

Bordurien – Flintholm

Sometimes an indefinable feeling echoes in some surrounding detail, and a random thing becomes a depot for part of the soul. On a beltway around Copenhagen, I drove past a shop sign with giant red letters, and I felt the essence of all the trips of my suburban childhood when we drove that same way whenever we had to go anywhere. This was such a complex bundle of dreamy feelings; it seemed beyond what the sign itself and the route destinations could logically induce. I only saw the sign from a car window, and even though it was a familiar landmark, it always came out of the blue, without me knowing in what part of town I was. As I pinpointed it geographically, it became less mythical. Likewise, the interior of my grandfather's living room was alive with the sum of all my visits: the pleasant holidays with the joy, horror, and absurdity that went through my head reading comics, seeing films, daydreaming. Inherited and moved elsewhere, the armchairs became concrete objects, and the soul they contained deflated. Some, less tangible things manage to escape analysis. The smell of infection reminds me of sitting on a football pitch with an irritated scrape on my knee.

In my artistic practice, I've been concerned with things and places that stimulate emotional depths that reach way back. I'm drawn by things from the past—not by what seems carefree in retrospect, but by the things that are so hard to define they induce both anxiety and fascination. As an artist, when I try rationally to construct creativity, I'm left disappointed about how limited my range of thought is and how clumsy and predictable the results are. On the other hand, I am surprised by the diverse and strong impressions I've allowed to sink from my clear consciousness down to a place from which it takes focused concentration or random reminders to call them back. I often search out things that have induced strong impressions. Some of these impressions remind me of a specific moment in time, usually during childhood. But at the same time, they contain a quality that puts me outside time. The smell of yellow abrasions reminds me of a summer day when I was eight years old and brings back other specific details from then, but the core of the impression goes beyond the specific situation, and I'm equally unable to comprehend its emotional meaning now as I was then. In that way, I'm taken outside the chronology I otherwise apply to understand my life: the one where I constantly turn into another, older person who sees through yesterday's confusion. This hierarchy is levelled, and I'm the exact same being across all the years.

I only feel like this in certain moments. Usually, I perceive the world superficially according to habit. Impressions get weaker as you adapt to the world and start grasping things practically. Faces on the train, cloud formations, smells when you enter strange homes—these things no longer play any role because they have no function. They are the kind of things that once overwhelmed me like supernatural omens, but because the omens were too vague and never hinted at anything specific, I stopped noticing them. But once you stop sensing strange details, time starts moving fast and events become generic. You can take part in ceremonies, talk, kiss, laugh, feel pain, listen to music, receive unexpected bills, and still think about something else. Even though they may not have been omens, the impressions that once frightened and moved me weren't inessential. The part of my mind that they affect is the actual mind, whereas the outer part I use to adjust myself in a world of formal constructions is only mechanical.

This shift of perspective from internal to external leads me to think of the “disenchantment of the world” Max Weber detected in the early twentieth century as the result of the standardisation of society caused by expanding capitalism and bureaucracy during the preceding century.ⁱ Weber describes how puritanical protestants created the spirit of the ultimately irreligious capitalism by viewing labour as a calling rather than just a form of self-sustainment and the exploitation of economic opportunities as a duty. They assessed hours and actions through profitability and shunned the impractical, including beauty and leisure. Their concern for possessions should have laid upon them as a light cloak but ended up being an iron cage.ⁱⁱ Weber describes the emerging trend of rationality and merely suggests the enchanted world it replaced. His text is aesthetically paradoxical, as its tone and method is cool and matter-of-fact, but it still puts the lost enchantment into a perspective of yearning.

During World War II, Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno built upon Weber’s conclusions in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, in which they detect a similar outcome caused by the rational world view of enlightenment.ⁱⁱⁱ Using Kant, they define enlightenment as abandoning immaturity and starting to think independently; they write that through enlightenment, every course of events is seen as repetition and anything that defies categorisation is left out. Enlightenment brings about demystification and thereby replaces meaning with formulas and obliterates animism: meaning objects are nothing but material. In opposition to science, which understands nature by distancing itself through analysis, art (like magic) pursues its goals by imitating nature. Thus, the writers grant art a rescuing potential, as it can mend what’s been shattered by analysis and show the spiritual wholeness contained in the specific. In other words, it can make the trivial come alive. However, art is only tolerated by enlightened society as long as it stays in a harmless supporting role and doesn’t pose a challenge in the arena of recognition.

