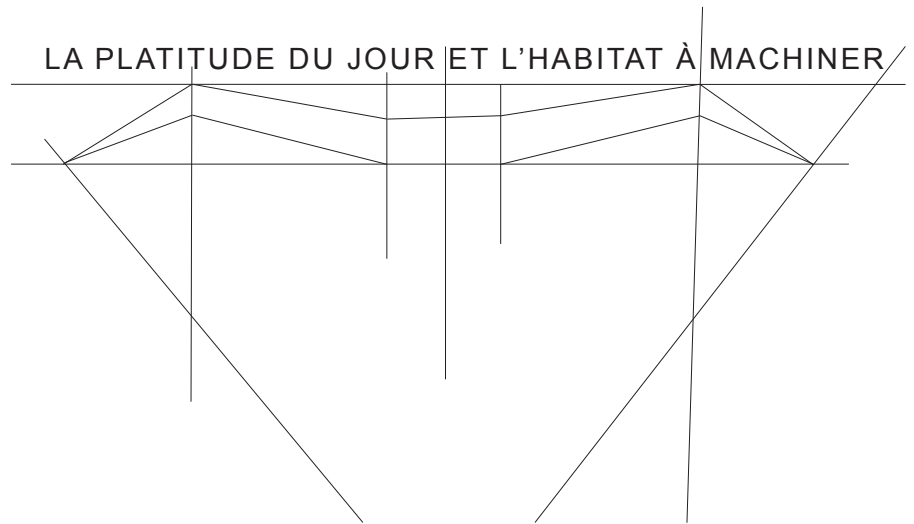




An inquiry into the logos at work in the work
of Rita McBride and Sophie Tottie
by Elmer Blåvarg

Introductory Claim 1:

There's a certain uniqueness in regard to experiences I've had, that form part of my identity. I therefore hold a distinct position in regards to this exhibition. As far as I'm concerned, I might be the only person that has had both Sophie Tottie and Rita McBride as their professor in fine art. These two individuals and artists have shaped the way I think about art and the way I make art, and subsequently also shaped the art that I make. I could pinpoint to you the differences in their respective teaching methods, their pedagogical philosophies, and of course also the sites where their thinking align. But I will not. The teaching of Art is a kind of dark sorcery that is at its best, far away from the bright light of black text on white sheets of paper. If you want to know what they both believe to be true when it comes to fostering a new generation of artists, find me and take a good look upon me. I'm a product of their respective tutelage and thus an embodiment of their intellectual heritage. Whether I like it or not. And whether they like it or not. And it is from this "unique position", this quite "singular identity", this text is written.

Disclaimer:

I may talk like an intellectual and look like an intellectual but don't let that fool you—I really am intellectual.

Day zero of two: The day before arrival: Preface

In the year of 1921 Walter and Dora Benjamin's son Stefan asks Dora to draw him a railway train. Dora tells him that he ought to draw it himself. To which Stefan replies, and he uses intervals in his speech as to discern the effect of his words while saying them, "He has not got any time. He has not got any room. He has not got any idea". This is also the story of the first time I met Sophie Tottie in 2020.

Later on, in the year of 1922 Stefan asks his father why morning comes. Walter allows him to find the answer to his question on his own: "So that the sun comes." It's a question of articulation. That is the story of the first time I met Rita McBride in 2022.

Day one of two: The day before the opening: La Platitude du Jour

- What's that Swedish time word I love?
- Yes, I'm a time optimist
- (*Laughs*)
- I always tell that to people but people never understand.
It's not that difficult to understand!
- (*Laughs*)

Every show has a context, a place and a time, a day, a datum, a datum in mind, so to speak, and I decide to find for it: I'm lounging by the grand piano in the Scandic hotel bar overlooking the bay of Strömstad. Stream city. This postmodern luxury resort tells the beautiful story of how mo became pomo. To some extent at least. The place is full of Norwegian vacationers. And, oh, to once or maybe twice in a lifetime be a Norwegian on vacation. To be sunburnt and talkative—talkative is long for drunk—but yes, don't talk to me about middle aged Norwegian heterosexual couples and friend groups of young men in their twenties. It's not a topic I enjoy discussing and therefore I'm the only one who's here by myself. Rita, Sophie and I met up at six for dinner at a pizza place Glen had spotted nearby.¹ Rita suspiciously asked if it's a Northern European pizza place. Jesper had called it scandi-core.² Sophie was talking about the birth of pizza salad and thus opted for a halloumi burger. Rita had a margarita she had to put salt on. She saved half of it for Glen. I had a calzone. We talked about some shows in Düsseldorf. Anne Truitt and Jon Rafman, and about Rita's public donkey art piece in Mönchengladbach being forced to reposition itself.³ The city loves them. But the city wants to move them. There's always, always at least two cities in a city. You know. And I know this since a long time. And now, just now the pianist comes to take his seat by the piano. Looking at me, he is, then asking me what I want to hear, what I want him to play. I reply that I don't know what I want to hear because, to be honest with you, his presence and his question takes me by surprise.

The Norwegian man next to me must have been here before, or simply has a quicker mind, and asks for *The Way It Is* by Bruce Hornsby. Cue the great Tupac sample. I smile and with the final line the piano player lets his heart out: "That's just the way it is, it is, it is, it is."

