

(B)
IOGRAPHIE

MOYRA DAVEY, HEMLOCK FOREST, 2016
WASSILI FRANKO, UNTITLED CONVERSATIONS IN VR, 2024
MAJA LI HÄRDELIN, SKILDA VÄRLDAR (WORLDS APART), 2024
MARK LECKEY, DREAM ENGLISH KID, 1964 - 1999 AD, 2015
JIAJIA ZHANG, UNTITLED (AFTER LOVE), 2021

(2)

TWENTYSIX

(A) (B) (C) (D) (E) (F) (G) (H) (I) (J) (K) (L) (M) (N) (O) (P) (Q) (R) (S) (T) (U) (V) (W) (X) (Y) (Z)

(B.1)

CALL AND RESPONSE, OR A MIRROR SPILLING ITS CONTENT IN BOTH DIRECTIONS

BY ANNA R. WINDER

The other night I decided to google myself. It had been a while since I had last done so. I scrolled through the google entries, checking the degree to which the algorithmic ties between the appearance of my name and the selected thumbnail photographs were accurate. I concluded that my name had gotten less murky and more outlined. Clicking through the pages, which chronologically tend to list the vaguer connections, I suddenly discovered my name in the headline of an article in a poetics journal, written by David Berridge. To my surprise, the name turned out to actually refer to my person. It was an article about my contribution to the book *Glancing to the right of Antares in Medium Blue, I intuit comic allurement*. This having never happened to me before, I wondered if it is common to write about others and their work without letting them know? Speculating about their motives, strategies, and attempts. Strange, that I should wonder about that only when the tables had turned—it had never crossed my mind before to contact the people whose work I write about. I roam freely through the information available, speculate about what is unavailable, and draw invisible lines where they appear to me.

One particular sentence from the article rings through my head: “Does Winder decide she has gone too far?” He takes note of my calling it an unauthorized translation—a confession of sorts on my part that my text does not meet the typical standards we hold translation work against. I roam a little too freely, insert myself slightly too readily, I make myself known. The work I was translating and commenting on in the form of loose annotations is the

book *Læsningens Anatomi* (The Anatomy of Reading) by Amalie Smith. Written in the form of a daybook, journaling the evolution of beginning to read again in the wake of a severe concussion, it is deeply autobiographical. I grew up in the city where the book takes place, so all its settings are crowded with my own memories. I too, have been heartbroken at the Assistens churchyard, I too have read, seated on a stony staircase, flooded in dim darkly orange streetlight. Is this the practice of a bad or of a good reader? In traditional terms, I would likely be considered a bad reader—not to mention a bad translator. My verdigris green copy of *Læsningens Anatomi* lies on top of a pile of books to my right, eying me with slight condemnation: keep out of my narrative, write your own book. Here I am again, metabolizing on *The Anatomy of Reading*. My appetite for this little book, which I first encountered at sixteen, does not seem to have diminished. However, the title of Berridge’s article in the poetics journal, *The Anatomy of Reading: Amalie Smith and Anna R. Winder*, shows me that I have definitely gone too far.

It must be said that I did ask for Smith’s permission to make and publish this annotated translation, even though I have to admit that I was running so short on time approaching the deadline, I didn’t dare ask before submitting my contribution in case she would decline. I only asked for permission once the book had already gone

to print. Along with Smith’s book, I have brought a small selection of titles with me to a three-month residency I have just begun. Among them is *Mother Reader* by Moyra Davey, a book that has also become somewhat of a manual to me, which I return to for consultation. More than motherhood as such, what spoke to me about the book was a quality often acutely experienced in

motherhood; the strong sensation of being called to a world outside your own, and the sense that you are not separate from this world but part of it, just as parts of it are part of you. A mirror spilling its content in both directions. My former arts professor once told me that during her pregnancy she could hear the stars sing. Another aspect of this tied-to-the-world-ness—or state of attunedness—described here in the context of motherhood, is its urgent bodily dimension. It highlights the sensual quality of negotiating one’s ties with the animated world. Leaning in or withdrawing, feeling your outline dissolve into that of others, or other worlds, or crystallize around you, in moments of metaphorical instantaneousness. Here, I follow the Borgesian idea of the metaphor being an immediate but unanalytical and unconstructed nearness between two things. It is the product of the chance encounter between two kindred-spirited things, two things whose forms align, between which a line can be seen shimmering, producing a constellation. Recognition—does it always follow in both directions?

