

The uneasy borders of desire – Magnus Enckell’s representations of masculinities and femininities and the question of how to create the Self

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“-- I see Enckell's art as places where fantasies can happen.”

as Sigmund Freud points out in his *Mourning and Melancholy* (Trauer und Melancholie). Melancholy cannot be mourned. In addition, as Freud writes, melancholy has more importance than usual distress. And that is why melancholy “satisfies” a melancholic more because one’s condition has more meaning compared to everyday act of mourning. (Freud 2005, 158–174.)

Images of Other

The Finnish artist Magnus Enckell (1870–1925) wrote the following in his notes from 1890’s: “The human soul needs a personal being, a personal love.” (Tihinen 2008, 110.) Enckell was expressing an idea very dear to 19th century thinking about the obligations of a Subject. The subject’s ego and personality were then, and are still, seen as a holy demand. This individuality could make the person feel lonely, or it could help this person understand one’s melancholic structure of being. In my study, the melancholic structure of being means the perpetual distance between persons. “I got you under my skin” is, after all, a poetic utterance, not a common fact. It is impossible to mourn the sorrow caused by the other’s unattainableness and this feeling being more pathological than normal mourning,

In the very core of my study lays the question of how we should understand over century-old works of art in a way that they are treated properly. What kind of ways do we have to contextualize them, and can we actually understand them? I suggest in the end of my study that works of art should be treated in a way which understands them, in a psychoanalytical sense, as Others. Our relationship with works of art is personal, we love them, worship them, hate them or despise them. In other words: we and the works of art have a tremendous drama going on. And this drama excludes all others. However, we must notice that the lover of art is an outsider, considering the original relationship between a work of art and artist, but this fact doesn’t prevent one’s lust to interfere in the dialogue with the work

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of art and viewer. To me, this dialogue is something which makes it possible to articulate one's own desires. Magnus Enckell wrote about the interaction between the past and the present in a following way in his notes:

"A ruin. Inside of it, there hovers a fog of forgotten pagan emotions and thoughts, perhaps empty dreams and sad thoughts for the one who comes from the outside, from sun light, but to the one whose home is there, it is still something alike to the times when people gathered in a temple to worship god." (Tihinen 2008, 110–111.)

The previous citation tells about the ambiguity of the past's relationship with the present. The past is both mystical and open to various interpretations, but there are routes or peeping-holes to get to know about forgotten gods. For us, the past isn't simply extinct, but real in a way that dreams, fantasies or memories are. It is perhaps nothing as factual knowledge, but definitely something as felt and interpretative knowledge. In this respect, the interpreter, who asserts oneself by his/her interpretations, becomes important. The interpretations are self-originated, and are thus about one's visions, fantasies and obsessions. One associates or analyses oneself by speaking about the outside self. Speaking about oneself is one's faith, weakness or strength, depending the point of the view chosen. The interpreter is a translator, propagandist or mediator. He/she is, as Friedrich Nietzsche writes, both dionysic and apollonian. The same view is also put forward by Michel Foucault does e.g. in his "What is author?" the borders of writing and author. (Foucault 2006, 7–14.)

The oeuvre of Magnus Enckell is an interesting subject to study, because it can easily be seen as continuing search process of personal interpretation, combining both classical mythology and the present moment. In this respect, Enckell is a modernist par excellence in searching his own artistic truth by using solutions, which are both modern and personal. A good example is the Golden Age or Paradise theme, with which the artist works with over 30 years, starting in 1897 and still continuing the search of synthesis in the 1920's. Golden Age or Paradise seems to be a dream for Enckell which he tries to achieve by using art's phantasmatic means. What could Golden Age be? The similarities between Enckell's phantasies about Paradises and André Raffalovitch's term unisexuality (1896), which means a mystical one-sex state of being, are suggested in my study. (Tihinen 2008, 101–103.) In unisexuality, the borders between sexes, genders, sexualities and individuals are melting and leaving room for experience, which is similar to the state before the Fall, or comes closer the original time of androgyny in Plato's Symposium. In this fantasy, desires and mysticism meet in a way which in contemporary terms could be described as queer. Queer is one of the theoretical starting points for my study, but also a tool to make use of. Queer is often linked with ambivalence, which is proper idea for using an originally pejorative term, which now is used in transgressive ways.