And so it's been a long day but at long last the first platitude shows its face. It is what it is. But things are, of course, never just the way they are. Something both Rita and Sophie are quite very clear about. Sophie reaches toward the knowing beyond the knowing and Rita questions the way knowing is created and upheld. And then: applause. The piano player is pleased with his abilities as a Mr. Entertainer and jokes, "ingen minns en fegis" and since I always thought the idiom got it the wrong way around, I counter with: "alla minns en fegis".⁴ And am I a coward? In many ways yes. And so people are now dancing around me. A couple gently caressing the parquet floor. The bar is slowly entering a space of bliss. That blissful ignorance of everything everywhere that the combination of a slight heat stroke, innumerable cocktails, thick wallets and a beautiful little seaside town close to Norway is made to achieve. Thinking now of how the Swiss confidence and the Norwegian happiness must be two sides of one coin.⁵ And so.

After the pizza we went down to a Catalan wine bar. I've had so many dreams lately of vermouth soda since I had it during one of the hottest evenings ever in the history of time in Paris earlier this summer. And so I order *Vermut Orange*. Sophie has a *Catalan Spritz*. Rita a glass of cava. "Du ska veta att jag inte glömt / Det finns bilder som aldrig suddats ut." the piano player still with us.⁶ We talk about Volvo cars. About the loss of generations of artists. Where is everyone? About the lack of discourse, or rather, the dilution of discourse as in: these days anything goes? After a while Jesper arrives in a silver colored Volvo with the exhibition hand outs and maps to proofread. Rita, with a frown in her brows realizes that he has removed "dimensions variable" from the check list. The very act of using this ready made phrase, and also the flexibility in the work that it proposes, is part of it. The seismograph records a slight movement beneath their common ground. Jesper wanting to simplify in order ensure legibility for the local crowd and Rita wanting to make sure that the way the work is talked about aligns with the work itself. Sophie and I sit in between, not particularly enjoying this in between. What is Rita McBride doing, doing a show in this tiny, tiny village? That question does not interest me.

He's playing Elvis now. The piano man. "I've been so lonely, I've been so lonely I could die." There's a new drunk Norwegian to the right of me. He cannot not show his love for Elvis. The pianist forgets the lyrics but it doesn't matter because his voice drowns in the drunk man's shouting. We're all clapping along now, because, why not. There's a couple now by the piano. It's hard to decide

whether it's a dad and daughter or boyfriend and girlfriend. But I suppose that's part of the charm with this place. The woman to the left of me brags about how drunk she's gonna get tonight. And asks me what kind of guy I am. I don't have an answer. Never had. I instead tell her what I'm here to do.⁷ And so I tell her then that I'm here trying to parse the context for the exhibition of two of my old professors opening tomorrow. The response is something fast in Norwegian that I cannot decipher and so we simply laugh together. After laugh she looks at my face with an evaluating gaze, evaluating my face, thus, one could argue, and then she guesses my age. She's a few years off but I tell her not to worry, because I know an artist that claims that age is a measurement as arbitrary as, say the width of train tracks, and that measurements of time and measurements of space, really are not that different from one another. She serves me the second platitude on a silver plate and states that age is just a number, glancing toward the couple opposite of us. Like, you know, I make a joke then, and ask her if she really thinks it's a coincidence that merely two years after Einstein had decidedly merged time and space once and for all, that Duchamp would create art that, you know, after Duchamp all art is conceptual... so? She doesn't laugh because it's a terrible joke, it's not really a joke at all is it, but anyway, I go on and tell her that there's more than that, that this artist I know, she would not only deliberately confuse years with centimeters and centimeters with years, she would quite literally, take the value of a face and use it as a meaning making substance. The literal surface. She asks me if this artist I know believes that every face is a mask, or, in other words, that the mask is the face, and I reply that I'm not quite sure. I show pictures of some of her artworks and she contemplates it for a while. The while passes and so she has to say something. She says that she thinks my friend the artist would say that the face value tells you the value of the mask, and if there would be a term such as mask value, then that value is what really would tell you the value of the face. I disagree with her, but still, I ask her, what would then be the meaning of a drawing drawn with face value, that is, the mask's value, as a pen? And she replies that she first of all never have believed in the word "as", but that she's ok with letting that one slip this time, and explains to me that since face value is essentially a fiction with real world consequences⁸, a drawing made with that substance must become something where the mark making itself tells the story of our ability to shape the world with our thinking, with our ability to measure and come up with concepts. I then ask her, finally, what it would mean if this drawing was simply a circle drawn directly onto the wall. She hesitates, and then says that if that were the case, then this circle could only be interpreted as the wish to achieve the whole. To create the world. I look puzzled and she reaches for her phone to show me an old wood cut. It depicts a circle, and next to it the hand of God in the act of crea-

ting it. She says that she's always been so intrigued by this woodcut because in it, it is not primarily the hand of God that is fictional, but the possibility of drawing a circle. The circle is even less possible than God and hence it is the fiction par excellence. Somehow then, it's easier to create the world than to draw a circle.

