Nervousness. Allergy. Dependence. A hypersensitive environment transforms images, videos, and sounds to a reactive system which parasites on its surroundings, circumstances, observers. The system behaves like an unstable network, a mutating virus, an overloaded nervous system. An image which literally is dependent and has lost its sovereign inaccessibility.

Peter Hagdahl **1**

… YOU HAVE GOT HOLD OF AN IMMENSE TRUTH. 2

The portable TV stood next to some tinned food on a shelve mounted beneath the ceiling. It kept showing the ever same apparently static view of a small store from above. The black and white flickering aesthetics marked the footage as having been taken by a surveillance camera. Visitors to *Conspiracy*, a small group exhibition in Uppsala, Sweden, in 1997, subsequently learned that these sequences in Ann-Sofi Sidén's installation *Prop for World Picture II* (1995) had been captured after evening closure at the artist's local grocery store in New York. Watching the deserted monotony, what had appeared as supposed specificity soon gave way to a sense of boredom and inevitably induced scepticism. The imagery started to look rather random, time- and spaceless, lacking any referential information. What did one actually see? Live or recorded imagery? In this filmic meditation on the still, present and past became indiscernible. Also, the tins placed next to the screen seemed to have sprung from the store in the footage, as if belonging to two distinct spaces and dimensions of time simultaneously. The readymade character of the imagery accentuated its origin elsewhere and stressed the viewers' spatial and temporal absence from the filmed. **3** It underscored a much discussed inefficiency of surveillance cameras for prevention. But the piece also exposed coexisting – hence undecidable – dimensions of time and space as much as a form of belatedness. Further explored by the other artists in the exhibition these notions would accumulate towards a feeling of incapacity to ever react.

Gilles Deleuze attributes disconnected, empty spaces and absent characters some importance in the second volume of his seminal works on cinema *The time-image*. **4** The French philosopher identifies the traumatic rupture constituted by World War II as crisis in the action-image of classical cinema. Referring to examples of neo-realism and new wave he describes the disruption of the link between perception and action that had dominated the former movement-image. Modern cinema (i.e. post-war) is characterized by the time-image. Here, the earlier sensory-motor link is lost and has given way "to pure optical and sound situations to which characters who have become seers, cannot or will not react, so great is their need to 'see' properly what there is in a situation". **5** As the characters encounter situations to which 'we no longer know how to react to' and spaces "which we no longer know how to describe" they have become 'seers' not 'agents' **6** – in fact their capacity to hearing and seeing increases as much as their ability to act declines.

Significantly, Deleuze's investigation manifests a critique of representation as it is based on an inversion of the relation between time and movement. If time had been subordinated to movement in

the classical action-image (and characters reacted to what they had seen) the direct time-image does not respond to an external relation. The films do not represent a content or a previously conceived reality nor will a conclusion become available. Linear time and space linked to the Cartesian coordinates of an Albertian window had assigned a quasi-transcendental viewer a fixed position: determining narration in time depending on movement in space. Now narration is not a given but comes forth from the time-image and aberrant movement depends on time, we are "plunged into time rather than crossing space".**7**

These thoughts on unlinear time as constituting cinematic narration imply several consequences. Firstly, it is a cinema not of representation but creation making perceptible "relationships of time which cannot be seen in the represented object and do not allow themselves to be reduced to the present …". **8** Secondly, an interchangeability between subjective and objective poles follows from this: representation relies on a 'presupposed independence of its object' as in realist description, that 'proposes a discernibility of the real and the imaginary' whereas neo-realist description in contrast 'replaces its object, … it erases or destroys its reality which passes into the imaginary'. Thirdly, truth as an understanding of a whole character or a unity between situation and action is in crisis since 'truthful narration is developed organically, according to legal connections in space and chronological relations in time'. **9** In contrast, what gives rise to the time-image are non-controllable spaces, unlocalizable situations and characters and something 'that has become too strong in the image'. Additionally, the absence of a plot and missing identification with the characters let the time-image appear as determined by something unsurmountable, a sense of crisis that cannot be addressed. Finally, a form of total subjectivity occurs in purely optical or sound situations: 'the connection of the parts of space is not given, because it can come about only from the subjective point of view of a character …', the time-image 'powerfully brings out all the reality which the imaginary or the mental create through speech and vision'.

Understanding Deleuze's thoughts as conceptualization one might apply these explorations to works of art, that unsettle and disjoin connections of time and space and render oppositions between subjective and objective poles insecure in order to evoke rather than represent a certain scenario.