The disenchantment that Weber, Adorno, and Horkheimer describe sociologically also applies to individual lifespans, regardless of the time period you’re born into, and is irreversible once you’ve become aware of and made yourself dependent on causal connections you were blind to before. You begin to discern things that used to seem as one big mysterious mass, and you can understand and control your own mood swings. When the world affects you, you realise why and how, and you manage to contain the impact. Of course, this is necessarily part of growing up, and the option of permanent immaturity is not attractive—childish naivety is only appealing when it’s accompanied by the observing curiosity that will ultimately undermine it—but it is hard to assess what’s lost in the process. The disenchantment sometimes seems total but isn’t, even when you believe you’ve finally grown sober. I look back and discover how irrationally I behaved not long ago when I felt myself fully grown up and clear eyed. Weber as well as Adorno and Horkheimer use supernatural terms (“enchantment,” “magic,” etc.) to describe the banished ways of seeing the world, yet it’s not just superstition and magical thinking that is lost, but also that particularity of minds and things that cannot be generalised or utilised. “Particularity” like in those impressions that form intense experiences that are nevertheless quickly forgotten, since no objective purpose requires that they be registered, and anyway, their strangeness defies precise description: if you expose them to rational analysis, only the generic is passed on. In this text, I’m trying my best to be honest and thorough,

but still feel the words letting me down in their neutral clarity, taking me away from what I actually wanted to say. Similarly, I've often been happy with paintings that, having no language or method, still express a peculiar state of mind that I couldn't describe.

Almost all the books I've been taken in by are fictional. The phenomenological skeleton for the thoughts I described above came from Marcel Proust, who, more than anyone, is engaged with the nature of dormant impressions. Adorno and Horkheimer's view of art as something that can come to the rescue when people are numbed by the scientific method is somewhat similar to that of Proust, who saw art as the means to channel impressions you've repressed as irrelevant but later revive among your most meaningful experiences. Coincidentally, I read Proust the year before I entered the art academy, when I was busy creating my portfolio and writing applications, so a period where I was hungry for references and easily affected. Another writer I read at that time was Kazuo Ishiguro, but I have only recently realised that he resembles Proust as a reverse variation of the same theme. Whereas Proust is concerned with regaining impressions from oblivion, Ishiguro is writing about the repression performed by people whose self-image would be shattered by mental clarity. The book I was reading at the time was his *When We Were Orphans* (2000). The narrator, Banks, is a celebrity sleuth in 1930s London, who goes to Shanghai, where he spent his first ten years, until both his parents disappeared, and he was sent to England. Going by his childhood recollections, they were kidnapped for their idealistic sabotage of the opium importation his father's company was involved in. When he arrives in Shanghai, its infrastructure is splintered from the early stages of civil war, and the Japanese invasion is ongoing. Nevertheless, the International Settlement is already preparing the banquet for when he finds his parents and solves the city's other problems. At this point, you wonder if the narrator has a screw loose, yet he realistically describes the nightly view of flashes from warships on the horizon and explosions in other neighbourhoods. The story is compassionate towards its narrator, which sets it apart from postmodern fiction that reveals its own fictitiousness, or a psychosis depicted from within. When Banks follows an impossibly vague tip and walks out into the street battles, magnifying glass in pocket, certain that he will find his parents in a house that maybe once belonged to criminals and that both sides' soldiers will assist him on the way, reality bends to his dream logic and rejects it at the same time. After an ensuing anticlimax, a Japanese colonel drives him back and, seeing the ongoing destruction, quotes a poet that childhood seems like a foreign country. Banks replies that he still lives in that country and has just begun leaving it. Ishiguro himself admits his plots are only metaphors for the human condition. Even though the storyline is far out, it compellingly describes common themes. We get older and sharper but fail to realise that our cleverness is limited to a small, sheltered world and outside of that we're *lost*. We consciously and persistently pursue ambitions that are just ghosts of old dreams. Sinister connections we gathered when we were still naïve feel true, because they are in contrast to our innocence at that time, but by insisting on them, we exclude more obvious explanations. We try to rearrange the scenarios that went before a loss in order to regain what's been lost with a simple trick: the International Settlement in Shanghai toasting idealistic speeches to stop a new great war; the orphan visiting a specific address to bring his parents back from the past; or someone counting on memories to recover the past, hoping to regain a wasted potential. The book is also about

nostalgia: how the memory of experiencing a good world makes you fight for a good world, but how it also illudes you and leads you astray.