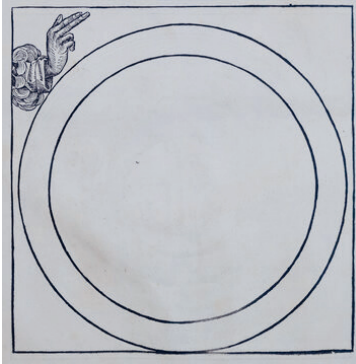


fig 1. "The Creation of the World", woodcut from an incunabulum, printed in Nürnberg, 1493

As if not having listened to our conversation the pianist now sings Billy Idol, "Eyes without a face / got no human grace". Seizing the opportunity to be, a bit, intense, I tell her that the image she's shown me reminds me of the cover of the 1855 edition of *La Fin du Monde par la Science* by Eugène Huzar. A snake circling the earth while biting its own tail. I ask her to find it for me and when she does she reads out the phrase printed above the snake: "Ce qui a été sera." I translate it to her as "What has been is what will be" and she says yes, precisely that is the impossible fiction of the circle. Repetition is impossible and therefore the circle is dumb, it is stupid. I tell her that Huzar warned his contemporaries that "The pride of science, the original sin of the world, which was its downfall in the past, will also be its downfall in the future." And that the argument he puts forth in his book is that "this rapid progress in our time, this unheard progress, will one day end in a global catastrophe, resulting from the very exaggeration of the power of science and man. Therefore, *what has been will be*, because the past for us is only the mirror of the future." And doesn't that have a certain ring of truth to it, for us, living in this age where the world has started to burn? She tells me that, okay, that may be. And the circle of my friend with a mark making signifying this conceptual power of us all, might be a drawing of a snake biting its own tail. But she's not really sure. I'm not sure either. She asks if we shouldn't just join the trance like state of her peers but I've had enough of this and so I leave.



fig 2. The cover of "La Fin du Monde par la Science"

On my way out of the bar there are two men hiding in the corner. One of them picks up a small plastic bag from his pocket. Follow your bliss. What else is there to do. It's begun to rain. Drizzle drops. One driplet after the other, yes. I walk past a mural next to the church. Strange it is. Frames of different times on top of the untouched cobbles and islands, the archipelago, and on top of it all rows of columns and Greek letters I cannot read. Yes. And it's like this: I would never shy away from a platitude. Not even the flattest of the flattest ones. And so it's neither now nor then. I close my eyes and think of that time when I was little and my father would read to me from my favorite book. A fable of a group of animals encountering the human world. Its Swedish title is

beautiful: *Hit och dit men ganska långt bort*, perhaps translatable to “This way and that but quite far away”. In particular I remember this scene where the little group of animals stand in a forest glade looking up at the full moon. Not having seen it before they’re unsure of it and they’re unsure of what to call it. They go with “bacon”. Now, only a fool would laugh here. Naming is different from measuring but they share a common logic; both enable us to see the world as it is being created. Rita and Sophie, both in their respective practices, refuse to coldly accept certain aspects of how the world is measured and thereby designed. So, if the tools used to measure the world is what enables us to see it, these tools must surely be available to be seen as well, but with what kind of gaze? What is the toolset with which one can measure, or un-measure, the tools themselves? At Lokstallet, in Strömstad, Sweden, close to the Norwegian border, this is what they both are trying to articulate. But, an angel joins me by my bedside to ask, do they succeed?

Day two of two: The day of the opening: L’habitat á machiner

So it starts. And so it starts. It never begins. It never has. But a morning sometimes starts. It sometimes does and with it the sun-machine. I didn’t scream. But that’s ok. It’s ok. I meet Rita in the foyer of our bed and breakfast without breakfast. But then there was breakfast. In a bag of course. What? At last Sophie shows up. Ever the optimist and optimistically we stroll. To the show. It’s opening today and so I waste little time because these people, the artists behind this show, are, of course, real to me. Some people aren’t but these people are. Of that I’m quite sure. The first time, yes, there are first times, always, sadly, or, yes, I don’t know, but in the academy where Rita thought and taught for a long time there was a student that said that brief encounters are the most beautiful encounters there are, and that second encounters just are memories of the first, and, and, so there was a first time. In the architecture department of the Royal Institute of Art in Stockholm I sit by the computer completing, something, when Sophie enters with “Oh I wasn’t quite sure, so, this is how you look in real life?” And I was afraid I would answer something silly, like, “Eheh, for real” so instead I’m silent. Ur tystnad i tystnad.⁹ And so the saying goes that if you sit by the computer that’s that. But then a few weeks later both Sophie and I sit by our computers and someone is talking. The person talking is talking about something like ventilation shafts colored yellow, she put the color yellow on them, or was it red, I can’t tell because I only remember her glasses. Orange. Fascinated. I’m fascinated by them so picture this: a while later I send her an email asking if I can become part of her class. She responds something along the lines of just join our Zoom on Wednesday. Something like this then happens and during this Zoom I try to conjure up some courage, I conjure it

up and I ask a question during the Q and A. I did ask a question and that's how I then ended up in Rita's academy in Düsseldorf. Things happen like that sometimes. And the first time, because I heard, there are always first times, the first time then that I see her, in the real, it's in an aula. The grand aula. But I can't remember much more than that. I guess because the first time already happened. That time with the orange glasses. And so then it's like this: the three of us stroll down the hill from our bed and breakfast without breakfast, or, yes, the breakfast hides in bags, so, we stroll toward the space. Lokstallet. The train stable. It's a windy day, fittingly enough, but it's terribly gloomy. The weather. Some insides as well perhaps. Outsides? Definitely not. Rita's wearing a shiny pink blazer embroidered with a dark blue swirly pattern and lightly dyed purple jeans with some pink Essentiel slippers.¹⁰ Sophie? A green, grass, shiny, cropped trenchcoat and trousers out of black lace. Glen calls it a detective's coat. Sophie does not take it as a compliment. Who's in the right here? Beats me. And speaking of myself, I'm wearing my watch inside out as I always do for special occasions and my soul slit up length wise. We out here. Roll the dice as some people like the say and the betting starts. And so it starts. It never begins. It just starts. Things just start. As long as someone's there to, yes, start it. They are both this someone. And I get the feeling they've been that someone for their whole lives. And that's how you can become friends. Sometimes. And so did it ever start? And what year? There are just simply so many of them. 17-? 18-? 19-? 20-? And what's a year other than a silly messy measurement anyway, the difference is not really there, is it, and people know this, Sophie knows this, and the guy behind this town's impressive, cartoonish city hall knew it. Conflating time and space at quite a grand scale, he was.¹¹ And rightly so and so Rita's relatives start a betting site and hats off, the lids off, the black box opens up and the robotic arm materializes its silhouette on the sail. That's a start? Right?

