
Magic Bureaucracy by Måns Wrangé
Curator: Nina Möntmann
11.10 2017–14.1 2018



Tensta konsthall

Since the 1980s, the Stockholm-based artist Måns Wrangle has cross-fertilized his artistic work with curating as a social practice. The exhibition at Tensta konsthall is a smaller “curatorial retrospective” which highlights Wrangle’s curated projects during the period 1983–1998. The exhibition is based on issues regarding utopian bureaucracy, magical realism, and immateriality and includes the projects *The Aerial Kit* and *The Stockholm Syndrome*. Wrangle’s initiative, self-organization, and contribution to the development to both artistry and curatorial methods are important aspects of the exhibition. This presentation is designed in collaboration with the architect and designer Igor Isaksson and is curated by Nina Möntmann (Hamburg).

According to the sociologist Max Weber, bureaucracy creates a utopian quality when it is applied to prevent the abuse of power and to make organizations more democratic. Wrangle looks at Weber’s theory through the magic-realist lens of the writer Jorge Luis Borges, by embedding magical elements in a realistic setting. “Magic bureaucracy” thereby creates a third reality, both rational and absurd, and, at the same time, realistic and utopian, and immaterial rather than object-like. The exhibition creates its own story through large-scale wall presentations and guides the visitors through a maze-like space.

The exhibition includes Wrangle’s conceptual project *The Aerial Kit* (1983–1989), a yellow metal box similar to the artist Marcel Duchamp’s mini museum “boite a valise.” It contains about fifteen different works related to airspace with objects, documents, sounds, images, film, and printed matter from the eccentric farmer M. Swingberg, who in the late 1960s cemented his fields to create a private airfield. (The box is part of the art collection of Moderna Museet). At Tensta konsthall, Wrangle has

built up an environment that refers to the art club “Salongen” at the cinema Lido on Södermalm, which he organized 1991–1992 with his brother Pål. It was a space for exhibitions, debates, video screenings, a magazine library, and food. During the same period, he curated the video section at Stockholm Film Festival in collaboration with Moderna Museet. Wrangle selected several feminist and queer works by Martha Rosler, Chantal Akerman, Mona Hatoum, and John di Stefano.

Wrangle has also created a new version of his famous work *The Stockholm Syndrome* (1998), an interactive exhibition structured as a story with several layers, based on the hostage drama at Norrmalmstorg. Works by Eija-Liisa Ahtila, Chris Burden, Thomas Demand, Stan Douglas, Renée Green, Abigail Lane, Shirin Neshat, Ricardo de Oliveira, and others are part of the project.

As a collaboration with Moderna Museet, *The Aerial Kit* (1984–1989) is displayed as a whole at The Pontus Hultén Study Gallery 25.11.2017–18.2 2018.

Måns Wrangle is curating a version of the almost 30 year old work in collaboration with the architect and designer Igor Isaksson at Moderna Museet. With objects, sounds, pictures, texts, printed matter and documents, ski jumping is presented as existential philosophy, the folk tune Sökkijärven polkka was used to prevent radio-tuning of mines during the Finnish-Soviet winter war, the architect Olof Timme’s utopian plans for his hometown Örebro, literary man Carl Fredrik Gyllembourg’s failed attempts to overthrow King Gustav IV Adolf through balloons, and how the farmer Martin Swingberg built an airfield on his field in the late 1960s and became a predecessor to today’s blogger through the creative use of the answering machine.

In collaboration with Curating Art at the Department of Culture and Aesthetics, Stockholm University, the students in the first and second courses in autumn 2017 will organize a series of seminars that will take place at Tensta konsthall. They will provide insight into the exhibition production from the perspective of the artist, curator, director, and technician.

Please note that The Video Section includes sexually explicit content in the film (Tell me why): The Epistemology of Disco, 1991, by John di Stefano.

Måns Wrangé is an artist based in Stockholm who works with long-term projects which explore the sophisticated methods and technologies for influencing human behavior, as used by the financial market actors, the national security agencies as well as the political lobbying and spin-doctor industry. His projects include collaborations with people from a wide spectrum of research fields, from sociology to artificial intelligence. He started CuratorLab at Konstfack 1997.

Wrangé's work has been widely exhibited internationally, including at Manifesta 4 & 7, ICA in London, Kunsthalle Wien in Vienna, P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center in New York, Shirn Kunsthalle in Frankfurt, Moderna Museet in Stockholm, Santa Monica Museum of Art in Los Angeles, De Appel in Amsterdam, Museum of Contemporary Art in Zagreb, The Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Museo Tamayo in Mexico City, CHA in Moscow, ICA in Boston, and Hamburger Kunstverein. Måns Wrangé has also curated a number of exhibitions at institutions such as Manifesta 7, Moderna Museet in Stockholm, and Stockholm Film Festival, including artists such as Martha Rosler, Renée Green, Mona Hatoum and Ulises Carrión. He has held positions as Rector of the

Royal Institute of Art in Stockholm, Professor at Konstfack – University College of Arts, Crafts and Design in Stockholm, and Visiting Professor at Stockholm University.

