

## DISENCHANTING PARADISES

Everybody knows our minds contain secret rooms of the imagination. Often we don't realise they are there, latently slumbering away at the back of our minds. As long as they are filled with nothing but our imagination, these places contain little, if anything, which might seem explosive to the order of society. Random cerebral concoctions of individuals hardly ever lead to anything concrete. Only true engagement, persistence and rationality within a social framework produces tangible results. From the moment certain fantasies are put into practice their extravagant nature soon gives way to reality. Managing fortunes, art or space travels often proves to be infinitely more prosaic from up close than in the hyperbolic imagination of an outsider. All those things that go through someone's mind at some point leave the outside world indifferent, unless matters are concerned over which that person has a specific social authority. The wonderings of an astrophysicist staring at the star-spangled skies may catch our interest. If Napoleon or Alexander the Great had ever considered taking over the whole world, this would be worth mentioning in their biography. We would like to find out Torquato Tasso's and Georges Méliès' thoughts about the far side of the moon. Artists, after all, turn their fantasies into a profession. No outsider, however, would ever inform about the delusions we once cherished about conquering the world, the way the stars work or how we imagine the far side of the moon. In the best case our friends might lend a ready ear to our fantasies. This is logical; after all we only show minimal interest in the treasures from our secret rooms ourselves.

In fact the term secret rooms is not quite appropriate. They are really more like distant rooms, in which we withdraw from the public world, and let our imagination run free. The outskirts of our mind often engage in a symbiosis with the architecture of a bedroom, a bathroom or a garden shed. This is the type of environment Heidi Voet's video installations often refer to. Except for a feeling of temporary seclusion, there is nothing exceptional about these places in them selves; they are fully part of everyday life. In those moments of intimate self-realization, when we control our proper kingdom with sovereign authority, our imagination is immediately confronted with the boundaries of the physical territory. Within four walls everything seems so hugely banal, even petty bourgeois to some degree. Beyond these, the unruly world unfolds, always ready to trip up our dreams. As a release our feelings of freedom and desires nourish an unbridled world of the imagination. Nothing can stop our thoughts from hovering off to distant, imaginary places. The harsh reality outside the room does not give us immediate comfort. There is a wide gap between the utter individual imagination and the unrelenting laws of the outside world. Up to some degree we feel safe within the cocoon of a secluded environment because there our imagination finds a biotope in which it can flourish to the fullest extent. From here we would like to escape to a no man's land, situated everywhere and nowhere, but one that fits our imagination where ever it goes. Social and natural restrictions like our body, distances, social and psychological obstacles, are left far behind by this urge to escape. Each place our brain is aware of is drawn out into a potential place to reside. Mountaintops and ocean-floors, polar regions as well as Milky Ways, pass in review. Our imagination can snuggle up at will in all possible worldly and celestial paradises.

Most people never attain the absolute urge to escape of mystics, artists and explorers. They stick to anonymous dream moments between the folds of a full life. Imagination does not have a name or a calendar; it follows a parallel course of life of timeless moments. It might seem like wasted energy, even though it originates from human nature. The significance of escape moments is not only to be found in a vitalisation of the mind. They underline a human refusal to conform to an existing situation and stimulate the realisation of alternative projects. Back in reality all these dreams will have to compromise among

themselves. Whoever lingers too long in his fantasies, is left behind in a no man's land, but occasionally returning to their purity prevents our longings from erosion. The video projections by Heidi Voet cannot be reduced merely to sexual sublimation or displeasure with social stratification. The dreaming energy crosses all ages and social classes, and is hardly concerned with material longings. Wanting to get away from the body involves more than a longing beyond death, because children and healthy people have a strong need for it as well. The video installations by Heidi Voet are void of artificial exoticism. Her environments strongly relate to familiar elements close to home, like trees, clouds, running water. At the same time they are fantasy matter beyond the scope of geography and history, unattainable by the surrounding world. In that sense her dream representations can be called abstract. They contain a sexual, social and exotic connotation, but the work of Heidi Voet goes beyond that. She takes the inherent laws of the imagination more profound. At first the imagination has no limit. In a second phase the mind begins to analyse and untangle itself to the level of the actual facts.