And so "I always start with images".¹² "I always start with images" and "I am not interested in the image".¹³ At first sight two incompatible statements but at second sight it's beautiful the way it makes sense. You start with what you're not interested in so that you end up somewhere else. And so "I was going through photos, which I hate to do as you know"¹⁴ and then we have two, four, black lines printed on top of two long sheets of paper with a combined length of 27 meters. Rolling down from the ceiling and unfurling on the floor. The limit of the large scale printer visible in the lines and shown by the repetition of the number 240. 240 centimeters, maybe. Breaking with the otherwise strict logic of lines, numbers and clean shapes of rulers and other tools, are small gusts of wind dispersed along the black lines. Pointing one's attention, then, to the five large, used, sails hanging down from the ceiling. Arriving in symbolic language are the silhouettes of deconstructed calipers on top of the sails, printed by a plot-

ter in red and black and blue. Caliper, as in an obsolete tool for measuring eyebrows. Eye have eyebrow and I have two of them and so the deconstructed calipers symbolize the expression of opinions, and, more specifically they symbolize the deconstruction of the measurement of the expression of these opinions. I will never forget Derrida's "Deconstruction is justice", how could I, so justice as the possibility of deconstruction and we have justice as always to come, always around the corner. In the heart of the deconstructed calipers we should then find a movement toward justice. But "more" on this later because it's like this: the sails are sails because the wind is the public opinion. The sails catch this wind, right, they harness energy from the dispersion and expression of opinions, they can be sheeted and then the ship will move, break the waves, and so that's that but I'm lonely again. Outside this time. A ship sailing by. Real sails. It's still quite windy and the bay is tiny so the sails are reefed. Nevertheless they stand proud. Full of life. I glance back upon the sails inside the exhibition. The smooth ceiling fans making them sway ever so gently, but, yes, they're sad. The small straps designed to tell whether or not the sail is correctly trimmed dangling in verticality, the gravity pulling them down. What is a sail without wind? A story of potential? In here there's no wind. No opinions. What are eyebrows for if we don't use them? If you don't express, you don't think, alas, you know, that's how Botox ruins thought, and if you don't catch wind in your sails, they aren't really sails, or?¹⁵ I can at least rest in the rich black squares printed next to the calipers. Rita was laughing when she told me that it took her two whole weeks to print four of them.

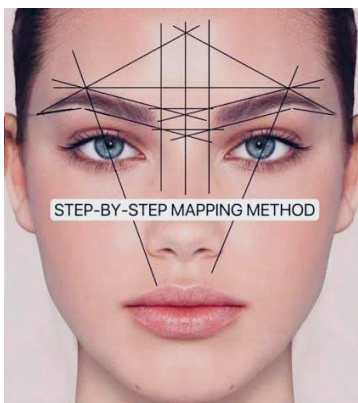


fig 3. Contemporary caliper action

So, naturally, while resting in those squares, the podcast putting me to sleep last night comes back to haunt me: "When does someone say something that has an impact in the real world like, when does rhetoric move from just being, you know fluff, that we put up in to the internet; into moving materials in the real world, influencing how people vote, protest, [...] stuff like this, how do you even approach that question?"¹⁶ The answer? It used to be: follow the money and so in order to do that in this day and age you follow the opinions. And again, so it's like this, and this is important: in order to claim an opinion, in order to broadcast an opinion effectively, you have to have authenticity. And authenticity is a question of branding. So as if placed there by Rita herself to exemplify this, we, the people at the opening, are blessed by the presence of a highly opinionated American teenager-turned-man.¹⁷ This man has branded himself with a vintage Spider Man t-shirt. A t-shirt that signifies authentic interest in popular culture going quite a way back. Yes, actually, way back, because it's washed out colors suggest that this era of pop has a few gray hairs

growing on its soul. Therefore, when he boasts opinions on the state of the world through the lens of popular culture, he's entitled to embody these opinions because he makes sure he brands himself as experienced in the field, as authentic.¹⁸ And so a question lingers in the air of the old train stable: can you float opinions without authenticity?