The apartment where I am staying for the next three months is fully furnished and belongs to two old ladies—I have been told that it is their childhood home. Strangely, I find it easy, even seductive, to slip into the life that this apartment speaks of, like a cosplayer that sleeps in their costume. All its rooms are lined with wooden built-in shelves, low boards, and wardrobes. The cabinets and drawers, most of which I have spied into, contain endless sets of china and rows of silver cutlery. Yesterday, I tried on a dotted silken scarf left in a cupboard, in front of one of the many mirrors installed throughout the rooms. There are also books and textiles, lamps and clocks, all carefully selected to fit the style, which I would describe as German-flavored mid-century modern. Perhaps the completeness of the architecture and furnishings is so convincing that I am sucked right into it? No. Something must be missing. Otherwise, its universe would be hermetically closed and there would be no room for me. There must be cracks here too, frayed edges, washed off veneer, a certain osmotic pressure. At least that is my theory; I easily slip into environments—be they real or fictional—that have something unfinished to them, that contain little voids. Smith’s book has a sketch-like quality, a study. Perhaps because it is journaling a process. It is a collection of material, a notebook. Apart from logging the various steps in beginning to read again after the concussion, it traces the history of reading, or as the title names it; the anatomy of reading. It recounts the development of letters and alphabets, the transition from

oral to silent reading and the remnants of speech in written words, the book as technology, and its way into the library, among other aspects. As the days follow one another, information is accumulated, sourced from various books that I, the reader, feel an urge to pick up too.

I was always drawn to the written word, characters and signs, to alphabetizing. As a child I collected alphabets in a small orange notebook. When I encountered people that spoke other languages than my native Danish, I asked them to write down their alphabet for me. I would make a diary entry spelled out with Polish characters—masking Danish words of course—another form a cosplay? Inhabiting strange alphabets, trying them on. I even drew the rune alphabet on twenty-four small cards that I handed out to my class mates, in the hope that they would join my play. For a time, I could read the stone inscriptions, but eventually my knowledge of runes faded as it lay inactivated. I only remember how to spell my name. The same goes for Egyptian hieroglyphs. My name in hieroglyphs consists of a bird, with a rounded chest, like the chest of a ‘q’, facing left, followed by horizontal zigzags, repeated with a bit of air between them, ending with another bird, identical to the first. My name, an anagram, two identical parts, folded in the middle.

My name, as a decorative element that can be repeated to form a patterned chain. Names have never been holy to me but shifty and slippery. I love pseudonyms and have changed my own name several times. Aliases. I have often sensed that my shifting name has been a source of irritation to others, as if there is something suspicious about name changing. The idea of a fixed name is tied to that of personal property. To conceive differently of property, perhaps we need to relax our relationship to names. One of my favorite presses, known as Creation Books, among many other aliases, however, has a slightly too relaxed relationship to property, hence the many names. Among them are: Solar Books, Future Fiction, Tears Corporation, Sun Vision Press, Glitter Books, Wet Angel Books, Creation Oneiros, Velvet, Bondagebest Limited, Butcherbest Limited, The Kobra Kollection, Attack! Books, and Annihilation. These names are strangely alluring to me, like little shiny stones that one can collect, or small colorful boxes that one can peek into. I am not sure if they still operate, and if so, under what name. Here, names are means to occultation by diffusion, of going undercover, instead of a means to be found.