Nina Möntmann is an art historian, curator and writer. She has been Professor of Art Theory and the History of Ideas at the Royal Institute of Art in Stockholm, and curator at NIFCA, the Nordic Institute for Contemporary Art in Helsinki. Recent exhibitions include: Fluidity (Kunstverein in Hamburg 2016); Harun Farocki: A New Product (Deichtorhallen Hamburg, 2012); If we can't get it together. Artists rethinking the (mal)functions of community (The Power Plant, Toronto, 2008); The Jerusalem Show: Jerusalem Syndrome (co-curated with Jack Persekian), 2009; the Armenian Pavillion for the 52nd Venice Biennial. Recent publications include Kunst als Sozialer Raum, (Cologne, König Books, 2002/2017); and the edited volumes Brave New Work. A Reader on Harun Farocki's film 'A New Product', engl./dt. (Cologne, Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2014); Scandalous. A Reader on Art & Ethics (Berlin, Sternberg Press, 2013); New Communities (Toronto, Public Books/The Power Plant, 2009) and Art and Its Institutions (London, Black Dog Publishing, 2006).

Tuesday 7.11, 19:00–21:00
On Curating and Being Curated
– Examining Power, Responsibility
and Care within the Curatorial

With Candace Goodrich, Maria Lantz, Maria Lind, Marti Manen, Robin McGinley, Michele Masucci, Renée Padt, Joanna Warsza, Måns Wrangé, Tirdad Zolghadr, CuratorLab participants and alumni, and more guests in a series of conversations.

Before calling it curating, Harald Szeemann, one of the pioneers of the genre, described his exhibitions as ‘directed by’ in order to conceptualize ways in which art has been presented, mediated, sold, and understood. Today the curatorial spans far beyond art, as even shops, websites, and travel itineraries are being “curated.” How did the curatorial dream emerge? A role traditionally associated with the capacity to identify the most relevant art has grown into a managerial position within cognitive capitalism and the political economy of relations. Is curating more about the power to decide or about having things done? Is it more about control or about care, more about having means of production than about emotional labor? With a series of conversations, we will be celebrating the twentieth birthday of CuratorLab . We will discuss how curating and the curatorial is taught, practiced, and performed, and how it transforms art and the art community in times when everyone can become a curator.

CuratorLab is a unique one-year international curatorial program at Konstfack University in Stockholm, founded by Måns Wrangé in 1997/98. CuratorLab doesn't have a fixed curriculum – every year it reinvents itself anew around a leading topic, followed by studio visits, seminars, lectures, and trips, co-organized together with the participants. For a few years, the program has been

closely attached to Tensta konsthall and has contributed to the public program and a series of exhibitions organized within the framework of **The Eros Effect Art: Solidarity Movements and the Struggle for Social Justice**. CuratorLab is open to everybody interested in working with and against the ideas of curating and the curatorial, but rather than exploring the history of the genre, we concentrate on working with pertinent issues of our time. In the years 2007–2014, Renée Padt was its program director. Since 2014 the program has been run by Joanna Warsza, together with guest lecturer Michele Massuci since 2017. For the academic year 2017/2018, CuratorLab is engaging in the concept and practice of love and its social, political, and artistic dimensions through the life and work of Alexandra Kollontai in preparation for the exhibition with Dora García at Tensta konsthall in 2018.

Work descriptions

The Aerial Kit – Between People 1809–1989 1984–1989 VAVD Editions

The Aerial Kit is a project which explores the Nordic people's pursuit to use the airspace from an existential, poetic and political perspective. The project consists of subjective interpretations and reconstructions of some fifteen extraordinary as well as neglected human stories, events and phenomena extending between 1809 and 1989.

The Aerial Kit is the result of six years of combined creative work and research in libraries, archives, museums, newspapers and study trips in the Nordic region. The project has been presented in the form of an exhibition, a multiple, a book, a lecture series, a slide show, a film and a radio program.

The exhibition at Tensta konsthall presents one of the fifteen parts of the project. A more extensive presentation of The Aerial Kit will be shown at Moderna Museet during the period 25.11 2017–8.2 2018.

Part 6: Säkkijärven Polkka

In August 1941 during the Continuation War between Finland and the Soviet Union, the Finnish army had re-captured the city of Viipuri (Viborg), formerly under Soviet territory. The Russians had, however, scattered the city with landmines which were triggered by radio signals that contained three notes that were broadcast on a particular frequency via a radio transmitter that was battery powered. After some investigation, The Finnish army discovered that the detonation of the landmines could be prevented by disturbing the transmission of the triggering tones. The choice of audio material that could be used

for disturbing the triggering signals was, however, limited to what was immediately available. The choice fell on a record with the folk tune Säkkijärven polkka, performed by the accordion virtuoso Viljo Vesterinen (1907–61), who played the melody extremely fast and without any breaks which made it very difficult for the enemy's transmitted tones to get through the air and trigger the landmines.

Finnish soldiers were assigned to play the record of Säkkijärven Polkka again and again in an endless loop for 24 hours a day, on the same radio frequency as landmine triggering tones. During August and September 1941, Säkkijärven polkka was broadcast on the local radio station in the area of Viipur, 24 hours a day until the batteries of the radio transmitter of the landmines were discharged and the landmines unable to be detonated. Through the headphones you can hear a reconstruction of how it could have sounded in a radio receiver in Finland in August to September 1941, if you would have tuned in to the Viipur radio station anytime of the day or night. This event is probably the reason for the classic status that Säkkijärven Polkka has today in Finland. In 1963 the song was voted "the hit of the 20th century" by a large majority of the Finnish population.