Apparently not. And to make a quick detour, allow me the pleasure of a tangent to go off on: this is the reason why comment sections on Social Media has become a major site for expressing and forming public opinion. They are the "last frontiers of intentional digital interaction".¹⁹ And this intentionality, authenticity, if you will, takes you by surprise. The sudden escape from the algorithm, at least seemingly, to a place where people take their time to write and to partake, to be funny or to be serious. In other words, there's meaning here.



fig 4. Authentic

And it's been there all this time. All this time. It's like. It's like. In 2011, I downloaded instagram to share photos with my friends and today Western democracy is a fascist oligarchy like oops but hey all this time, all this time, there were always the comments. The comments sections could have saved us, but now, sadly, it's already too late again: Seeking them out as "authentic" places to communicate, big and small brands compete over posting the funniest comments on whatever content really. Katie Hicks at the suspicious looking blog "Marketing Brew" describes how Dove—yes the soap company—they have five strategists only reading and replying to comments on social media. Kalie Dubrow, their senior supervisor, says "It's important for us to be looking for fresh opportunities and fresh ways that people are talking on social so that we can figure out how to insert the brand into current and relevant conversations." I mean shut up. Or what. Sorry. But hey. Hey. If this, the fact that even soap companies are hustling and bustling in comments sections, if this, if this isn't a sign, an argument for the cultural importance of, of the desperate never-ending strive toward authenticity, then I don't know what is.

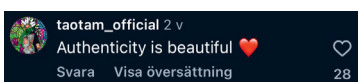


fig 5. Instagram comment

This tangent, the one I went off on, then, to prove that authenticity is as valuable a currency as ever, and show how it truly is a question of branding. Literally. And the one reason they all want it? And want it more than anything else? To sway public opinion, and hoping, they all do, to then sway it on a larger scale than the poor ceiling fans inside the exhibition space.

And so back to what I was saying. As long as I have known Rita, she's been thinking about authenticity, especially in relation to authorship and the archive. I've seen her several times become

somewhat disappointed in an artist or curator or etcetera when they don't have a complex or thought relationship with either of them. Not everyone has to be interested in the through and through debated ideas of authorship surrounding the creation of an artwork, but I do think that, if you're not pushing that question around with your work, then you're allowing conservative tendencies to take hold in it. And like fungi they take root and then they are difficult, oh so difficult, to get rid off. And so the printed calipers are yet another of her contributions to that ever-ongoing debate. You see, we all have eyebrows and thanks to these eyebrows we can express our thoughts, our opinions, our reactions to everything and nothing. So if you measure that eyebrow, what are you really measuring? Yes, its authenticity.²⁰ This is how it's possible to measure, design, the validity of the opinions expressed by eyebrows. Parallel to this we have Sophie's claims that there are no authentic measurements. So? So just like that we have the concept of changing one's eyebrows to change one's whole appearance, one's whole personality.²¹ And it tracks. It tracks. It fucking tracks. Sorry, I don't want to be a potty mouth, my kids are gonna read this, but it tracks. It f-ing tracks. And this is the million dollar sentence: the money shot: the one phrase to rule them all: *I was trained to track change*.²² To fine tune my sensibilities toward the world, become a photographic plate slowly revealing the image, and sense things people without this training could not perceive. And so I'm sorry for this next sentence but what can I do? This is apparently the kind of sensibility I have: I was tracking trains when I stumbled on the train track. As one does. And so what? An old man helping me up on my feet asks me: "Are these lines or are these time-lines?" Yes my dear old man with your head on the nail, what we have here, at our feet, is it a depiction of train tracks, a timeline or something else entirely?

In an effort to answer his question I tell him that I was once told that an abstract gesture is the gradual movement from the real to 'pure' form, and a concrete one is taking the ideal, 'merely' thought up, form and putting it out in the real world. An abstract square and a concrete square are thus very different from one another, but they differ only in the way they were given birth to. Western art history, I tell him, would here go with for example the French painter Camille Corot as a father of the abstract gesture, all the way to someone like Piet Mondrian, and, say Hilma af Klint or Wassily Kandinsky for the concrete. This is not completely true, but still, he nods in agreement. And thus, I continue, the opaque black squares on the sails here are abstract squares. Derived from the black box initially shown when booting up computers in the olden days.²³ I tell him that I, to be honest, never really think that much about this, to me, a little bit technical differentiation, but when Sophie states how "Strangely enough, concrete form can both give shape to silence and make it graspable.", saying that

“...without concrete forms and attempts to form, which guide us, we cannot return there [to the silence]”, she firmly states that the concrete form is necessary for reaching silence. And also that her work “...simultaneously gives form and, paradoxically, highlights how the abstract and formless have a value.”²⁴ The distinction seems necessary. Abstract information made visible through concrete form. And the consequences? They’re hiding in plain sight. Sophie deliberately leaves information abstract, moving toward almost a random noise. But here the old man interrupts my monologue-to-be and tells me that he used to be a mathematician, that he still is, a mathematician. And to mine and your delight, one of the things he spent his life researching was random noise. Having followed the recent development in Large Language Models he tells me that the crux of their further development lies in the compression of information. Therefore, compression can even be considered to be the basis of intelligence. And the most compressed form of information, he tells me, is random noise. I nod to this, although, to be fair, not entirely-entirely, following him, and tell him that the value of a row of four digits here then ought to lie in its intelligence. In the fact that the concrete number is free to play together with the abstract concepts of years or a distances. All the while the lines also are free to be lines, be they time-lines or be they train tracks. Different modes of interpretation are here available to us simultaneously. What’s random and what’s not? What’s noise and what’s made into being not-noise? I hear the crickets, but also, I don’t hear them, you know. And so wherein lies the intelligence of it all? With no-one or nothing to decode the random noise, can one really talk about information, or abstraction, anyway? The old man asks me if I have a name and I say no and stagger out of there. I think of the beautiful pair of lines running along the floor of the entire planet. These lines. A perfect concrete moment. It’s just lines. It’s never just the way it is, but these are just the perfect lines. Violent lines. But what about the liners? The liners informing Le Corbusier’s famous villa. What?²⁵ Forget about the liners. They were powered by steam. And we’re not into steam. We’re into wind.