Another title from the stack of books I have brought with me is *The H.D. Book*, poet Robert Duncan’s book on the work of poet Hilda Doolittle, who went only by her initials. Duncan’s book is partly the result of a letter correspondence with H.D., initiated by Duncan when he began writing the book in 1959, lasting until her death in 1961, and his intensive and continuous reading of and engagement with her writing. At the time, H.D. had been largely forgotten, and through writing *The H.D. Book*, he also regarded it his task to uncover her writing from oblivion, though he worried about how to do it without creating hype around her name. The result was a monumental and difficult book whose publication Duncan didn’t live to see. Apart from discussing H.D.’s work, it is also a book on Duncan’s poetics; a search or quest for a poetics developed in dialogue with her work. In the introduction to *The H.D. Book*, its editors state that the initial conversation between H.D. and Duncan opened up to include a vastness of other voices and minds. About conversation as form, which they call a “particular kind of event”, they write: “The central responsiveness—back and forth—is also always, in a true conversation, a further, an

opening beyond.” Many of these other voices and minds are referred to by name. While the contours of the conversation are not limited to those names, they serve as entry points; “The presence of the names is itself an opening and an invitation to each reader to join in.”

Rigorously written and rewritten, Duncan returned to the different chapters many times, revising, editing, and expanding them. He compares this method to the process of architectural construction—or rather reconstruction or restoration—he says that he does not want to “correct the original” but to “live again its form and content”. Instead of feting the ‘original’, he compares the series of revisions and recompositions to an old city. As opposed to strictly designed housing developments and landscapings, often constructed where disorderly areas of a city have been removed, the old city is multilayered and multitemporal, open-ended. Duncan compares this palimpsestic approach to Gaudi’s restorations of the gothic cathedral of Palma, or Freud’s picture of Rome upon Rome. His method implies a concept of content as emerging rather than as a finalized form, of form as open-ended. May only the author return to their work in this way? What if the reader is taken with an urge to add successive layers or digressions? Is she a welcome or unwelcome guest? Duncan seems to endorse such a reader: “The poet and the reader, who if he is intent in reading becomes a new poet of the poem, come to write or to read in order to participate through the work in a consciousness that moves freely in time and space and can entertain reality upon reality”.

I am reminded of a section from *The Anatomy of Reading* where Smith quotes an anonymous chat-forum entry on the ethics of archeology, of unpacking and handling material of the past: “in a sense, the matter of archaeology travels much faster into the future than I, who seem to be standing still, trying to grasp it. Therefore, there is no reason to fear violating it by interpreting it: It always escapes. And there is no reason to believe that it suffers in the process of interpretation: In the interpretation process, it is much stronger than me. Instead of guarding it, it is I, who should guard myself from it.” When adding layer upon layer, the bottom layer continues to make itself felt. The ‘original’ need not be protected from interference. What does the anonymous author mean with “it is I, who should guard myself from it.”? Perhaps it refers to a fear of becoming infected, inhabited by this past, of losing autonomy. A simultaneous search for likeness and relation but accompanied by a desire to keep this relatedness at a safe, scientific distance, to not lose ones’ delineated contour. Or is it about the matter itself, being frightening in its persistence and mute mystery? Subjectivity being lodged in soft matter, almost motionless if we zoom out far enough, while hard matter holds a different temporal dimension. I think of Bergson’s proposition that the difference between a stone and a person is only a matter of degree.

Smith talks about how she was asked why she did not name the book “The Archeology of Reading”. She doesn’t answer this directly, but it is clear that she wants to insist on the bodily. Her focus is on the physiognomy of reading and the alphabet as (bodily) technique; braille, writing that is absorbed and decoded through the fingertips, silent reading’s relationship to oral reading, where tiny muscles of the tongue are activated with each word. Particularly the latter spoke to me, perhaps because of an early experience with the relationship between letters and the tongue. As a young girl I had a slight lisp. It wasn’t very pronounced, yet my parents deemed it proper (or maybe it was my own embarrassment of this irregularity

and the felt autonomy of my tongue) that I go see a speech therapist to treat it. I remember that her practice was located in a suburban house, probably her own home. She had a s-machine, a little metallic apparatus, reminiscent of a thermometer, with a clock hand that responded to the sound of 's' and showed how correctly it was spoken. She made me say 'ssss' repeatedly, until the clock hand pointed at the desired spot, and then asked me to pay attention to the position of my tongue. 'Oh,' I remember thinking, 'this is where it is supposed to be'. She asked me to memorize the tongue position, to think of it every time I pronounced words containing an 's' for the next two weeks. I followed her instructions and my lisp disappeared after just one session with the s-machine. It does occasionally return if I am exhausted or drunk. Underneath the subsequent layers, the earlier body memory is still intact.