The phenomenologist Gaston Bachelard realises in *The Poetics of Space* that analysing poetry by fixing it in a theoretical context ruins the poetical essence, and so he sets out to make a “phenomenology of the soul” that is ready to reset its own foundations for every new poetic image.^{iv} To comprehend the soul, he uses the house as a metaphor. The more floors and rooms in the house, the more spaces the memories have to live in and we have to return to in dreams. In the house, there are rooms where the unconscious can reside happily, as he differentiates between the normal unconscious and the ousted unconscious that psychoanalysis deals with. What you think you know from the past is “a sequence of fixations in the spaces of the being’s stability—a being who does not want to melt away, and who, even in the past, when he sets out in search of things past, wants time to ‘suspend’ its flight.”^v Everyone has a house of dream-memory beyond the actual past where imagination and memories blend together and create “the real being of our childhood” that lives on as a source of poetry.^{vi}

Impressions steer my life, even though they’re unbound by laws of nature, chronology, or factual precision. Dead people and faraway people live on in me. I spontaneously misinterpret an ambiguous image or phrase the same way now as when I first deciphered it. Even when I feel my judgment is unclouded, I fail to recognise things that later seem obvious. Lacking a final fact sheet for all invisible connections, assumptions are what everyone has to fall back on.

I find it incredible that *my time*—the time that started with my earliest memories, which feels like a morning dream; the time that consists of emotional impressions that accelerate or slow it down, and seems able to stop or go backwards—is the same time as that general time that applies to the whole world and makes everyone gradually older; the time that only moves in one tempo and one direction, that was mapped out and tracked forwards and backwards in calendrical data long before my birth. That in the same moment, I was caught up in and enchanted by details as a kid; events determined by old mechanisms took place, which I wouldn’t know about until long after and which I would then think were as new as my discovery of them. That the whole world is not already within my impressions and that it doesn’t even know about them, but yet the impressions are tied together with all the events they sided with in time, merely because they were contemporary and only practical coincidence kept these external events from rippling into my life. That any person has that same private time consisting of equally peculiar and exclusive impressions in lockstep with general time.

Concerning time, I’m particularly interested in the ’90s, as it was the decade in which I was born and made my first impressions; when the vibe of that decade now seems weird, I don’t know if it’s to do with my own outgrown child’s perspective or because it actually was a weird time. There’s sometimes an eery feeling to that period: the bizarre colours and angles in photos, the shallow coolness of posing models, and the dorky appearance of everyone else who wasn’t yet used to constant cameras. The mixture of dreaminess and clumsy realism matches my own memories. It’s also strange how all those visual details that make up the look of a certain period—the state of the

streetscapes, design of supermarket items—are almost totally wiped away from the record, and the remaining visual documentation highlights singular events that were historically noteworthy. I saw an exhibition recently in which Copenhagen as European Capital of Culture 1996 had put random objects (packs of cigarettes, women’s magazines, etc.) into “time capsules” for posterity, and even though the contents of these capsules didn’t invite any grand comparative analysis, it formed an impactful image of the passing of time. More impactful than the historical events that everyone and no one has a relation to, which end up remaining alone in hindsight and make it easier to generalise the whole period into an overriding political trend.

When I see footage from the past, I’m sometimes saddened, because the people seem doomed. They’re stuck inside their time and the pictures like mosquitos in amber. They talk, dress, and behave in a certain way that must have been natural or hip to them. Their way of laughing sticks out too, as if even the spontaneous is mimicry or a stage of innocence everyone has since outgrown. When they’re melancholy, I understand them, and when they’re glad, I feel sorry for them. They can’t see themselves from the outside or what the future has in store. Did they wait for something amazing, or were they content just existing? They surely must have become disappointed since. Past videos have an atmosphere of loneliness. Is that because a more intense loneliness actually existed before the option of seeing and writing anyone anytime, or is it a posthumous loneliness of those buried in time?