A simple comparison would have it this way: the sailboat follows the opinions floating in the air and the railroad imposes a world-view onto the world. But then again, they both enabled Europe’s settler-colonialism.²⁶ Without either of them it would not have been possible at such a scale. Perhaps it’s this violence inherent in their conception that makes Rita explicitly refer to the upcoming Swedish election. Printed on top of the sails is the date 13/9. The election then interpreted as that regatta referred to in the work’s title—*Regatta Betta*. And “Betta” perhaps as the increasingly betting-like structure of Western democracy. An amusing game of cards for the high-rollers around the world.

In the last election of 2022, the far-right fascist party Sverige-demokraterna became the second largest party in the municipality

of Strömstad. Surpassed only by the Social Democrats.²⁷ That racism and islamophobia has taken hold of the village is clear after spending just one night there. I'm taking a walk through the picturesque harbor and a guy comes up to me and out of nowhere tells me that he "hates Islam". It is therefore with real urgency that a thinking around the formation of opinions is necessary. I have mentioned earlier how comments sections on Social Media is a place over other places where opinions are formed. For a teenage boy to start a TikTok account, it takes a mere 15 minutes before the content starts to turn misogynic and right-leaning.²⁸ The disparity in success between the online right and the online left is a problem analyzed by many leftists. In the US, for example, 90% of alternative media sources are right-leaning.²⁹ A claim can be made that the 2024 US election was one decided by podcasts—dubbed as it is as the "the podcast election", or, alternatively, "the Joe Rogan Effect". And as a response to this a few leftist podcasts with an overt propagandistic agenda has popped up. They're here to educate a public about the material conditions that run this world. They're there to encourage unionism and to de-radicalize the youth. The problem is, however, that they struggle to compete with some kind of sex appeal that right wing content producers possess. A swag, I guess, an aura, coming from their hyperbole speech positioning them in opposition to a cultural hegemony, a so-called elite, lending them unrivaled authenticity. A real proposition by the left is, by now, to ban the algorithmic feed. Quoting the intense radicalizing effect it has on the youth—a radicalization that's very difficult to reverse if it takes place during an adolescent's most formative years. So one could say that opinions are floating in the air around us, but one could also say that the opinions are orchestrated by a select group of immensely powerful tech-oligarchs. Single handedly holding the power to steer the public opinion with their technology.



fig 6. Regatta Betta?

And so during one of our conversations Sophie brings up Marcia Sa Cavalcante Schuback's notion of the Fascism of Ambiguity. And similar to how it's possible by now to identify that "fascism needs AI just as much as AI needs fascism"³⁰, Cavalcante Schuback states how "So called artificial intelligence aims to create artificial sensibility and to replace the complete mobilization with a complete automation. The fascism of today no longer strives toward an international fascism but toward *the world as fascism*."³¹ If I'm to very breezily unpack that quote, it's about the fascism of today not being interested in mobilizing the entire population around one single leader and goal, but instead wanting to automate the human and replace its sensibilities with artificial ones that will streamline themselves to that essentially one and very same goal, complete and total homogeneity.

Cavalcante Schuback writes how contemporary fascist politics renders all meanings and values ambiguous. This ambiguity is performed by a constant appropriation and expropriation of meaning—it transforms every meaning and every value to any meaning and any value. The immense polarisation taking place in politics makes everything appear as one and the same: everything in a polarized world is easily flipped to mean the opposite. This ambiguous fascist politic, also empties out the world through exaggeration and overabundance. Freedom of speech kind of loses its meaning and value when it's used only to say whatever one wants to say in a public sphere. We have an overflow of information that rids the meaning of meaning. An oversaturation of images rendering the viewer blind for the transformative power of an image. We have eyes that do not see. And without eyes there's no point in having eyebrows, is there.

This is the epistemological arena within which opinions are formed today. And also the arena these ambiguous opinions strive to create. It is an arena where an opinion can mean anything. It is primarily there to destabilize and empty out the meaning of all other opinions. What's at stake here is a reality where opinions are useless, because the one dominant opinion is that opinions are of no value. We could thus talk about an erasure of wind. And so the techno-fascists have realized something sailors have known for a long time. It is not the wind blowing on to the sails that create the propulsion, rather, it's the lack of wind behind it, the empty space created, the vacuum, that sucks the ship forward. Maybe that's why the sails are just hanging there. Refusing, as they are, to be used in a productive manner and instead telling us all these stories of potentiality and horror. And so the ship sails.

But blink twice. Please. And I'm out parsing context again. This time at *Backlunds*. Old stone building in the midst of the harbor. The heat lamps on. Outside. I'm seated at a table with a Portuguese freelancer, Sweden's arguably best cellist and a middle manager from Saab's ballistic missile division. I tell the man making weapons of mass destruction about a recent performance project of mine and he loves it. What do I do with that? What would Rita do? What would Sophie do? And of course the inevitable question from his mouth: how did you monetize it? Well, we don't and we won't. Count to three and a drunk guy spawns in the corner. Asking if he can just sit down and laugh for a while. By all means. Laughtear by laughtear.³² His shortly cropped hair is ash, cinders literally falling out of it and there's blood on his lips. Ashes to ashes I presume and he has almost already made it to the second helping. He looks at all of us, opens his mouth and decidedly drops a bar: "You're not me I'm a rockstar, I live on top of a car car." Car car is a humorous, but nonetheless accurate description to use if one wants to instill in the listener the image of a car posited on top of another car. You know, the parking garage.