VAVD Editions was an interdisciplinary group that between 1983 and 1990 produced art projects, organized exhibitions and seminars as well as published and distributed artist's books and multiples. VAVD Editions was started by the artist Peter Andersson, and included Måns Wrangé, researcher in International Public Law, Pål Wrangé, literary historian and graphic designer Lars Svensson, flight expert Roland Zinders, as well as a network of loosely-connected people from different professions. Måns Wrangé left the group in 1988.

The Archive of Deleted Files 1996

**Måns Wrangé in collaboration with
Konrad Tollmar**

The Archive of Deleted Files is a web project from the early days of the internet when the first web browsers such as Mosaic and Netscape became popular in the mid 90s. The project explores issues of personal integrity and the surveillance of the internet – issues that are more current than ever with the massive surveillance by the secret intelligence agencies in both democratic and totalitarian societies, as well as the collection and analyzation of data about individuals' habits and behavior on the internet by the global tech-companies such as Facebook, Google and Amazon.

The project The Archive of Deleted Files was founded in 1996 by Måns Wrangé in collaboration with Konrad Tollmar, senior IT researcher at KTH, the Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm, and was first presented in the web exhibition [a:t] 1996. It was curated by Karin Hansson and Åsa Andersson, founders of The Association for Temporary Art in 1996. The Archive of Deleted Files is constructed as a web archive that contains deleted files found in various computers connected to the Internet. In order to attract as many visitors as possible, it uses a set of the statistically most popular search terms as invisible keywords by using META tags.

Upon visiting The Archive of Deleted Files, the visitor is asked by a dialogue box to submit deleted files to the archive in order to access the archive. When answering "OK", a program designed by Wrangé and Tollmar – Trojan Horse 1.01 – is automatically downloaded to the visitor's computer and starts to scan the hard disk for deleted files. When a file is deleted on a computer, the system just hides the data by

removing its file directory and mark the space as free for use. Since the data is not destroyed it can be recovered by using specific programs such as Norton Disc Doctor. The program Trojan Horse 1.01 uses a similar recovering technology, and the files that the program has managed to recover, are then sent back to The Archive of Deleted Files. The visitor is thereby given free access to the archive in exchange for the submission of his/her deleted files. For each contribution, the visitor is entitled to explore another person's deleted files. The identities of the people who have contributed to the archive are anonymised.

**The Aesthetics of Compromise
(Saltsjöbaden/Harpsund/Haga)
1999**

A mini-exhibition consisting of four glasses. Photographs of three glasses borrowed from three different places where crucial compromises in Swedish political contemporary history have taken place: Grand Hotel in Saltsjöbaden (1938), Harpsund (1955–1963), and Haga Castle (1973). The fourth glass is a mouth blown glass based on a computer-based 3-D compromise between the three other glasses. **The Aesthetic of Compromise** is the first work of the experimental house project **The Compromise House** (1999–) which explores the compromise as a political, social and aesthetic principle.

In the Western cult of the individual, not least in the fields of art and culture, compromise is often considered something negative. But in all social life, from couples and families to politics and society, compromise is one of the basic conditions for an egalitarian and democratic relationship. In Sweden compromise has played a leading role in the development of the welfare state since the 1930s where the “Swedish model” of a welfare state for all can be said to build on a number of decisive compromises: for example between capitalism and socialism, individual and collective, private and public.

An important cornerstone of the Swedish welfare state was the new aesthetic – “Functionalism” – that was launched at the Stockholm Exhibition in 1930. But the Swedish version of the modernist claim that “form follows function” never really made itself felt in the industrial art sector to the extent that it did in architecture and town planning. In these latter fields a radical, functional aesthetic in association with an equally radical policy of distribution could be centrally

directed. But it was more difficult to persuade the citizens to buy the new, plainly functional furniture and porcelain. The internationally established concepts of “Swedish Modern” and “Scandinavian Design” rather describe an aesthetic that is characterized by a compromise between “functionalists” and “traditionalists” in which the radically functional was fused with the formally aesthetic. What combined this “Swedish aesthetic model”, with its willingness to compromise, with the uncompromising functionalism was a belief in the moral contribution of aesthetics to the “new men and women” who were to be characterized by both good taste and moral virtue.

**The Stockholm Syndrome
CD-ROM exhibition
1998**

**Curated by Måns Wrangé in
collaboration with Igor Isaksson**

The Stockholm Syndrome is a curatorial project exploring the psychological condition known as the “Stockholm syndrome”, which describes the strong bond that sometimes develops between captor and captive, in particular between kidnapper and hostage, when those who are controlled begin to identify with their controllers.