I stumbled upon an obscure YouTube video: an American documentary from the ’90s about youths from the state of Nebraska who accused powerful local men of having molested them sadistically. The court rejected this and flipped the case’s charge from abuse to false accusations, but the documentary is obviously siding with the accusers. It plays an emotional soundtrack to indicate who’s good and who’s evil, and everyone interviewed gives the accusations credibility. Rationally, the claims might well be fake, and the documentary is certainly too one-sided to be trusted. Yet I was struck by the video’s atmosphere of helplessness in a system of evil. This is the basic atmosphere of a conspiratorial world view, and of course many others attempt to create it, but they typically come across too weird to strike a chord. I was drawn by the sentimental effects and by the low-quality video’s corny and oversaturated VHS aesthetics. The youths give off an indifference beyond fear and hope, as if they’ve long ago realised their stepping forward will make no difference, because the visible world is a product of their enemies, anyway. Even the cheery and constructive elements are sad because they’ve been created as a smokescreen: balloons, corn fields, court houses.

Since the ’90s, conspiracy theories have become a potent political phenomenon. In the USA—which for better or worse sets the tone for other countries—public discourse has splintered, and everything has become a question of narrative and ulterior motives; the line is blurred between sensible scepticism and biased delusion. The most notorious group in this landscape is the so-called QAnon, whose world view is based on at-first-glance reasonable causes: child protection and distrust of politicians, which in their greenhouse of information have overgrown into paranoid mythology, making them willing to use violence against public servants. In 2021, they took part in storming a government building, which made them a symbol of horror to the rest of the country, and they were erased from the sunny side of the internet. Their theory is that the free world is run by elites who

hurt children in satanist rituals. Since these elites have no scruples and dominate the entire political spectrum as well as media and public institutions, it's only natural to QAnon that there are no witnesses and everyone's against them. They're always on the hunt for real proof and, in the meantime, refer to an eclectic pool of circumstantial evidence. The video from the '90s is also used in QAnon circles.

The perspective of conspiracy theorists is, in a way, similar to the perspective of a child: politicians are grown-ups who lord over the world and decide what is true and false, but at the same time, there's a hunch that a different reality exists among them that they try to keep hidden. Like an unconsolated child alone in the world, they connect random details and give them a terrible meaning: a cryptic message is code language boasting human sacrifice, a weird sculpture is a requisite for a Black Mass. Is this perspective maybe also similar to that of an unrestricted subconscious? You distrust some people for no clear reason. Certain things give you outlandish associations. You sometimes wonder if your silly premonitions hold an acute intuitive judgment.

If anyone has a poor reputation, it's QAnon, and yet their world view is mirrored in several places beyond their own forums. Mainstream movies and TV shows are crowded with kind politicians who turn out to be monsters and public employee-assassins who can camouflage killings as natural deaths. In historical research and journalism, revered figures are taken off their pedestals and analysed anew, this time with an assumption of brutal cynicism. It's paradoxical that the fear of power has grown so strong in an era where power is more transparent and more riddled with irrational symbols than ever. On its own and without metaphysical ideals, the ambition of power becomes suspect. Bureaucracy seems like the bland streets above a sewer of evil. Horkheimer and Adorno write that one expects to be free from fear when enlightenment has analysed all things unknown, but the resulting tautology doubles the horror and enlightenment becomes radicalised mythical fear.^{vii} This can also be applied to the political system: whereas archaic titles and byzantine processes might have had a calming effect as they make oddities appear natural, the same oddities become horrifying when they occur in a mechanically efficient political system carried out by impossibly uncontroversial career politicians, robotic clerks, and trivial regulations. What higher purpose do they serve? There's no limit to what people are willing to believe exists behind such a neutral façade.

