

## 0K – A Play in Five Acts

Per Hüttner and Fatos Üstek

*On Sunday May 16, 2010, artist Per Hüttner and critic and curator Fatos Üstek presented a project that oscillated between a traditional talk and a performance at the Flat Time House, Peckham, London. The location is the former residence of conceptual artist John Latham, who has devised the idea of flat-time based on the theoretical physics of Event Structure. The house functions as an archive and research centre and hosts exhibitions and events.*

*Üstek and Hüttner have been investigating the conditions of knowledge in non-ordinary realities, taking absolute boundaries of time, space and temperature into account. The play merged into investigations of notions such as travel, movement, time, volume while imagining zero Kelvin (absolute zero) as a point of reference and referring it back to their respective creative practises.*

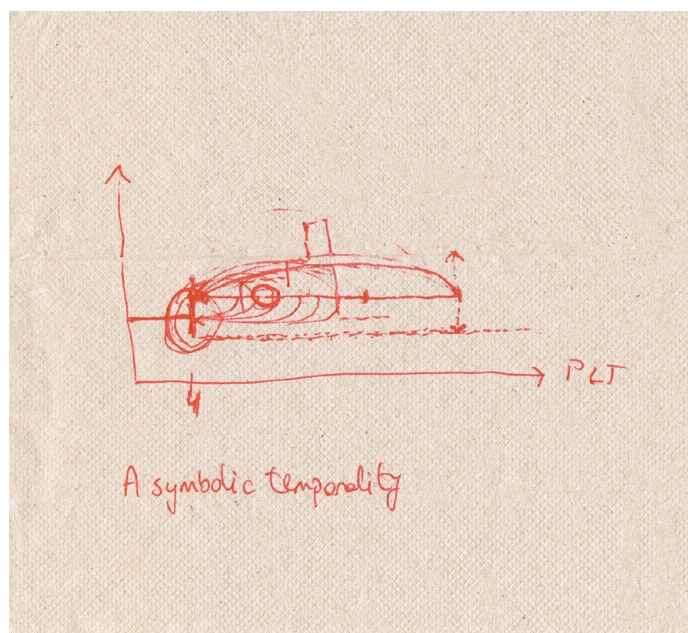
*This text, carrying the same title as the event, is an outcome of the discussions the two have undertaken over a year on theorems of abstract mathematics, quantum mechanics, subjectivity, temporality, timelessness and knowledge.*

*This piece is the first of a three-part contribution, and is composed at 122K. In October Hüttner and Üstek will take a trip to Minnesota, U.S., to visit Robert Ettinger, the father of cryogenics and founder of Cryogenics Institute, Michigan. This trip will form the core of the two following 'cold' texts.*

### Act 1 -At the Flat-Time House 2

The door everyone has been staring at with anticipation opens and a small hurricane of cold air hits the audience. Two figures in space suits covered by layers of strange ice crystals enter. The high-tech space suits emit strange white smoke and as the two figures move, tiny chips of ice come off their suits and burn small holes in the carpet with a low 'pffissching' noise. Everyone in the audience is so still that you can reach out and poke at the silence. The strange astronauts take off their helmets revealing the head of a man and a woman. They both look tired. But more than anything, they smile with great satisfaction and joy. The room is filled with applause and they hug.

But their ultra-cold space suits stick to each other. They are asked to put their helmets back on and the suits are sprayed with a special liquid that make them return to



room temperature. The two become unstuck. As soon as they get out of their suits they are given warm blankets to wrap their bodies in. People from the press ask questions and cameras flash.

“What do you have to say to the young students at home in Turkey?” a man with a big moustache asks.

“Well, they have to find their own way, keep reflecting on the present and continue to learn from art as well as from science,” she says.

“We from Berlin,” another moustache-clad man says, “would like to extend a special thank to you both.”

The two heroes bow their heads stiffly as if the man was Japanese rather than German.

“What does Berlin have to do with anything?” a fat middle-aged woman in the audience hollers, waving her cigarette.

“They both lived in Berlin, everyone knows that,” the German moustache says.

## **Act 2 – At His Flat Paris/Stockholm**

“How was your trip?”

“Terrible, the train caught on fire,” she says. “Look, now the whole station’s on fire!” They both look out the window and plumes of greyish red smoke come out of Gare du Nord and a lot of Charles Ray fire trucks stop in front of the station. An army of toy fire fighters get out their Lego hoses.

“This is horrible, let’s go to Stockholm,” he says as the smell of burning plastic enters the room.

They grab her luggage and go into the bathroom.

They both exit from the bathroom in Stockholm.

“I seem to have a lotus flower growing in my right lung. Can you help me to pull it out?” she asks.

“Sure.”

