, as visible, for example, in practices of sampling, collage, montage or the cut-up. This process of taking things apart and recombining them whilst not knowing or understanding what the gesture produces is constantly generative. By opening alternative routes from the past to the future, independent from the ones narrated by control, fictioning is a gesture that conceals as much as it reveals while being intent on suspending the laws of nature and causality. It challenges consensual reality like the everyday experience of eating microwaved pine martens while the cutlery levitates in non-Euclidian forms. By offering us a new platform for dreaming, it also challenges dominant regimes of subjectivity. It creates forms of unpredictability that arrives at a collective potentiality. Myths and fictions are part of the ways we orientate ourselves in the world. Therefore, they need our attention. Dramatic simplicity is one of their chief attractions, but it is also their chronic weakness. Reality is always complex and chaotic.

Kasper Opstrup is a writer and researcher.