Genealogical sensibility

According to Michel Foucault's theories about genealogies it is possible to say that in my genealogical project I study



lacunas, discontinuities and ambiguities (Foucault 1998a, 63–107). I don't want to restore Enckell's art in one historical interpretation or explanation. Instead of that, I'm going to speak about the ambivalence between sexological discourses, formations of identities, visual arts, past and present. Enckell's oeuvre isn't to me only about the closeted art-historically silenced representations of homosexuality, but it is more like a mirror which doesn't reflect me as I feel to be. I think of Enckell's works more in terms of a psycho-analysis's couch, as a place where I can argument my associations by words, or even by muttering. To me, the last example is visualised in terms of the following quote from Enckell:

"I would like to throw away all that is masculine and feminine in you, and you would ultimately have to melt as the child in you comes forward." (Tihinen 2008, 110.)

"The child in you" is a really tempting idea for my speculations, but a speculation, nevertheless, which is the best when taken as a fantasy or dream. The return to the beginning of being is a very tempting and culturally important fantasy of finding the beginnings of everything. The beginning of Self, life, sexualities, identities. However, when we are dealing with this fantasy, we are really dealing with a fantasy which is dear to us, but which we can't ever achieve. The fantasy of beginning is important in understanding Enckell's notes from the 1890's, because the very century was greatly about finding different kinds of beginnings (such as the origins of art, history or sexual-

ity), and also explain how these entities were born. And, it is useful to understand that a fantasy about origins is not only restricting, but opens possibilities for a counter-power to take its place, as Foucault writes in his Introduction of the *History of Sexuality*. The counter-power opens the subject a possibility to articulate one's own subjective truth about oneself. (Foucault 1998b.)

In the search of the past

Why should there be talk about the melancholic structure of being, homosexuality, narcissism or androgyny in terms of Enckell's oeuvre? Are these terms needed? My answer is both yes and no, because as borrowing Harri Kalha's idea, these terms are written in the tradition of Enckelliana. Enckelliana means the tradition of Enckell-studies which "explains" and interprets the artist's oeuvre in different terms. (Kalha 2005.) In my study, I have been following Salme Salme Sarajas-Korte's excursions to Enckell's art, because of her innovative and exhaustive ways in studying Enckell have mainly localised most of the themes which I'm interested. I'm aware of my lineage in this tradition and actually proud of it, because Enckell's art is, by definition, aware of its linkage with tradition. And Sarajas-Korte's trial to achieve the impossible (past) passionately, is something to admire.

I have earlier been playing with the problems of defining a work of art. The very definition of a final work is in the very core of my study, as my aim is to destabilize the banal

definitions of works of art as finished or solid, better or worse. A work of art is to me a name for a process which is needed in creating a unity which is more or less solid. The very character of a work, or should I say in a more obscure way, the very nature of a work is that they are never completed, they are simply left to be. In this respect a sketch, which is usually seen as something unfinished or sketchy is very important for me as an idea. I outline my thoughts in a process which is constant and sly in a sense that I'm never sure when I'm moving to one work to an another. This means that if I want to be sincere about the intellectual level of my argumentation, I must see my arguments moving in terms of convincing, referring and sweet-talking. It isn't insulting to me to see this kind of research in terms of an essay instead of a study. To me, the writing of an essay is a definition for a writing process which doesn't construct a rigid opposition between final and sketchy text, but instead shows the uncertainty and incongruity which is central to humanistic writing, both scientific and belletristic. These sketchy articulations emerge as more ambiguous, more phantasmatically satisfying; places, where reader or writer can stay. Place, or topos, is important in this respect, because I see Enckell's art as places where fantasies can happen. These places present possibilities for a gazing subject to exist, and by analysing these fantasies one can even understand something substantial about oneself.

Oscar Wilde, an author contemporary to Enckell, wrote in his *The Critic as an Artist* how a critic should study his own soul (Wilde 1957, 966). In my view, and based on

my own experience as a practicing art critic, I must say that Wilde had it right. Only by examining oneself, or by sketching one's self-portrait it is possible to try articulate something what one can call his/hers own interpretation, or point of view. The subjective "truth" or interpretation has to be created to be such a bewitching song of sirens that it will make all listeners fall in love and follow my truth. It is a must for a critic, artist or scholar to make one's oratory to be lovely, even if most coarse message is being delivered. For this mission every action is permitted, because it is really about the love or war between reader and writer.

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