The term stems from the case of four people held hostage by two bank robbers at a bank in Stockholm in 1973, the so called “Norrholmstorgsdramat”, or, the “Norrholmstorg drama”, when the hostages became sympathetic with their aggressors and instead looked upon the police as their enemy. A few years later, the “Stockholm syndrome” became internationally renowned when Patty Hearst, the millionaire’s daughter, was kidnapped by a terrorist group. After being psychologically brainwashed and sexually assaulted, Hearst began to identify with the terrorists to the extent that she even participated in their bank robberies

The introduction of the concept the “Stockholm syndrome” explained some of the often irrational reactions to control and repression expressed by people in hostage situations. The project The Stockholm Syndrome examines what the implications of the psychological condition the “Stockholm Syndrome” may be if applied to other structures of power, dependency and control.

The exhibition The Stockholm Syndrome exists only in the form of a CD-ROM, and is structured as a kind of a computer game with a multi-layered narrative based on the hostage scenario “Norrholmstorgsdramat” in

Stockholm. The CD-ROM offers three ways to explore the exhibition as well as the hostage scenario: temporally, spatially and relationally. Each of the art works in the exhibition are linked to an actual event, location and a sociological relationship from the hostage scenario. The contexts and the relationships between the art works change, depending on the way you choose to navigate.

You can explore the exhibition temporally through a time line which presents the various events in the hostage scenario. You can investigate the exhibition through a sociogram showing the relationship between the agents in the drama: the hostages, the criminals, the police, the psychological advisor, the government, the media, and the public. You can finally navigate spatially between the locations where the hostage scenario took place, and explore related art works.

Artists: Academy Training Group, Eija-Liisa Ahtila, Chris Burden, Thomas Demand, Stan Douglas, Renée Green, Johan Grimmonprez, Abigail Lane, Shirin Neshat, Ricardo de Oliveira, Julia Scher, Jörgen Svensson and Knut Åsdam. Essay by Joshua Decker.

The Stockholm Syndrome was commissioned by The European Capital of Culture, Stockholm 1998.

The Video Section
Video Program at Stockholm Film
Festival and Moderna Museet,
Stockholm
1991–1992
Curated by Måns Wrangé and
Pål Wrangé

One of the official sections of the Stockholm Film Festival was initiated and curated by Måns Wrangé in collaboration with Monica Nieckels at Moderna Museet, where the video section was screened. The Video Section was the first time in Sweden where international video art was shown in the same context as international feature films.

The selected video works for the exhibition **Magic Bureaucracy** at Tensta konsthall explores the surrogacy industry from a class and gender perspective, the political role that disco culture has played in queer identity, the commodification of black athletes' bodies in white media, the personal and traumatic experience of exile and rape, and lastly, the relation between cultural creativity and economic, political and social forces.

Mona Hatoum
Measures of Distance, 1988,
15.30 min

Measures of Distance is one of the few examples of Mona Hatoum's work to employ direct reference to the artist's exiled condition. Hatoum, a Palestinian born in Beirut was stranded in Europe at the outset of civil war in 1975, and has lived in Europe ever since. In the video's soundtrack, as well as in the graphic image of text in Arabic taken from a series of letters between the artist and her mother layered over flesh, Hatoum explores how degrees of proximity and separation can be conveyed by employing both concrete examples (her mother taking a shower), and more formal abstractions (text, paper, voices, a trip to Beirut).

Mona Hatoum is a video and installation artist who lives in London and Berlin.

Keith Piper
The Nation's Finest, 1990, 7 min

This short video explores, through a collage of images, text and voice over, some of the issues raised when Black athletes are called upon to "represent" what have been historically seen as "White" nations, within the international sporting arena. The piece juxtaposes nationalistic heraldry and the heroic imagery found in public monumental sculpture, with the bodies of two young Black athletes. Through referencing historical legacies of the disenfranchisement and exclusion faced by Black people, the piece goes on to examine how the transition of the Black athlete from the periphery to the centre of the nation's psyche, carries with it a network of contradictions and limitations.

Keith Piper is a contemporary artist, curator, critic and academic. He is a founder member of the groundbreaking BLK Art Group, an association of black British art students.

Martha Rosler
Born to Be Sold: The Strange Case of Baby S/M, 1988, 35 min

Born to be Sold is a critical and witty interpretation of the controversy around an American custody case, the “Baby M” case, in which a natural — “surrogate” — mother and father of a baby fought each other for custody of the child. Martha Rosler assumes the various roles of the participants in the controversy. Reconstructing the story from its trial by media and the court transcripts, Rosler views surrogate mother Mary Beth Whitehead’s actions as an attempt to defy the identity assigned by her class and gender, and sees the verdict favoring the upper class family Sterns as an endorsement of the father’s phallic right, his jurisprudential endowment. Her analysis demonstrates how political, class and ideological systems are played out on the body of the woman. Produced by Paper Tiger Television.

Martha Rosler is an artist, born and based in America, who works in video, photo-text, installation, and performance, as well as writing about art and culture. Rosler was one of the first artist in the late 1960s and 1970s, to inflect conceptual art with a feminist agenda.

John Di Stefano
(Tell me why): The Epistemology of Disco, 1991, 24 min

(Tell me why): The Epistemology of Disco is an often humorous, at times sarcastic and poignant look at the role that disco music has played in the formation of gay male identity. The piece challenges the notion of disco as merely a “leisure activity” by positioning disco as an important cultural space created as an expression of gay sexuality.

John Di Stefano a visual artist/filmmaker, writer, educator and curator, based in Sydney.