I recently saw one awkwardly installed on the ugly faux-wood-but-actually-wooden³³ floor of K20 in Düsseldorf. For the reader unfamiliar with Rita's early work it is a bronze sculpture of a parking garage. Its simplicity is deceiving and therein its allure. The first time I was in the same digital room as Sophie and Rita, that time with the glasses, Sophie showed us all a picture of a parking garage next to the department store NK in Stockholm. Rita nodded in... appreciation? Lesson 1 (finally a lesson): Some people you shouldn't show your pictures of your cats to, you should show your pictures of parking garages to.³⁴ And rightly so. Cats are forever and parking garages, thankfully, not. The drunk guy leaves. Thank you ever so much and so I can think for you:

In his 1923 manifesto *Toward an Architecture* Le Corbusier draws inspiration for a new architectural ideal from the liners, airplanes and automobiles of his era. He points at them to show that the aesthetic of modern architecture is there, just no one around that sees it. Hence his "eyes that do not see" and his intuitively easy to grasp statement that just as much as the car is a machine for transport, the modern house must be a machine for living in—a *machine à habiter*. He even goes as far as stating that the Parthenon is a machine for stirring emotions. Not sure if he's joking or not. But instead of laughing, or something, close your eyes and let your educated mind picture his Villa Savoye in Poissy to see his idea materialized. However, the 20th century enfolds and his utopian ideal became realized predominantly in its depressing inversion hollowing out so many cities. Sharing a similar set of aesthetics: functional, streamlined, efficient, practical, the parking garage doesn't celebrate the machine age, it is its depressing everyday reality. AND SO, what I'm getting at is this: instead of the machine à habiter, we kind of got stuck with the *habitat à machiner*. Now open your eyes and look around you. If you're reading this text the way it's meant to be read you're standing inside of one as well. This old home for locomotives. And hence we have LO CO MO TIVE. You see, if "loco" stands for the Spanish *loco* and "mo" is short for *modernism*, then "tive" must simply mean *relative*. As in time and space is relative, but mostly as in Rita's relative started a betting site—I mean the reason for this show is crazy³⁵, but I don't make the rules, I break them—and so the show can finally start: Rita and Sophie both articulate a distinction between what's just and what's just there. Thing is, they differ by ways of method. We have Rita deconstructing the caliper as to achieve the value of a face deconstructed and we have Sophie abstracting face value through the concrete form. Deconstruction and concretion. Oil and water. LO CO MO TIVE is an emulsion. It is mayonnaise. We love mayonnaise.

Day three of two: The day after: Imperitus

Bus after bus after bus because I'm trying to get out of there. Forced to spend an hour at the shopping mall in Torp outside of Uddevalla I get some time to ruminate over my existence. I don't want that time, it's the last thing I would ever want to have and so I conclude. I buy a sandwich and a double espresso over the counter outside a gigantic Coop. While drinking my coffee I surf the web and so I find a poem from the 1300s scholar St. Able. I'll simply let it speak for me:

One morning a little betta shows up
Ask then, what would be a betta
And so I show one hand and then one
Stable stable for me, for anyone

The screeching sound of tires makes me leave my phone behind because the bus has at long last arrived and stepping inside of it the radio is on. This summer's mega hit by the Swedish pop-rock-rap-group Café con Cretion at max volume. The bus driver must be half deaf. "No one left to show me pity / And so I come down to Authenti City". I close my eyes in frustration. Eventually I fall asleep, and, eventually, I wake up. Having rested my legs for a while I had fallen asleep on the sofa. A thunderstorm had been holding the city of Montpellier hostage, and the deafening sounds almost made me fear the wrath of god. I glance at my watch and realize it's time. August is coming to an end and I open my computer and there's Rita. And allow me to paraphrase because she talks to me:

"I went to the beach today. It's been a rainy day but I went anyway. I've always enjoyed rain on the beach. And it was windy, there was a lot of wind. It was making these fascinating criss-crossing patterns on the waves. You see, the beach is right where two seas meet so there were these huge forces clashing right in front of me. I look up and could literally see two winds facing off one another. I'm right there in it. And let me tell you, it's even better than drugs."

And so maybe I just end this on an imperative note. Someone gifted you a set of eyes. And on top of this set of eyes, a set of eyebrows. Use them.

¹ Glen Rubsamen, Rita's partner.

² Jesper Andersson, director of Lokstallet.

³ "Donkey's way" (2015). A group of seven life-size donkeys in bronze at Sonnenhausplatz, Mönchengladbach.

⁴ "No one remembers a coward", and "Everyone remembers a coward", respectively.

⁵ At least judging by nominal value.

⁶ "You should know that I haven't forgotten / There are images that never got erased"

⁷ Yes my father is an existentialist by profession and by calling. And what can I be more than the son of my father? Filiation is sadly forever, until it's suddenly not.

⁸ A concrete gesture, perhaps.

⁹ From silence to silence.