I am speculating if body memory is also stored in printed words, if there is a way to unfold this. Rhythm is present, and rhyme and diction. Conversation as call and response; like calling into a dark cavity using the echo of your own voice to feel out the shape of its interior. Smith: "Am I ventriloquizing for the book?" In his article, David Berridge writes that he feels encouraged to prepare his own annotations for the text, "if only I had access to the InDesign file and there was room left on the page", and proceeds to add one:

Anatomy, my hypothetical annotation explains, evokes Rembrandt's *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp* of 1632. The body laid out, the surgeon beginning his work, holding up a scissor-full of tendons having made an incision in the man's side. The smartly- dressed audience, who do not look at the body but over it at the large open book on a stand. (...) Juxtaposed with "*The Anatomy of Reading*" it suggests how for Smith the "cuttable", "divisible", even the "bodily" have become absorbed into behaviors and understandings around reading, where they are wholly metaphors but evoking emotions from their fleshy past.

The association to Rembrandt feels accurate to me—as it if was there all along, underneath a thin membrane that one could perforate. It brings a text by Jean Genet to mind: *What Remains of a Rembrandt Torn into Four Equal Pieces and Flushed Down the Toilet*. The text is composed of two separate texts placed in two columns running parallel to each other. How one is supposed to read this double text is not clear; begin with one or jump between them? Stay within the confines of the single page, or skip ahead following one of the columns, to return to the other later? Were the texts written at the same time, or is one a comment on or result of the other? Does one attempt to add what isn't present in the other, or are they simply two variations that Genet couldn't or wouldn't chose between? I think of the two brain halves, each column representing one of them—observation versus embodiment, intellectual attraction versus drive—the space between them as a cut. The motor of the text is an encounter that took place in a train where Genet found himself seated across from a man whose bodily presence was overwhelming. The eyes of the two men meet and in the flash of that instant Genet is overcome with a sense that he is the stranger. An instant of total identification. Is this a case of narcissistic-paranoid tendencies or of monstrous empathy?

I wonder about this experience of seeing oneself in the other, even being the other, which feels familiar to an overly emotional reader. It can be habit-forming, addictive. Why is it so compelling to exit ones own biography, to lose

oneself in the endless details of the lives and thoughts of others? I think of it as more than escapism, as something more radical than that. Mimicry and the ability to read others as a basis for the social. More than a means of escaping oneself it produces belonging. There is play in mimicry, even something erotic. In recognition, warmth spreads from the mind to the senses. While compiling *The H.D. Book*, Duncan worked from notes on scraps and pieces of paper as a method for "avoiding a totalizing relation to his materials." About Duncan and H.D., the editors of the book write:

"They shared a commitment not to *this or not this*, not to the *self* or the *other*, but to the fissure from which such forms arise into the conditioned contingency of the given." The contours of a methodology emerge, which is dedicated to the incomplete narrative strand, to the fragment, and holds a commitment to the social as based on central responsiveness, call and response in a field of play.