The Wonderful World of Hobbies
Kulturhuset, Stockholm
1991
Curated by Måns Wrangé

An exhibition in the form of a museum of hobbies, which explores the hobby world in Sweden as a neglected socio-cultural phenomenon in relation to notions of labour and rationality in the development of the Swedish welfare state from the 1930’s to the present. At the beginning of the twentieth century, with the eight-hour working-day reform and the implementation of vacations for all employed persons, people were introduced to a new concept: leisure. Prior to this, clearly defined “spare time” was a luxury reserved for the wealthier classes. But while this new phenomenon has led to profound social changes, it has been remarkably little studied by academics. “Labour” has remained the key concept in the social sciences, as well as in politics since John Locke, Adam Smith, Georg Wilhelm Friederich Hegel and Karl Marx. In this perspective the project **The Wonderful World of Hobbies** may be seen as an alternative history of the realization of the modern project in Sweden with the focus on leisure rather than on labour.

The project takes its point of departure in the hobby as the antithesis to the alienation of labour in the form of an alternative micro-utopia of non-instrumental creativity and self-fulfillment, where the hobby also can serve as a safety-valve for a socially acceptable form of madness where it becomes acceptable, within the limits of a hobby, to collect bottle tops or to build model railways as an adult.

The exhibition part of the project consisted of reconstructions of a handful of people’s hobbies with their biographical stories about their hobby interest.

U-media

**Bildmuseet, Västerbottens Museum,
Bildhörnan, Tullkammaren, Galleri
EST EST EST, Stadsbiblioteket,
KC-Nord, KRO, Folkets Hus,
Ögonblicksteatern, Rune Johansson
Radio-TV, Västerbotten Folkblad,
Kabel-TV, Västerbottens lokalradio,
shop windows and workplaces
1987**

**Curated by VAVD Editions in
collaboration with Decay Pitch**

U-media was the largest exhibition project by VAVD Editions including around 40 artists from more than a dozen countries. The focus of U-media was a discussion on the transformation of the public sphere in relation to the development of new media and communication technologies and its effect on notions of center-periphery, identity and power.

The exhibition was divided into several thematic sub themes with artworks scattered all over the city center of Umeå, including exhibitions in the main art galleries and cultural institutions, projects for public space, the local radio, cable TV and newspaper as well as performances, program of video screenings and seminars. This is today a rather common model for international biennials, but was 30 years ago one of the first of this type of multifaceted exhibition projects in Scandinavia.

The curatorial strategy was “chameleon-like,” where art works were “embedded” – inserted and adapted – to various public contexts of communication from media channels to public institutions, for example audio projects in the local radio channel, video works on the new local cable TV channel, book projects in the city library, text project for the local paper and commercial LED street sign boards on city the community center [Folkets hus] and fax (which was a rather new technology at the time) in an information office.

A conversation between Nina Möntmann and Måns Wrangé

Nina Möntmann: You are well known in Sweden and abroad as a visual artist, mainly working with projects based on long-term research into the social, political, and economic constitutions of democracy and the nation state. The presentations of your projects may include sound, video, objects, sculpture, text, graphic elements as well as the recent AI-based technology. This exhibition, *Magic Bureaucracy*, however, focuses primarily on your early practice in the 1980s and 1990s, which has a strong curatorial component. In the early 1990s you even organized an art club, “Salongen,” that hosted interdisciplinary conferences and several film festival programs. How did you experience the art scene and the context in Stockholm at that time, and how did you position your practice in relation to that?

Måns Wrangé: Well, when I started to work both as an artist and curator/organizer in the early 1980s, the Swedish art scene was quite different from what it is today. In those days, neo-expressionistic painting was the dominant trend in Sweden as well as in the Western European and American art world. The tradition that I came from, conceptual art, was one of the few art movements that never got established in Sweden in the 1960s and 70s. The same goes for new media art, which was seldomly shown at art institutions and galleries here until the mid 1990s. With the exception of a few people, galleries, and institutions, the Swedish art scene in the 1980s was also rather nationally oriented. As you know, for a long time the so-called “international art world” was basically limited to a handful of western countries, and thus hardly any Swedish artists were exhibiting with any frequency abroad until the mid 1990s.

Since there was a rather limited interest in the established art world for the kind of art that I was interested in, such as video art, performance, and conceptual projects, I soon realized that I had to become active in organizing alternative platforms. I started to get involved in the new video art organization Video NU by making video works, parallel to teaching short video art courses and co-organizing video screenings. In the early 1980s I met the artist and organizer Peter Andersson, who had similar art interests. He had quite a wide range of knowledge of performance art, artists’ books, new media art, and conceptual projects, as well as an international network of artists and experimental artist-run organizations, which was quite rare at the time. Peter, who had more years of experience in organizing given his background as an editor of an experimental cultural magazine, organizer of a small performance festival, and working as a producer at the music and art center Fylkingen, asked me to join him in establishing a new art organization which would be called VAVD Editions. VAVD Editions became a platform for curating exhibitions, screenings, and conferences as well as producing art projects and publishing and distributing artists’ books, prints, and multiples.

We were even working on founding an alternative art school, which ultimately failed. I learned a lot from working with Peter.