Some sort of uncanny silence lingered above the rooms of *Conspiracy*. Upon entering one passed a wall text describing a protagonist obsessed by unravelling a labyrinth of ongoing conspiracies yet growing desperate at the inability to communicate the shocking to anyone. Annika Eriksson's installation *En fruktansvärd Sammansvjärning (A dreadful conspiracy*, 1995) followed – a quasi newsroom displaying articles and statistics including speculation about the murder of the Swedish Prime Minister Olaf Palme in 1987, dramatic ecological changes, sightings of ufos, spreading influence of New Age, implementation of electronic tagging devices into the human brain and other mysterious stories. What was fictional what real remained unclear. Thus, Eriksson's instruction to distribute stickers with the words *En fruktansvärd Sammansvjärning* appeared in one way connected to the

headlines, yet cut from their specific sources. The visitor, who was demanded to act, became aware of this rupture, when trying to grasp what exactly it was one should communicate. An air of unspeakability became introduced: in this dramatic yet apparently uncertain scenario one might not want to get involved and rather avoid any participation.

A sense of overdetermined but also uncontrollably perpetual activity characterized other works - Andreas Gedin's merry-go-round installation *Hare and Wolff* (1997) for example. The proposed causal relationship of two figures and their shadows as hunter and hunted soon gave way to a rather irritating realization: again, this scenario existed as if in a vacuum, lacking a referent to specify the relation. Nor did this animation move to any sense of conclusion. The indiscernibility that always already informs the relation of before and after, of cause and effect pronounced: both can be hunter and hunted. Next to this "perpetual interchangeability" **9** characteristic for the crisis of the Deleuzian action-image, the seeing spectator emerged as a rather helpless onlooker, condemned to just watch as if on stand-by but reciprocally also becoming a too curious gawper "seeing himself acting, complicit viewer of the role he himself is playing." **10**

In *The Disappointed and the Offended (1994)* Magnus Bärtås presented people who "consider themselves to be subject of conspiracies and all seek revenge in different ways". **11** Lost on the emptiness of the white walls their miniature stearin faces seemed to have become memories to their own stories. The connections to their individual reports displayed on the wall below as they had appeared in the news were missing and left the visitor unable to reconnect character to story. Despite all initial force of the accusation, who felt unfairly treated and for what reasons remained unclear. Bärtås' victims were portrayed as not having access to the truth of what had been going on. As in the time-image it might be a 'matter of something too powerful, or too unjust … which henceforth outstrips our sensory-motor capacities.' Similar to Ann-Sofie Sidén's readymade surveillance footage or Gedin's carrousel, these contradictions proposed a moment of seeing that did not lead to a plot. How to speak belatedly as in Sidén, about an undecidable scenario as in Eriksson and Gedin or against all odds to reclaim ones individual truth as in Bärtås? Like the Deleuzian witnesses who 'provide us with a series of reports with neither a conclusion nor logical connection … without really effective reactions' the notion of witnessing was rendered ineffective and helpless in *Conspiracy*.

In fact, the exhibition was understood by Magnus Bärtås to be anchored both in the development in Sweden that became exposed as a result of the mysterious and still unresolved murder of Prime Minister Olaf Palme in 1987 – a shock to Swedish society which opened up unexpected fault lines of disintegration in the former 'model' state. Also, it was seen to respond to more global moments of "destroyed or reformulated ideologies, a more moving and sensitive world economy and a growing religious fundamentalism". **12** The sense of something uncontrollable inherent in these scenarios became alluded to as conspiratorial in the exhibition: by problematizing the succession of time and alluding to the undecidability inherent in the resulting imagery, the works explicated the ambiguity of time underlying a conspiracy. Whether one comes across the conspiring before their plan

has been executed or after its success: what is inevitably thrown into doubt is the perception of the past, previously remembered as secure present. Accordingly, conspiracies always prevail as something one got to know about too late; in retrospect as something one did not see. The present that became past cannot be remembered 'correctly' anymore, as ones experience of it is now – too late – shown to have been partial: only one side of the truth. Similarly, the present as the previously imagined future is retrospectively thrown into doubt: on what grounds did one keep imagining a secure totality, a version of truth? Still though, imagination remains the only place in which the conspiracy could ever assume reality.