(Fig.01)

Moyra Davey, *Hemlock Forest*, 2016

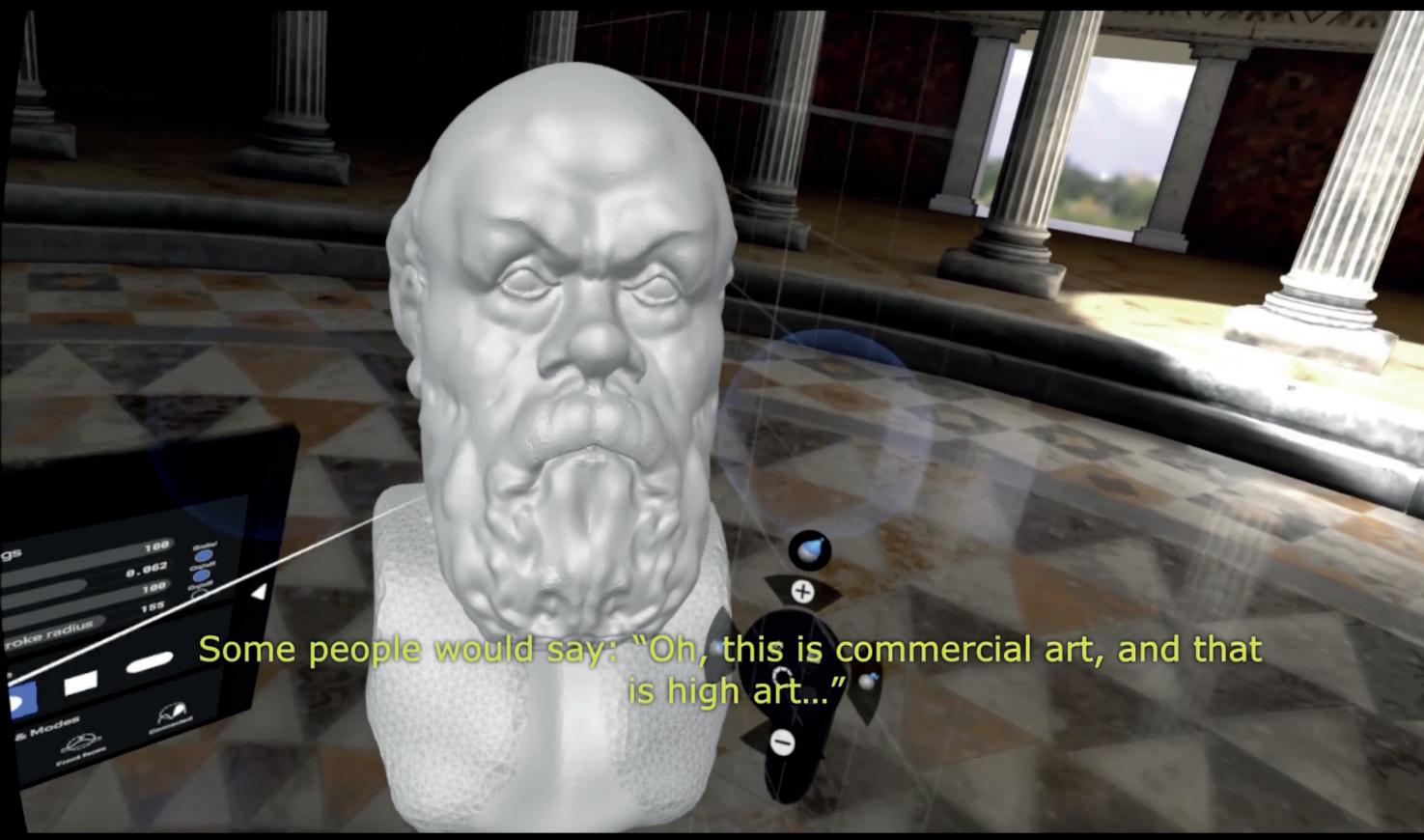
video with sound, color, 46:00 min. / Courtesy of the Artist and Galerie Buchholz



(Fig.02)

Wassili Franko, *Untitled Conversations in VR*, 2024

13:00 min. / Courtesy of the Artist



Some people would say: "Oh, this is commercial art, and that is high art..."