It was, however, rather difficult for a small, unestablished and independent organization like VAVD Editions to receive any public funding from the Swedish cultural funding bodies. Consequently VAVD Editions and the subsequent curatorial constellations that I founded and worked on during the 1980s and 90s had to find other ways to make it possible to invite interesting artists and theoreticians from abroad for

public lectures, conferences, art projects, screenings, and exhibitions. This led to a “friendly parasite” strategy where we collaborated with a “host” institution in order to realize our projects. Over the years, in different curatorial constellations, I have collaborated with non-profit organizations, universities, galleries, art schools, art magazines, and cultural institutions like Moderna Museet, Stockholm Film Festival, and Manifesta.

In 1987 I moved to Amsterdam, which at the time had a very lively conceptual and new media scene. I studied there at the research academy Jan van Eyck Academie, and later at the Rijksakademie. In 1990, I moved to New York. With these two cities as a base, I continued to organize conferences and curatorial projects until the mid 1990s, when I moved back to Stockholm for a position as head and professor of the art department of Konstfack – University College of Arts, Crafts & Design. Stockholm had at this time become a much more global and interesting art context than it was just ten years earlier, and had a new generation of internationally active curators, critics, and new institutions—such as for example Tensta konsthall, several interesting artist-run initiatives, and not least the international studio program IASPIS. The art schools were also gradually becoming more internationally-oriented with both teachers and students coming from outside Sweden, at the same time that Swedish artists started to exhibit abroad.

NM: Could you discuss some of the curated projects from the late 1980s and early 1990s in more detail? Video was an important medium, as you said, but also the social component was central to projects you did at Lido Cinema, for example. When we think of “relational aesthetics,” which became a signature art practice of the 1990s,

or other forms of participatory practices that merge artistic and curatorial practice, how consciously did you conceive the social aspects of your work?

MW: The social aspect became important for some of these early projects. In the art club Salongen [“the Salon” in English] which I curated together with my brother Pål, the social was one of the starting points since the project explored the literary salon of the 17th and 18th century as a curatorial model. What interested me with the concept of the salon is that it combined social gatherings with the presentation and discussion of new cultural, intellectual, and political ideas of the time. It was also one of the few sites where women were allowed to play an important role in the public sphere, since many of the influential salons were organized by women. Salongen was organized as a series of nights in 1991 and 1992, where each night had a specific theme based on a current political issue of the week, such as the slogan “the only road for politics”, as promoted by conservative politicians at the time. It consisted of different curated components such as a dinner, a magazine corner, a public debate on the stage, film screenings, and a “one night stand” exhibition, where an invited group of artists made a slide-work on the theme of the night, which was then projected on a large cinema screen throughout the night.

This format was somehow offering itself, since the place of Salongen was a former cinema that had been converted to a club. Another of the main concepts of Salongen was “culture clash.” This was a burning topic at the beginning of the 1990s, when the first right-wing populist party Ny Demokrati (The New Democrats) entered the Swedish parliament, and their rhetoric was to a large extent based on a racist discourse on the theme of “culture clash.”

Since the established cultural field in these days was – and to a large extent still is – quite white, middle class, etc., and also rather separated in terms of generations and art forms, we tried to mix people from different groups who rarely met in other social contexts. Since this was before the internet and social media, we instead had to create social chains where people would invite other people from different groups. A little like the Stanley Milgram “six degrees of separation” experiment where participants try to send a packet to a person they didn’t know, only through a chain of friends and friends of friends, etc.

In other curatorial projects by VAVD Editions from the mid to the end of the 1980s, such as U-media, we were more interested in the social in terms of a “post-Habermasian” discussion on the transformation of the public sphere in relation to the development of new media and communication technologies and its effect on notions of center-periphery, identity, and power. In U-media the curatorial strategy was “chameleon-like,” where art works were “embedded” –inserted and adapted – to various public contexts of communication from media channels to public institutions, for example audio projects in the local radio channel, video works on the rather new local cable TV channel, book projects in the city library, text projects for the local paper, and commercial LED street sign boards on city the community center [Folkets hus], and fax (which was a rather new technology at the time). We did also curate an exhibition as a “business expo show” with artists who presented fictitious companies and institutions as art projects.

NM: U-media is part of the exhibition. You present it mainly in a documentary format, including a description, photos, and press articles. When we were going

through the body of your works from that period and discussing which ones should be part of this exhibition, one criterion was that there is an urgency or an appeal that is still relevant for today, although in different terms, so that the viewers could relate to the works from the perspective of our time. How would you describe the process of relating current questions to your projects from the 1980s and 90s that we selected for the exhibition? For example, **The Stockholm Syndrome** depicts police tactics in the famous hostage situation in a bank in Stockholm in 1973, including diagrams visualizing the relations of the individual agents participating in that drama. Today one might think of police tactics in dealing with current forms of terrorism, which has become much more complex.

MW: The projects that we selected for the exhibition relate to current societal issues in different ways. The main theme of **The Stockholm Syndrome** was to explore what happens when you apply the psychological diagnosis of “the Stockholm syndrome,” which describes the strong bond that sometimes develops between captor and captive when those who are controlled begin to identify with their controllers, to other structures of power, dependency, and control.