From the evidence they present, QAnon's fierce hatred of politicians is unlikely to be caused only by the fear of child abuse. It also seems to be fuelled by a fascination with both the occult violence performed by the powerful as well as the rebellious violence they themselves want to carry out. Like people who imagine paedophiles, only to give their violent fantasies a legitimate object. The lust for appreciating violence is the same in vigilante movies, in which an initially peaceful protagonist is the victim of an act so heinous, it justifies the ensuing killing spree. In these movies, revenge isn't merely something you begrudgingly accept as a necessary evil in the lack of legal resolve, but something you indulge in, to a degree that the premise becomes just a symbolic excuse for hours of choreographed violence—the beautiful, superior lead wiping out the ugly degenerates.

In *Powers of Horror*, Julia Kristeva writes about “the abject,” a concept she coined to address the opposite of all norms. It can both mean something physically repulsive and something abstractly immoral. Kristeva sources the abject to the absorption between subject and object, and locates it in the crossroad between phobia, obsession, and perversion, and so it contains both fear and fascination.^{viii}

There’s also something about QAnon’s dread for omnipotent satanists that echoes a wider sentiment. Whereas the *diabolic* theologically and morally symbolises the ultimate evil, the pact with the devil—in which you give up your soul or morals to achieve worldly success—is a frequently used figure to illustrate how the world works (although rarely in QAnon’s literal sense of including actual rituals): someone abandons their principles and ideals and succeeds by selling out to their opposition or using others as pawns or simply seducing people to do things they otherwise would not. In Dostoevsky’s *Demons* (1872), anarchists cause havoc in a small Russian town. They have great plans for transforming the world and their misdeeds are calculated to bring their vision about, but it’s implicit that the politics are just a sheen over their true desire for chaos. Events turn out in their favour, so it’s hard to say whether they drive the world forward or vice versa. They try to make the charismatic Stavrogin their figurehead. He’s unmoved by mayhem, but his inner darkness compels him to ever greater transgressions, and, at the same time, gives him magnetic radiance. On the other hand, the story’s moral character, Shatov, is helpless and confused. He falls out of step with the action around him, gets outplayed and killed, having achieved nothing. This novel is also highlighted by Kristeva as an example of the abject in literature. She quotes the enjoyment specific characters get from seeing fires: the more intense the joy, the more out of control the fire.^{ix}

When someone depicts evil as strong and good as weak, it often reeks of they themselves being weak and wanting to fool others into thinking it’s because they’re noble. It suits a defeatist, superstitious view of evil. The bad don’t necessarily feel strong themselves, or even evil. But the figure of an evil phenomenon, moved forward by convenient circumstances and people letting themselves be drawn along, still seems striking, both in fiction and history. It rises, bending all obstacles and norms, only to suddenly collapse and see its *abject* gift for spellbinding disappear.

In crime stories, you’re one step behind a murderer who seems diabolically superior to the detectives, but when he’s finally caught and explains himself, handcuffed, he’s just a nobody. In the novel *A Wild Sheep Chase* (1982) by Haruki Murakami, there’s a supernatural sheep that occupies a random man and gives him frightening drive and influence, only to abandon him like an empty shell once his task is fulfilled. These figures illustrate arcs from all levels of real life: someone obtains power within a certain field using a degree of brutality that inspires awe rather than condemnation, until they suddenly fall, and everyone wakes up from their abject fascination. In his last photos, Muammar Gaddafi is scared and alone, pulled out from his hiding place by a lynch mob. He’s lost the charisma that allowed him to rise above good and evil. When the scandalised Harvey Weinstein stumbled into court with a walker and drooping mouth, he seemed only formally identical with the ruthless god of Hollywood he was known as before.

Once the feared have fallen, it's easy to pile onto them and start punching. The evil spirit that gave them drive and shielding charisma has already left them for someone else starting an ascent elsewhere. If a psychological mechanism is needed to explain that evil spirit, it is the fascination people feel for someone who openly oversteps moral boundaries, and the frenzied hope that they might obtain the same benefits by following suit. When it's all over, the followers explain they were tricked or coerced, but this account never seems quite sincere.

In revived memories, when you feel a mix of fear and fascination, it's caused by the simultaneous pull to and repulsion from the amoral and grotesque that exists parallel to one's reasonable understanding of the world. You're particularly sensitive to these things when your understanding of the world is still under development. When you get older, you stop caring as you navigate in accordance with norms and taboos like traffic rules—without any profound approval. However, in art, you are still confronted with the feeling.