Theoretical frameworks of interpretation do not offer more than a fragmented explanation. The inexhaustible supply of the imagination accommodates a multitude of explanations, never quite coinciding with the phenomenon itself. There is space left to experience mystery. This simply refers to the conclusion that the actual course of life cannot and does not have to be fully explained. If the actual sea no longer lives up to the idea of sea, the imagination will effortlessly shift to the skies or a representation of it. The elements of reality act as vehicles for an escapist urge, looking for concrete anchor points. There is a preference for places we only had vague notions of as a child, like the infinite sea, the ungraspable structure of grains of sand, the moon and the stars, the migratory routes of birds. From within the imagination we can elaborate on them. At the heart is our own idea about it, strongly influenced of course by culture in a broad sense. A completely autonomous imagination does not exist, although our creative escape routes gives us a satisfactory feeling. Family stories, early impressions, the media and consumer goods also determine why our imagination prefers these specific and no other places to settle in. In fact, we derive a number of cherished fragments from the outside world, in order to idealise and magnify them. Our added value can't just be deduced from an objective investigation of the vehicle. The mental significance lies precisely in the added value we project onto the chosen medium. An outsider, who refuses to concede to our fantasy, can achieve little with his objectifying perspective. The essence escapes him, because this requires a subjective empathy, which falls outside the scope of the concrete reference point in reality. This point of reference is merely an abstract vehicle, transformed at will by the imagination. Empathy into the sublimated idea of a sea, clouds or a tree takes precedence over objectivity. A better understanding of the work does not require an extensive foreknowledge about trees, but rather of the mental extension trees we create in our minds. Evidently a certain degree of familiarity with genuine trees, as well as their deeper cultural effect, might direct us to a better understanding of the mental constructions developed around trees. An excessive knowledge of the imaginative components, however, might blur our empathy with the world of the imagination. Affinity with the mental attitude is prime to knowledge contents. Because the personal fantasies of the artist connect with general culture, numerous points of recognition with our own habitat exist.

In this situation it does not matter as much in which medium the vehicles of the imagination appear. In most cases Heidi Voet's work concerns places which can't be transferred into an art space in their three-dimensional form, like trees, earth, clouds, stars, the sea. Their literal representation might seem most familiar to us, but in her videos shadows as well as drawings, or projections of other projections appear. All of these representations are merely reflections of reality, filtered and transformed by our

imagination. Entering her installations, we see how the imagination, almost literally, invades the existing architecture, bending it to its own will. Ceilings slant down, floors are elevated. Instability sets in, accompanied by an effect of alienation. This gives rise to a slightly claustrophobic reflex. We find ourselves in an environment cut to the size of intimate daydreams. The video projection on the collapsed walls opens up a portal into another dimension. As if we are falling into a physical wormhole, a heavenly gate, an invisible dimension, or one of the many dream appearances in René Magritte's work, where irrationality pierces everyday reality. Exclusion from the outside world is counterbalanced by a mind leap into an infinite fantasy world, where everything seems primitively innocent. It is the type of expectations we cherish during childhood, or at the outset of a new situation, making acquaintance with an unknown country, acquiring foreign knowledge. By distancing ourselves from the biological time of our bodies, we can participate in the infinite time of the universe.

If the imagination takes a giant leap, it will eventually have to come back down to earth. Perfect dreams have to give way to compromise. The original representation is traded in for its shadow, reflection or copy. As time goes by we deconstruct the paradises we set up, if time does not catch up with them. We should anticipate this natural process of decay, and switch to the realization of a number of dream contents. What might have seemed a timeless perception at first, ends in a race against time. More daydreams means more plans waiting to be executed. And yet, without mental stimuli we would get stuck on an average level. We would resign to the existing world, where time gnaws at us. Heidi Voet's video installations make clear that dreams of escape and image deconstruction can walk hand in hand. On the one hand we let our imaginations drift along the clouds, waves and stars. On the other hand we become aware of the way visual components can be constructed. Wishes need an intellectual, technical and financial foundation in reality. We invest our time and energy in this search. Is this a process towards growing up, becoming aware or total harmony?

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