(Fig.03)

Maja Li Härdelin, *Skilda Världar (Worlds Apart)*, 2024

4:3 HD Digital, 25:53 min. / Courtesy of the Artist





(Fig.04)

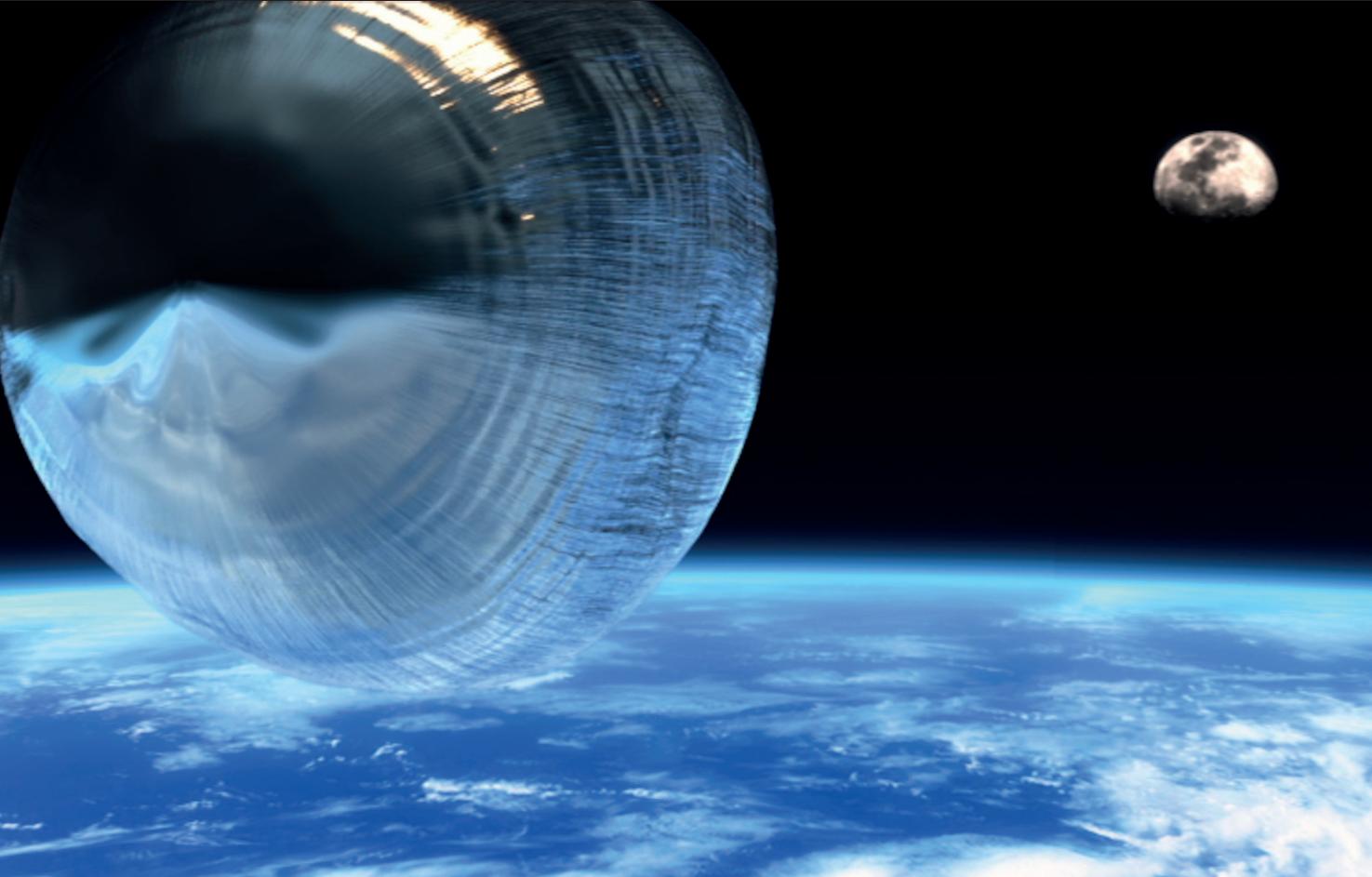
Mark Leckey, *Dream English Kid, 1964 - 1999 AD*, 2015

