



Interview with Kalle Brolin.

Marti Manen

1-It seems that you, as an artist, are taking care of what's going on near you. You are, in one way or another, giving your personal answers (or questioning) to particular contexts. What is the thing that drives you to start an artwork? How important is the connection with some individuals? When you start the working process, how important is to get information? What kind of information do you want? Emotional one? Sociological?

You probably know that I come from a small town in south Sweden, called Ängelholm. I was a kid in the seventies, and in my class there seemed to be strict regulations imposed on what was acceptable behaviour - on the one hand the teachers were mostly progressive and very aware of social and global injustices, on the other hand the elite kids (four out of twentyfive) were hardcore Darwinists.

Some people I went to school with:

I remember one guy doing a presentation where he showed an overhead image he'd made, a cross-cut section of his own brain in blue, red and green ink. It was very messy, and he continued to draw on it as he talked about how inhaling his snot, instead of blowing his nose, had clogged up all his channels for thinking, and he warned us not to inhale snot. The drawing inadvertently illustrated his craziness, I guess. One time when I ran away from home, I stayed in the attic of the house where his family lived.

I heard about him a couple of years ago, how he'd gone to a masquerade party dressed as Death, in a black robe, white face, and wielding a scythe (very sharp instrument used to harvest wheat in pre-industrial times). At the party he'd had an argument with his brother, who had chased him around the house with a shotgun. The guy left the party and roamed around town, still dressed as Death. He jumped out of bushes, shaking his scythe at people in cars driving up the suburban street, scaring them shitless.

Another kid, a girl with an Italian dad, a bit more ahead of the rest of us in terms of dreams about what she wanted out of life - to get the hell away from

Ängelholm and travel, have intense and meaningful experiences with exciting people (all impossible in Ängelholm), well, she turned me into a sort of project, she explained, and after a year of strange manipulations left me with a whole new view of what things could and should be like.

After college she left Ängelholm for Sicily, then lived in your Barcelona for a couple of years, where she worked as a tour guide. Her boyfriend turned her into a junkie. I met her not too long ago. Drugs had made her psychotic, and she'd been forced to move back to Ängelholm so her mother could look after her.

Then there was my best friend, a fat kid who had a glass eye (went from stereo to mono after taking out a brain tumour). I'd be on him all the time to take it out and show me what was behind it, and he'd always keep me on my toes about it. Only one time each six months we'd go behind the green barracks in the school yard, where he'd take out his glass eye and show me the red meat and the white pus in the cavity behind it.

After college, he started running the marathon. Then he became an entrepreneur social worker, starting up treatment homes for kids turning to crime as a result of abuse, running them for a couple of years and then moving on to start up a new one from scratch in another town, all restless energy.

And then, there's this fat girl, who'd never be allowed to be anything other than a fat person in the eyes of others, that was all she was about. I'll meet her now, from time to time, and she'll shout at me across a street full of people, completely shameless, 'Hey crazy kid! How's it hanging?'. She's a truckdriver now, and she wears a baseball cap backwards. There was a reunion for our highschool class, arranged by a local restaurant, and she was the only one out of twentyfive people who showed up.

This type of information, about these people, is to me both emotional and sociological, and possibly even political in the sense of invoking the necessary opposition of elites.

When I start the working process, it is because of coming upon some information that I guess reminds me of these people from my childhood in Ängelholm. So in terms of importance - information is the starting point.

Other than that, I am also a big fan of statistics. I think it is a powerful tool in fighting stereotyping and illinformed opinions. Sweden has one of the best developed Central Bureaus of Statistics in the world, and they are a wonderful source of information.

2-It seems that, sometimes, (I'm thinking now on "Case of Callus" or "Roof Girls") the final result of your process is not just "a" final result but a collection of different items (DVD, posters, animation...). How important is

for you to not be locked in a traditional art format?

Well you want your artwork to be, as you guessed above, both emotional, intellectually stimulating, politically challenging, and then there's also the wish to do something avant-garde. Not that I think I manage this very well, but this is still the whole point of showing your work, to have all these various effects. Also, what makes it art more than just pop, or just sociology, or just a political statement, is that it contains the possibility of invoking all of these dimensions.

As for the avant-garde bit, maybe that used to be done through esthetics, but to me it seems that nowadays it is better achieved through a play on formats, or doing something unexpected with formats. For example, a fanzine is usually a small self-published magazine, done very cheaply, about a subject of deep personal interest to the author. Well then, you might think, why not do a fanzine as a dvd record - burning one doesn't cost more than printing a copy of a small magazine, and you can still have the same content, and more (you can add film and sound). Another example of formats - if you put two different posters next to each other, they can be made to resemble a spread from a glossy magazine. You might not be able to afford to print a glossy magazine, but two posters is okay. Then this spread can be distributed in an unorthodox way, pasted to public walls. And so on through all kinds of formats - a birthday party can be an installation, a scene from a film can be turned into a choir act done in a public space, an archive can be of the future just as well as of the past.

But back to your question - the reason that there's often not just one work as a final result is that I'm also a fan of the essayistic way of circling around a subject, saying 'on the one hand there's this way, but then on the other hand...'. In the case of the Roof Girls film, there was a process that was allowed to develop as it went along, turning out various results along the way, and when it's time to exhibit, you make a selection of what you think works well together, or possibly a selection of things that contradict each other. There were the girls' own films, how they thought it was cool to show themselves to the world on film. Then there was an animation which was an image from my dream-world where small dark girls were perched on rooftops around a medieval city-centre, like a scene from a fairytale. Neither version is the documentary truth in any way other than showing what we want others to see.

3-I do think that the way you present your work is very interesting. You can get different kinds of contacts with the users of your works. What are you expecting from them?

I show my works in any place that wants to show it. I want as many people as possible to see it, which I think gives it a better chance of reaching the two or three people in the world for which it might actually mean something on the scale of 'opened my eyes, changed my life, made me feel recognized'.

While I was at art academy, a lot of my classmates had serious doubts about the relevance of their work to other people, they thought it might be a self-indulgent luxury to do art that meant nothing to anyone but themselves. Well, I never had any doubts of this sort. This is because I know that art can have a life-altering effect on people, since it actually happened to me, when I was trapped back in Ängelholm, as a kid. Music, books and art of the more subversive kind gave my life a lot of more possibilities, fuel for my imagination.

Maybe you ask about what I get back from the audience. Now and then there is someone that recognizes themselves in my work, now and then I recognize myself in someone in the audience. Then we are less alone, and then we are strengthened.

4-It seems that your work is always in process or that it can continue after it is finished. The work itself can find other channels than the “artistic” ones. Is there an idea of functionality?

Some artists I know define art as something that has no function, and some are afraid of art being turned into use in the chain of production and consumption of late-capitalist society, wanting to stay pure by staying away from the word function. Me, I see art as having several very clear functions. Depicting what life is lived like now, for example, in a way that combines the sociological with the emotional. Providing inspiration, as I guess I've stated above.

If there are other functional divergencies, I guess that has to do with how to have more angles to the story, or how to reach more people. But the basic aim remains the same. I want to do art for people who are like those kids from my class I described above.

5-You are interested in the civil society movements and you also work directly with people that usually are not participants of the art context. How can we find a way to interact from art with reality?

'The political', to me, means having an effect upon reality in accordance with your will, inspired by your capacity for imagination. The visionary artist dreams up images of what the world might be like, the willful artist makes convincing statements, and the activist artist acts out life as it should be lived. You can be all three kinds and more.