The artist I've been most infatuated with is Pierre Bonnard. It might have been when I went to a Peter Doig exhibition at Louisiana several years ago, where a quote by Doig on the wall described Bonnard's style as akin to when someone lies with their eyes closed and tries to replay a scene for their inner vision, that I began to think of Bonnard as special (more so than if someone had just called him "dreamlike").^x Bonnard is concerned with the intimate and homely, which discreetly affects his personal impressions—colours are magically shiny, and the floors sometimes tilt like a ship in high seas—but he never actively moves the painting away from his unconscious sensing and into his own construction. It gives the images an ambivalence that contrasts with the depicted scenes like in a video with no audio. Bonnard was rejected by some for his joy of beauty. That's not only a blasé but also a shallow interpretation, as it fails to consider the ambiguous distance in the pictures' sensation, which typically goes through photos or memories.

While rococo art, for instance, strived for the beautiful and conventionally harmonious, visual art, since way before Bonnard, has been concerned with the anxiety-provoking, either by obvious means or by denying the spectator fixed points and easy interpretations. In 1757—the middle of the rococo period—Edmund Burke described the beautiful in relation to the sublime. The beautiful inspires love,^{xi} while the sublime induces fear.^{xii} Both concepts are defined flexibly, so they can also apply to things that Burke didn't live to see. Neither is dependent on conventions—the swan and the peacock are both beautiful birds in Burke's eyes, even though they are each other's opposites in shape and colour. The sublime is primarily characterised by danger and ambivalence. While contemporary people are galvanised by depictions of monsters and gore, the sublime can also be subtly present. Burke excludes the option of trivialising a small animal once you know it to have a fatally toxic bite. I find Bonnard interesting because he oscillates between the beautiful, which is obviously present in his colourful scenes, and the sublime, which, upon closer inspection, rises up from the depths of the distorting consciousness from which the images were summoned.

An artwork that uses no ploys but that I still find chilling is Gerhard Richter's 1988 series of paintings, *October 18, 1977*—painted eleven years after the depicted events: the death in custody of the leaders of the Baader-Meinhof Group. The Red Army Faction (RAF), as the group is also

known, was an ideologically extreme group in West Germany that committed fatal attacks on various representatives of the state and capitalist interests. Richter's pictures are painted immaculately from black-and-white press photos, but with a blurry brush effect that makes them discernible from the source. In her article on Richter, Siri Hustvedt states that all Germans recognise these images, but here they appear as revenants haunting the living, more like pictures of a collective scar than documents. She notes that the paintings "conjure the feeling of remembering itself, which is always a clouded or faded version of what was once seen."^{xiii} The pictures' topic is historical and described by many, but the atmosphere is still ambivalent and vague. After all, the essential details are still not clear despite the coverage. You only get an inkling of the theme if you don't know the references, but the vibe is still disturbing. In Renaissance portraits, it's not scary that noblemen have a potential for violence when you see them pose in armour and carrying a sabre. This was how they solved conflicts, and the period is so distant, their appearance now invokes a carnival. In Richter's RAF series, there's another source of unease, as the potential for violence seems anachronistic and *uncanny* in terms of how the subjects appear. They are sophisticated, fragile, and non-distinct, citizens in a bureaucratic and disenchanted society where disagreements are to be solved through analytical discourse, where you're not allowed to carry arms, and still they've decided to kill. As if civilisation can never eradicate violent conflicts with rationality and violence is ever close at hand, despite all restrictions. While the press photos and written reports distance you from the events by putting them into a context and flow of information, the paintings, in their silence, refer the viewer to a strangeness that can't be analysed clearly. In explicit accounts, you only see things through established facts and then everything is simple. When we know the ending, we see it in that light and nothing leading up to it is dubious. Periods in time that were filled with a dread whose object ultimately never materialised lose their content and become generic, as they're analysed in accordance with their factual outcome (e.g., 1930s, troubled; 1970s, untroubled). By removing the omniscient narrator's voice of hindsight, the scenes Richter calls forward in his paintings are suddenly refilled with the ambiguity they must have had when the depicted scenes took place. The same goes for his paintings of relatives in Nazi uniforms. This is a theme so clearly illuminated in retrospect that it's hard to grant it ambiguity, but the title of *Uncle Rudi* (1965), a portrait of a man in Wehrmacht uniform, gives the model a degree of familiarity. He's posing in his uniform, smiling expectantly, and everything is blurry.