4:3 HD Digital, 25:53 min. / Courtesy of the Artist and Cabinet London



LIFE

抖音
抖音号: 1821288148



(Fig.05)

Jiajia Zhang, *Untitled (After Love)*, 2021

HD Video, 16:9, Farbe, Ton, 16:26 min / Courtesy of the Artist



My home is

BUILDING BLOCKS FOR DE-PARTING BIOGRAPHY

BY JAKOB VILLHAUER

Biographies make me feel like I am accessing the lives of people I never met, never knew. Reading biographies, autobiographies, watching biographical documentaries and the like is an entertaining activity; it feels like engaging with other people, even though the engagement is indirect at best. Lately, however, I have been thinking about the implications, assumptions, processes behind the project of biography. Biography, literally a written life, always faces this: How to condense something as infinitely complex as a human life into something comprehensive? In a traditional sense, biography tries to interpret an endless number of events and contexts. A person is constructed as a subject of inquiry. The 'important' is chosen, the 'irrelevant' left out. Thereby focus shifts away from ambivalences or contradictions that make up life from moment to moment. So, what exactly is it that is deemed irrelevant? Which life, which lives are considered as the basis of biography, which are never thought of in that regard? And who condenses whose life into a book, audiovisual or other narrative object? These questions generally refer to a hegemonic understanding of biography or biographies, generally those of public figures. Let us use this understanding, which shall be left alluded to but not fully defined, as a point of departure – and look for a few possible directions you could take from this point of departure.

By imploring what she calls critical fabulation, Saidiya Hartman activates archival fragments and points to empty spaces in the colonial archive. In the essay *Venus in Two Acts*, she asks: "[H]ow does one rewrite the chronicle of a death foretold and anticipated, as a collective biography of dead subjects, as a counter-history of the human, as the practice of freedom?"¹ Hartman opens the possibility of the narrative biography of Venus, an African girl subjected to the trans-Atlantic slave trade as commodity as well as a number of other brutal acts. In the archival fragments, Venus only appears in written accounts of her death and when she is acted upon; her life as such is not written. So, based on incomplete accounts, one could narrate a life, fabulating what was left unwritten. Just as Hartman opens the possibility of a narrative biography, she does not fulfil it, pointing instead to the impossibility of accuracy. This opens the question of how to deal with the fact of (literally) countless unwritten lives of people not treated as people but subjected to the inhuman system of colonialism.

Blues music as a genre is defined and its origin is reconstructed; but the actual development of the practice over a longer period is not documented. It is a Black American art form; it features characteristics found in certain styles of African music; its name describes not just music but a state of mind, that of having the blues; but the origins of the blues evade a narrative retelling of events. The biographical documentary *The Howlin' Wolf Story: The Secret History of Rock and Roll* (2003, Don McGlynn) on the other hand offers a narrative retelling of the life of blues musician Chester Arthur Burnett, known as Howlin' Wolf. Interviews, archival film and sound of Burnett himself talking are collaged in a way that compress 66 years into

88 minutes. In the biographical film, the recording of a performance during Newport Folk Festival 1966 for Alan Lomax's camera and tape-recording equipment is used as a plot point. Before breaking into an improvised performance, Howlin' Wolf gets into an argument with Son House. Both blues-musicians were invited by Lomax to perform for a film document he made at the festival. The document was later released as *Devil got my woman*. During their short discussion, started by Howlin' Wolf wanting to explain something about the blues, Son House appears drunk. While Wolf talks, the handheld camera pans to Son House, standing in the shadow, looking straight into the lens, rambling. Wolf continues and after a while refers directly to House: "See, this man got the blues right there. That's where the blues comes from, because he done drunk up all of his... Any word?" The microphone being stationary and pointed towards Wolf makes it hard to understand what Son House is saying, but he replies and tries to defend himself. Wolf responds: "We're talking about the life of a human being, how they live." When he and his bandmates Hubert Sumlin and Eddie Shaw break into their performance of *Down in the Bottom* a minute later, the music works as continuation of the discussion right before, the band is making an argument. The way the first long held notes on the guitar underscore muffled voices, the room and everybody in it are as much part of the music and performance as the music is part of everything else happening. The blues is what is talked about, the music talks, and the talking underscores the music. Wolf talks about "the life of a human being" not just when addressing Son House, but when he's playing as well. The blues is (among an infinite number of things) an expression of life experience, an autobiographical art form as well as a folk art that blurs the lines between all its performers.