The syndrome has, for example, been used to explain why many abused women do not leave their abusers, but instead continue to defend them. The syndrome has also been applied to explain why citizens of totalitarian states defend the oppressive system they forced to accept. It has been used in discussions on, for example, women and ISIS, and in a post-colonial analysis of how the dominant white culture is forcing minority groups to accept and internalize negative stereotypes about themselves. These are all quite urgent and important questions today.

U-media, which was curated by VAVD Editions in the mid 1980s, dealt with the issues of communication, identity, and power in relation to center-periphery, which are still burning issues given the increasing polarization between urban and rural areas in Sweden as well as in many other parts of the world.

The web project **The Archive of Deleted Files** from the early days of the Internet in the mid 1990s explored surveillance of the Internet – a phenomenon that is more relevant than ever with massive surveillance operations undertaken by secret intelligence agencies in both democratic and totalitarian societies, as well as by the global tech companies such as Facebook, Google, and Amazon.

The video section of the Stockholm Film Festival which was screened at Moderna Museet, and that I co-curated in 1991 and 1992 together with my brother Pål, contained themes and works that dealt with issues that at the time were rarely discussed in mainstream Swedish culture, but which were quite urgent in New York, where I lived during the first half of the 1990s. We screened for example John di Stefano's (tell me why): **The Epistemology of Disco**, which discusses the political role that disco culture has played in queer identity, Martha Rosler's **Born to Be Sold: The Strange Case of Baby S/M**, which problematizes the surrogate mother industry from a feminist perspective, Mona Hatoum's **Measures of Distance**, which deals with her experience of exile as a Palestinian who was born in Beirut lives in London, and Keith Piper's **The Nation's Finest**, which critically explores how black athletes' bodies are commodified and fetishized in white western culture and media.

NM: Could you say a bit about the architecture of the exhibition and its function to dramatize the works?

Walls divide the room into a maze of several corridors, and they create a narrative by guiding the visitor through the exhibition in a specific way. Color codes mark individual sections or chapters of that narrative.

MW: When Maria Lind invited me to make an exhibition at Tensta konsthall, she wanted to focus the exhibition on the curatorial aspects of my early projects from the 1980s and 90s, when parallel to my art practice I also conducted a number of curatorial projects. For me, there hasn't been a real difference between how I have worked with the curatorial projects and the art projects. The projects selected for the exhibition therefore reflect a modus operandi, which is quite similar for the two practices. However, curatorial projects in general, and the projects presented in the exhibition in particular, are by their nature a challenge to exhibit since they are based on a specific site and context, and what is left from the projects is mostly documentary material such as photographs, texts, printed matter, maps, etc. Consequently, we had to be quite selective by not including every project from the period, as well as being careful not to overload the exhibition with too much information.

Since presentations of documentary material can be quite boring, my long-time collaborator, the architect and designer Igor Isaksson and I decided that we would have to construct a new narrative for the material where the ideas and projects could become relevant for the current context as well as interesting and visually intriguing for visitors of Tensta konsthall. We also decided that we would like to dramaturgically stage the material in the smaller gallery space of Tensta konsthall by designing a slightly confined exhibition architecture which consists of a labyrinthine structure of corridors that would lead the visitor through the exhibition according to

a specific narrative order where the visitor would not be able to see what might be around the next corner.

The labyrinthine structure of the corridors is, of course, also a small wink to two of the masters of the literary genre magical realism – which is one of the references of the title of exhibition, **Magic Bureaucracy** – Jorge Luis Borges and Italo Calvino, who have both used the labyrinth as a metaphor for the human condition, and to one of the progenitors of magical realism, Franz Kafka, who in several novels used labyrinthine corridors as a visual metaphor for human conflict with bureaucracy. The corridors are covered with red Stage Molton, a curtain material which is used in theatres and cinemas. The fabric introduces an aspect of theatricality to the exhibition, and the projects are presented in between the openings of the curtains like on a stage or a film screen.

NM: The title of the exhibition, **Magic Bureaucracy**, also has a strong link to contemporary politics of the neoliberal state. If it was a promise by neoliberal politicians to reduce bureaucracy, in fact the opposite happened: it proliferated under neoliberalism, as Mark Fisher points out in **Capitalist Realism**. A good example is the Anglo-american model of the academic educational system, which requires ever more applications, reports and (self-) assessments as a matter of self-preservation. Besides this apparent use of bureaucracy as an end in itself it serves as a means of mass-control, which is enabled by an internalization of perpetual self-assessment. In contrast to that, the bureaucratic apparatus of the (nanny) welfare state, which the neoliberalist project pretended to abolish, operates with a notion of the “average,” which it produces at the same time. Citizens don’t have to self-manage and capitalize on their qualifications

all the time, but, on the contrary, are expected to not stand out in order to get what they want, but to rather be an easy-to-administer part of a well-taken-care-of, pacified group of citizens. In some of your central works you refer to exactly these implications of the Swedish model of the welfare state, for example **The Average Citizen Project, 1999–2009**. In the turmoil of the current historic moment, the welfare state and the Swedish model seem to offer – besides the critique you also formulated on the implications of the “average” – attractive and pragmatic solutions in the process of reformulating what we expect from the state. What can the idea of **Magic Bureaucracy**, the combination of labyrinthine imagination and a rigid governmental tool, imply in the context of this discussion? And in what way does it bind together the individual pieces of your exhibition?