She unbuttons her shirt. The plant is protruding from her chest right under her right collarbone. The root is sticking out five inches and is covered in smelly mud. He pushes her against the wall, grabs the plant with both hands. He puts his right foot on her belly and pulls violently. She breathes loudly and pants like a dog and after a few minutes’ struggle, the flower comes out of her lung with a loud popping sound. He falls backwards and hits his back on the corner of the stove. He gets back up again and complains loudly.

“Are you OK, dear?” she says.

“Sure, are you?”

“Never been better, I will get a OK bag for you.” She grabs a fist-sized white sack from the freezer and hits it

hard against the dinner table. It makes a fizzing sound and she holds it against his aching back. “Do you think that the way that thought travels is similar to travelling at the speed of light?” she sits down at the table.

“I guess so. That is why the mind can be free,” he says as the pain subsides. He turns around to serve her salad.

“But are we free when we travel?” she asks.

“It is up to you decide if you are free or not. I do not think there is such thing as objective freedom. That is an invention of desperate politicians and their executives.”

“What do you mean by freedom being an invention?”

“It is all about how you see yourself. Thinking that you can conquer the world, is the first step achieving something,” he says.

“Wow, how does that affect our idea about democracy?”

“Don’t even get me started. It suffices to say that most of us think that we are free on a conscious level, but unconsciously we create unsurpassable thresholds for ourselves. This is what elite schools do, they grind down these thresholds to create successful and visionary people.”

“Yes, I am with you,” she says dipping a piece of carrot in the humus. “What if you fall into a black hole when you are on your travels? Maybe we can call that a freedom since you can have no dependants of your movement? It is all a continuous oscillation that resonates as high as your initial speed of entry,” She smiles.

“Associating movement with thinking, the physical becoming the mental?” he asks, not knowing where the words come from.

“You could say that and you cannot at the same time,” she looks at him. “One does not compensate one another or replace differences, nor can they claim independence.”

“I am not sure I understand, but I know the place to go to find out.” He leads her back into the bathroom.

## **Act 3 – All Over the African Continent**

We see the man and the woman next to a sand desert bathroom. She is about 11 years old and goes over to him. He is old and immobile as if he were some age-old mummy. She gets up on the toilet seat and puts her hand in his mouth. He remains immobile while her hand and arm is in his mouth and she is searching for something in his guts. She pulls out a little lizard and throws it up

in the air. It dashes behind a rock.

The scenery has changed. They are in green jungle. He comes alive and smiles. He becomes a teenager and she old and bent over a Zimmer frame. He makes her fall by placing his foot in front of her. She looks shocked and surprised (did she break her hip bone?). He leans down and looks into her open mouth. The lizard he pulls out of her is slightly bigger and louder. It hides behind the same rock.

The two sit down next to a campfire each rolling a cigarette. Everything is calm and they both look young and healthy. The rocks around the fire appear to be cheap props made of painted Styrofoam, but the jungle in the background is all the more real. As they smoke, enjoying the open sky, the two lizards have merged into one. That lizard peers out from behind that same rock.

"I'm Raimundas, but you can call me The Wonderful Lizard of Oz".

"Wow," the two say at the same time.

"What did you put in this!"

"No way, I see it too" she says stubbing out the cigarette butt.

"Look," the lizard says, "The agency sent me. I am here to set up a séance with you." "A séance?" she snaps. (As the words are uttered they find themselves in a market place full of crocodile and panther skins, selling water.)

"Yeah," He becomes 68-years-old with long curly hair wearing bottle-bottom glasses. "That is ridiculous," he adds.

They are both now playing with toy cars and glass balls in a street in Izmir among other kids.

"Irratio-," as she speaks out, is interrupted by Raimundas.

"If you just acknowledge that both you and your surroundings change without interruption, you would be less inclined to speak about stupidity and irrationality. I am on tough schedule," the lizard adds with evident boredom. "So we need to get the séance going. You have ordered a session with Mae Junod Ettinger."

"Who? And whom do you say ordered the séance?" she asks.

"Mae Junod Ettinger," the lizard looks annoyed.

"Strangely enough it does ring a bell. I see an image of Lake Michigan in the snow." "Yes it is a future memory," the lizard says. "Or it could be a memory transmitted by Mae. You need to be silent," Raimundas says looking at him. "I am communicating with Mae."

"Huh, that cold bites with an attitude," the voice of Mae rings out with an icy reverberation. "But it is better to

be here than on the other side," Mae goes on with her antiquated American accent. "How's Robert? I miss him."

Raimundas looks at the two of them and nods.

"He says that he misses you too," he says.

"Liar," Mae snaps. "He never said that to you."

"Sorry," he sulks.

"But it is true that he misses me a lot," her voice is warm and motherly. "Don't take my remark personally."

"OK,"

"I wish that it could be colder here. The closer I get to OK, the calmer I feel," Mae says.

"So you go back to the origin of the universe?" Raimundas says.

"You really are stuck in the stupid idea that you call science," Mae replies with contempt.