Bolex International S.A. was the manufacturer of a legendary 16mm-camera, the Bolex H-16. Jonas Mekas owned several of them, lent them to other filmmakers like Jack Smith or Barbara Rubin and shot his own films with them. As I sat in the cinema for a showing of his film *As I was moving ahead, occasionally I saw brief glimpses of beauty* (2000), I started to sense how he employed the camera – none of the images feel framed, instead they feel like fragmentary experiences ripped directly from someone else's senses. During the five-hour visit to the cinema, while not being offered a retelling of Mekas' life, I was offered a piece of it, in the form of moving images. I imagined Mekas walking along the places I saw on screen, and instead of thinking of the best ways of framing them, the act of filming, the act of taking the camera into your hand, looking through it onto your surroundings and pressing the button to run the celluloid across the lens for a few frames seemed instinctive. How would you call a film by Mekas? Are they diaries or home movies? Both terms seem a bit belittling. Are they not also autobiographical, but instead of a narrative focus on a name, an occupation, events, they focus on all the contradictions and little, often forgotten encounters that are the basis of the rest?

Books, by being built with words, collect phrases in a linear way. Autobiographical books, more than biographies written by someone about someone else, can employ details about emotion and how the person felt as part of occurrences, part of the memory of an event. Were you to write an autobiography, surely it would not be a distanced retelling of your life's story, but it would retell the facts with lots of emotional anecdotes. In fact, following the thread of the ideal of facts as basis for a life's story, you would need to question the separation between facts and emotions, feelings, affect. Yvonne Rainer did so by naming her autobiographical book "Feelings Are Facts".

B., an abbreviation that refers to Paul B. Preciado's middle name, can also be read as a seizing of fixed meaning, fixed names, especially fixed identities. The letter and dot are referencing a change of names that has taken place. This change could take place again – anywhere and for anyone. Preciado's *Orlando, ma biographie politique* (2023), his debut as a filmmaker (non-fixed descriptor), is a multitude in its identity as a film. It is an adaption of Virginia Woolf's 1928 novel *Orlando: A Biography*. It is an autobiography by Preciado. It is a biographical documentary of over 20 acts/ressess/tors, that portray Woolf's fictional Orlando. It is also none of these. It is an examination of what 'is' even is. Interviews with 'Orlando' in all their forms switch between talking about experiences of trans-childhood in this millennium to the retelling of memories of blue-blooded Orlando suddenly waking up a woman. So, Orlando is not fictional here. Different Orlandos talk about the personal experiences of another Orlando because it is their lived experience, since all of them are Orlando, and it's Orlando's lived experience, Orlando's life that is being told. Orlando is becoming a different Orlando during Woolf's narrative, Orlando is becoming. All the protagonists in Preciado's film, by being Orlando, are becoming as well; they are not fixed. Their act of writing/speaking their own lives as Orlando enables their written life to not be fixed. A change of names is not what has occurred, it is occurring every time you are named, every time you name yourself.

¹ Hartman, Saidiya (2008): *Venus in Two Acts*. In: *Small Axe*, No. 26, pp. 1-14 [p. 6].

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Courtesy of the Artist

IMPRINT

FIRST PUBLISHED IN 2024
by Twentysix

EDITED BY
Twentysix (Robert Bergmann & Julian Ernst)

DESIGN BY
Max Schropp

PRINTED AND BOUND BY
REPLIKAT press

MANY THANKS TO
Phoebe Blatton, Galerie Buchholz, Cabinet Gallery, Julian Göthe, Inga Charlotte Thiele, Moritz Haas, Linn Nora Henz and to the participating artists and authors.

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