The title **Magic Bureaucracy** has a background in ideas that I had in the early 1980s and has several references and connotations. It is obviously a take on the literary genre “magical realism,” which describes a narrative style where reality is blended with fantastic or imaginary elements. Jorge Luis Borges and Italo Calvino were quite influential on my work as an artist at the time.

The title is in a similar way an attempt to pin down a certain type of approach and method that is common for the projects that we have selected for the exhibition, and that could be considered a merging of the curatorial and the art practice. These projects have a common denominator in an artistic method where systems and procedures, which from an artists’ perspective are considered to be “bureaucratic”—such as categorization, classification, prescribed patterns and rules, archival, organizational and administrative processes—are used as creative tools at the same time

as they are being subverted with elements of the unexpected, the absurd, or a touch of dry humor.

The title is in itself, of course, also a kind of a paradox and a contradiction in terms, since bureaucracy was one of the main instruments of the rationalization and organization of modern society, and what one of the most important theoreticians of bureaucracy, the sociologist Max Weber, described as the “disenchantment of the world.” Weber considered bureaucracy instead to be the antithesis of the organization of the world according to the “magical thought” of the premodern world. The structuralist anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, who influenced me in my early twenties, challenged the fundamental idea of the Enlightenment that scientific thought is superior to pre-scientific “magical thought.” Lévi-Strauss argued instead that the knowledge that was developed in pre-modern societies had not only the objective of satisfying basic needs—that had been the consensus earlier—but did also meet intellectual requirements, and that all cultures have long been systematizing their world. Pre-modern societies, he said, just applied different systems than scientific thinking does. Pre-modern thinking should also not be considered just a phase in the linear development of scientific thinking, but rather as two parallel modes of knowledge production. The projects in the exhibition at Tensta konsthall could from one perspective be in line with these ideas, insofar as the projects explore strategies of organizing the world by using “bureaucratic” structures and processes, but in a different and slightly twisted way and with a rather opposite result than what is usually governed by the bureaucratic and scientific rationale.

The discourse around the social and political implications of bureaucracy is also rather contradictory, which

was already reflected in Max Weber’s writing on bureaucracy almost a century ago. On the one hand, Weber considered bureaucratic systems and processes to be a way to achieve impartiality, fairness, and equality for all citizens independent of class and social connections, and which would limit arbitrariness, bias, and nepotism in decision-making. On the other hand, he also observed the dysfunctions of bureaucracy as well as its depersonalization effect and its limitation on personal freedom.

An interesting aspect of the critique of bureaucracy is that it is one of few phenomena that unifies the left and the right, but from different ideological perspectives. While the left regards bureaucracy as an extension of the capitalistic system and an apparatus of discipline and control, as studied by for example Hannah Arendt, Kathy E. Ferguson, and Michel Foucault, the right, with its critique of “big government,” is influenced by economic theoreticians such as Ludwig von Mises and Milton Friedman, who were important for the neoliberal revolution of Reaganomics and Thatcherism in the 1980s up through the New Public Management ideology of the 1990s.

The irony is, as you pointed out, that the effort to diminish bureaucracy in the public sector by trying to run public institutions in the same way as businesses, has in many parts of the public sector, for example in the higher education sector that you mentioned, ended up creating what Michael Power has labeled the “audit society”: A nightmare of endless bureaucratic structures and procedures where every administrative operation has to be reported and evaluated according to some abstract criteria. But there are also for example feminist theoreticians such as Louise Chappell who argues that bureaucratic structures could be used strategically for activists’ purposes by working

the system rather than from an outside position.

That being said, there is currently another ironic development in several countries such as the US, Poland, Hungary, and Turkey, where political leaders with populist and nationalistic agendas have declared war with the “bureaucrats,” that is, the independent public institutions of their countries. Members of public sector staff are being purged and close political allies and even family members are instead being appointed to important public positions. President Trump has even stated that bureaucracy is one of the “enemies of the West,” together with terrorism. In this highly polarized social and political climate a defense has been raised for politically independent bureaucratic institutions with impersonal and slow procedures as well as the detailed rules and regulations, from the same groups from the left to the right that used to criticize the bureaucratic structures but in a different political context.

Nina Möntmann is an art historian, writer and curator based in Hamburg.



Dates

Tuesday 10.10, 17:00–20:00
Opening: **Magic Bureaucracy**

Wednesday 11.10, 19:00
Conversation: **Nina Möntmann and Måns Wrangé**

Wednesday 25.10, 19:00 Artist presentation: **Måns Wrangé**

Wednesday 8.11, 19:00 CuratorLab
On Curating and Being Curated
– Examining Power, Responsibility and Care within the Curatorial

Wednesday 22.11, 19:00
Presentation: **When Sweden Became Contemporary** by the critic **Anders Olofsson**

Friday 24.11 Opening: **The Aerial Kit** by **Måns Wrangé** at **Moderna Museet**

Onsdag 6.12, 19:00 Presentation: **Art, Bureaucracy, Elitism** by the artist **Andreas Ejiksson**

Saturday 13.1, 14:00 Artist tour: **Måns Wrangé**

For more information www.tenstakonsthall.se

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