Accordingly, the works put forward something unspeakable and unrepresentable. Cause and effect might manifest a relation between before and after but this was simultaneously thrown into doubt: what has happened cannot be explained by looking at the past anymore, nor does a solution projected into the future seem available. Instead of a distanced observation or investigation of the sequence of causes having led to the shocking event (depending on a perception of time as linear) the works operated via a breakdown of the representational link, as it has been explicated by Deleuze. Instead of illustrating a thematic headline they deferred their effect, strangely connected it to the visitor or stayed in the realm of the inexplicable and disjointed. Proposing a seeing but helpless onlooker the atmosphere of the conspiratorial (rather than an attempt to represent it) became invoked as the central focus of the exhibition.

The belated knowledge of a conspiracy also induces a feeling of having been excluded. This became alluded to in Carl Michael von Hauswolff's and Leif Elggren's quasi-democratic set up of their virtual kingdom *Elgaland and Vargaland*. It problematized forms of participation. Amongst the display of photographs showing the kingdom's most popular citizens the spectator suddenly found himself to be one of them - as specular image. The distance between work and spectator collapsed and inscribed the spectator into the spectacle. **13** Even more so in Peter Hagdahl's portraits of a less controllable activity uttering forth a magnitude of unimaginable consequences. The computer project *Everything is a substitute for everything else (1996)* formulated an underlying level of something going on, eluding any form of control. Entering phrases into the computer, one saw a chain reaction unfolding on screen that moved between different spaces and times via unforeseen links beyond space. **14** A similar interconnectedness was inscribed in the 'unstable nervous network' consisting of a projected image that changed in response to the smallest movement of the visitor. The chart emerged as an "intersection of bodily, mechanical and information spheres" connected irrefutably to oneself. **15** In these instances one was always already involved in the dependent image that referenced a Deleuzian mutating character of becoming. The subject-object relation between artwork, representation and visitor collapsed. It was portrayed as interchangeable effects rather than static opposites.

The images created by the journeys in this exhibition were formulated by the experience of moments that could not be connected back to their origins, secrets and connections one came across yet could not address. Encountering abrupt changes or images of unclarity, the visitor's perception stepped forward as if into an abyss: these contradictions "make the viewer aware" as in the Brechtian moment of distanciation. **16** The resulting oscillation of subjectivity evoked the "state of affairs right after the deluge, when the illusions about security and safety have just been destroyed, the moment, where people are forced to formulate their own versions and explanations of the world – since the larger picture, the official *Big Story*, does not show to exist any more." **17** Striving for the unreachable truth ones own explanations, or models of truth, were shown to be the only alternatives. Mapping a terrain of conspiratorial becomings that ellipsed a linearity of time as a falsely remembered past, a questionable present and an unimaginable future the art works proposed the affect of the aesthetic to result in the subjective political.

Footnotes

1. http://www.galerija.skuc-drustvo.si/svedi2.html, 20.05.2008
2. From the wall text of *Conspiration*, Uppsala Konstmuseet, Sweden, 1997. Curator: Magnus Bärtås. Works by Magnus Bärtås, Annika Eriksson, Andreas Gedin, Peter Hagdahl, Carl Michael von Hauswolff and Leif Elggren, Ann-Sofi Sidén
3. Though I do not agree with all arguments put forward by Nicolas Bourriaud in *Postproduction*, it might be pertinent to consider his thoughts on the readymade and work of art in the information age at this place. Limited space prevents me from doing so. See Nicolas Bourriaud, *Postproduction*, New York, 2002
4. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2 – The time-image*, London 1989. Unless otherwise stated, quotations taken from *Chapter 1*, pp. 1 - 24
5. Ibid., p. 128
6. Ibid., p. 126
7. Ibid., p. XII
8. Ibid., p. XII
9. Ibid., p. 133
10. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1 – The movement-image*, Transl. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta, London 1986, p. 214
11. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2 – The time-image*, London 1989, p. 6
12. Fredrik Ekman, in : Magnus Bärtås. *Conspiration*, Exhibition Catalogue, Uppsala 1997, p. 73
13. Magnus Bärtås, Ibid., p. 4
14. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2 – The time-image*, London 1989, p.5
15. Sven Olov Wallenstein, in: Magnus Bärtås. *Conspiration*, Exhibition Catalogue, Uppsala 1997, pp. 68-9. Though the screen is referenced here, it might be seen not to refer to a 'window or a painting, but rather constitutes a table of information, an opaque surface on which are inscribed 'data', replacing nature…' Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2 – The time-image*, London 1989, p. 265
16. Peter Hagdahl, http://www.galerija.skuc-drustvo.si/svedi2.html, 20.05.2008
17. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2 – The time-image*, London 1989, p. 304
18. Magnus Bärtås in an interview with the author.