The Baader-Meinhof Group is associated with conspiracies from all angles: through their perception of the state, their own secret schemes and attacks, and their leaders' apparent suicides in jail. But even disregarding that, the paintings' aesthetic is loaded with something anxiety-inducing. It is the same with Luc Tuymans's paintings, where the context is less familiar. These are most often stills from what looks like easy-to-watch TV shows. By being frozen in time, they're given back that awkward slowness that characterises reality, which is cut out in TV edits. The viewer is forced to give the picture a deeper meaning, but what? Conspiracy theories are related to this beady eye, which directs a penetrating gaze to the transient and random. It's through the excessive use of this gaze that one becomes willing to go hunting for the evil system that surfaces and leaves its traces in a random scene, only to disappear again before anyone can catch it. These loaded details become

darkly mysterious relics, like the photos of JFK's happy motorcade or the three witnesses pointing to the place from which Martin Luther King was shot.

The same gaze on the world can also be applied in a more personal, undramatic manner. Looking back, life seems to be consistent: "That was the year I graduated" and "I was into this and that, so obviously I went on to do this." It's hard to accept that the now of the past was as restrictive and unclear as the current now, and that what happened was next impossible to foresee even though there were signs.

By seeing pictures with no description or evident context, you're confronted with how hard the world really is to navigate and comprehend. How the rational rules of thumb you use to get by are only used retrospectively or once things are fully analysed or designed to function within familiar frames. Doctors might be able to analyse thousands of hazy X-rays once they're trained to recognise all typical problems, but once something unknown appears, they're irrational anew.

Art's shift towards the sublime and fear-inducing happened such a long time ago, you might ask if making people uneasy with art still serves a purpose, when they've long gotten used to just that aim, and the lack of harmony has become its own convention. Art's also a reaction to its time, and so it'd feel contrary to only show beauty in an era characterised by distrust and where God, science, and humanity are not generally revered, where everyone seems to be waiting for some revenge of nature and the decline of civilisation.

In my paintings, I've dealt with my own fascination with long-lasting and indeterminable impressions and memories. I don't want to let the unsettling dominate, as a habit or a shallow influence from a ruling aesthetic trend. I'd like to combine the uneasiness with intimacy and love, because even in safe moments, I'm filled with ambivalent impressions. I want to show the beauty of trivial places in my life, which have reached a fantastic dimension because of the travels through imagination they've inspired or the relations to other people they've enveloped. I'm captivated by how the world can contain so much affection and intimacy next to so much brutality and randomness. That one extreme can be only a snap of the fingers or a doorstep away from the other. That even in brutality, there can be sympathetic hints, just as the safe and intimate include details reminding me of savagery.

ⁱ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons and Anthony Giddens (London: Unwin Hyman, 1930; London: Routledge, 2001).

ⁱⁱ Weber, *The Protestant Ethic*, 123.

ⁱⁱⁱ Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 1–35.

^{iv} Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969; new edition, 1994), xvii–xxii.

^v Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 8.

^{vi} Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 16.

^{vii} Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 11.

^{viii} Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 45.

^{ix} Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 18.

^x Something similar is quoted in “Peter Doig: Twenty Questions” (extract), in *Peter Doig*, ed. Adrian Searle, Kitty Scott, and Catherine Grenier (London: Phaidon, 2007), 142.

^{xi} Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. James T. Boulton (London: R. and J. Dodsley, 1757; London: Routledge, 2008), 91.

^{xii} Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, 57.

^{xiii} Siri Hustvedt, “Gerhard Richter: Why Paint?,” in *Mysteries of the Rectangle: Essays on Painting* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Architectural Press, 2005), 149–167, <https://extrafilespace.wordpress.com/2016/09/04/gerhard-richter-why-paint-by-siri-hustvedt/>.