¹⁰ I think of when Rita told me that without her outfits, without the possibility to style herself, there's no way she could've tackled all that she has had to tackle at that sometimes conservative, very conservative, academy she spent a large part of her life trying to change. This is also echoed when she writes: "Being lost in foreignness is particularly stimulating, especially when pairing outfits with potential live scenarios." in *Our Game* (2024).

¹¹ The architectural measurements of the city hall in Strömstad was determined by the builder's and his parents years of birth. As described in the text Sophie has put in the exhibition to accompany her work.

¹² Said during breakfast the day after at the bed 'n' bag.

¹³ As quoted in Anna Budniewski's "A List of Abstract Aspects as Practical Ideas" (2024).

¹⁴ Rita to Sophie during a Zoom call.

¹⁵ I prefer my forehead like I prefer my brain: smooth.

¹⁶ Joshua Citarella to Jason Myles.

¹⁷ Brief note on US-American culture, because, why not: "American culture is based on the teenager. It is decadent, self-indulgent." as put by Gabriel Orozco in 2007. And if "... teenagers live in a world of their own with a culture distinctly different from any other known to man." As stated by Dwight Macdonald in the *New Yorker* 1958, this world is by now the Western hemisphere. Teenagers has since the second world war claimed the lion share of all available authenticity. They know what's up and what's down, and society responds thereafter. As in: they create the

day. And the day is never done. You know, no wonder people want to stay young. And, I was on the verge here of continuing the argument with that Dada, yes Dada, is for perverted kids. Who shit and pee on the table, and that I feel much closer to that. But then I'm realizing this is applicable to President Trump. And I don't feel particularly close to him. And so this whole little footnote—footnote as in Imperial Superpower—crumbles like the delicate house of cards it, is.

¹⁸ Not sure if I'm to be unnecessarily explicit now with informing you that this is of course the sole purpose of the introductory claim to this essay.

¹⁹ Eloquently put by Funmi Lijadu on Polyester.

²⁰ Begging the amusing question: what is an authentic eyebrow?

²¹ Quote lifted from an instagram post depicting a young woman before and after having altered the shape of her eyebrows.

²² One should of course, much like the magician never reveals their tricks, explain a joke but this sentence is more than a joke so “let me explain”: the main work from Sophie in this show—main meaning largest—examines among, other things, the changes train tracks enforced upon the measurement of time. The arrival of trains and their tracks made it necessary to have, more or less, the exact same time in different cities. Gothenburg and Stockholm was in need of one clock. This is shown in some of the year-cum-measurement-cum-years in the large print. For example “1900” which can stand for the year Greenwich time was implemented in Sweden. So what we have here is this building used to house the hounds that were the driving force behind a unifying of the clocks, making one of the measurements of time. With great speed comes great change.

²³ Or what? Stop looking at me like that.

²⁴ All three quotes from Sophie's exhibition text.

²⁵ (foreshadowing)

²⁶ Although, sailboats are a much, much older invention than the train, I'm referring here to the carracks developed in the 1400s that made it possible to traverse the Atlantic Ocean.

²⁷ See the municipality's website: <https://www.stromstad.se/kommunochpolitik/kommunensorganisation/allmannaval/valresultatmandatfordelning20222026.4.537bc111659f1dd15e1d234.html>

²⁸ According to a study by Baker, D. C., Ging, D., & Andreasen, D. M. B. (2024). “Recommending Toxicity: The role of algorithmic recommender functions on YouTube Shorts and TikTok in promoting male supremacist influencers”. And, this became even more poignant during the time I was editing this essay. An 18-year old boy tragically murders a 17-year old girl and harms three other people in a school in Sweden. As it turns out, the idea and “courage” for this attack comes

from a radicalizing section of TikTok where terror attacks are romanticized and idealized.

²⁹ At least if we trust Joshua Citarella in the podcast “Doomscroll”, episode 49.

³⁰ J. P. Hill

³¹ From “Mellan Lögn och Verklighet - Tvetydighetens Fascism”, (2025). Own translation from the Swedish.

³² Anne Carson, I believe.

³³ In Germany they love that shit so much. I’m a fan of love obviously but these overtly amorous feelings they hold for ugly flooring is a tad too much even for me.

³⁴ ”In fact, I am more excited about photos of architecture than photos of cats. I crave gravity.” Rita in “Our Game” (2024). And cats, as you very well know, have the ability to ignore gravity when it suits them. But buildings? Not so much and so they all crumble, eventually, you know, castles made of sand, melt into the sea, eventually, what not. And so very much like the wind shaping the desert’s sand dunes, the opinions re-arranges our arena time after time. You see the footnote of the footnote here is that Glen wrote a text on Rita’s seminal work Arena, and figured out that arena means sand, and, surely, by now we know that wind means fleeting air which in turn means opinions. The publicly shared ones first and foremost. I know what I should’ve answered the Norwegian lady asking what kind of guy I am, for good or for bad I am the opposite of the highly opinionated. I stay quiet, silent, a lot of times. I never blow wind around and so like a sail I just try to find answers in it. Joke 1: What does Bob Dylan and a sail have in common? They’re both looking for answers blowing in the wind. And I mean, wind is blowing, still.

³⁵ This is me making a rather weak pun that perhaps is hidden one layer too deep, or too shallow. You be the judge.

A close-up photograph of a hand holding a pen, poised to write on a notebook. The notebook has a light-colored cover and a dark red or maroon inner cover. The text is overlaid on the image in a stylized, cursive font with a yellow-to-orange gradient and a drop shadow.

*The right brows
don't change
your face
they reveal it*