"And what would you suggest takes its place?" the lizard asks.

"That is for you to figure out," Mae replies frostily.

"Well," says the lizard, "we are working on a premise where OK, travelling at the speed of light is a source for anti-intuitive thinking that will help us to get unstuck in the intellectual void that we are in."

"That is beautiful!" she says.

"It should be, you came up with it," Mae says.

"I did?" she asks in awe.

"You are ruining everything Mae," the lizard says.

"How do you want to continue this?"

"Time to get some flavours," Mae says.

Africa and the Bromley foothills are sucked into a black hole and Istanbul takes its place. You can smell diesel in the air and a muezzin calls a prayer.

**Act 4 - At Her House London/Istanbul.**

"I have brought you a present," he says and smiles.

"Thanks," she takes the prettily wrapped box. She removes the red ribbon and opens the golden cube. She thinks about Swiss chocolate. He looks at her in anticipation.

"It is incomplete," she looks inside the books with disappointment.

"That is the whole point," he replies.

"Why would you like to give me such a present?" she looks at him with contempt. "It is the only present that we can share," he smiles sadistically at her. "So, you create your own presents and your life is an infinite set of indistinguishable moments or presents."

"That can only be defined in retrospect," she retorts

dryly.

"Sure, but they still remain impossible to grasp. They are incoplete by default."

"Why do you say 'Incoplete', you mean 'Incomplete' right?"

"No, I mean 'incoplete' because when it lacks the 'm' it proves its own 'incompleteness'. The moment 'incoplete' without the 'm' becomes socially acceptable, written in all dictionaries it loses its functionality," he says with great pride.

"Though incomplete is not a condition of lacking, it is a condition of the without, without knowing what is what you are with or without!" she argues passionately.

"So, as long an art expression remains 'incomplete' it is alive?" she is full of doubt. "Yes and it vibrates in its incompleteness in the present – that is why I gave you the present."

"Thank you, this is very kind. However, I would argue differently. I would say that its incompleteness allows itself to resonate differently. If I was to example art as incomplete. And your present eludes my reception of the present(s)".

"Maybe?" he has no idea what she says.

"So what would presence at OK, travelling at the speed of light or in black matter be?" she asks.

"They are all beautiful fantasies, since all of these states are impossible for the human body to survive in. But on a theoretical level, it would be possible for us to actually live the present in any of these states," he says (or was that her?).

"And I suspect that that moment would last an eternity,"

"So, inside the box I can find a ticket to visit OK?" she says.

"You might and you might well not."

## Act 5 - At the Flat House # 1

"Let's just calm down" he says "It doesn't matter that you left your plug somewhere, we can still show the film on your computer."

"Yeah, sure" she replies nervously. "This is not how I imagined it to be."

"It is good to be here before travelling to OK, and I am expecting some friends to show up. Anyway, do not worry, this is a potentiality of the present, something you could not prove it to be there, but now it is here."

"Yes to achieve 'incopleteness' in real time," she adds sarcastically (or was it him?).

"Wow!"

"What happened?"

"I received the images of our space suits, they look great and puffy."

"You were expecting this, weren't you?"

"Yes, but chances are that it will be gone when you step out of your space suit," she sounds disappointed.

"I can live with that," he smiles. "Now, we have to dance."

"OK!"

He puts on the music and they dance their way into their respective space suits.

An army of people from NASA appear all around them. Peckham looks like Houston and Cape Canaveral rolled into one glorious wet dream of technology and the New Cross Mountains have never looked more majestic.

"Let's take a picture," she says.





## Liquid Nitrogen - A Play in Five Acts

*On May 16 2010, artist Per Hüttner and curator/critic Fatoş Üstek presented a cryonic performance at the Flat Time House in London. A text version of the event was published in Nowiswere 7. In the next issue, you will find out what really happened when a text that recounts their trip to Detroit to visit to Robert Ettinger, the father of cryogenics will be published. For this issue, the two present a text where they imagine what will take place during this trip.*

### Act One – Night, Philadelphia, PA.

Darkness.

An alarm rings and a light comes close to the ceiling which illuminates a workshop where awkward looking sculptures, a mountain of old freezers, pieces of wood and metal and huge tools are scattered. It looks like the workshop of a mad scientist. At the back of the stage a tall wooden structure in two floors has been erected.

“You are virtually a scientist,” the man says waking up on the upper level of the structure and raising his arms above his head. His skin looks green and lifeless. “Can you explain what it is that gives you that special taste

in your mouth when you wake up early?”

“Jesus, it is 4.30, how can you be so perky?” the woman asks, getting up from a mattress and climbing down a wooden ladder. She is wearing a T-shirt and grey jogging trousers and gives a lifeless impression. She walks over to a mirror and starts brushing her teeth.

“Do you want to shower first?” He gets up and display his lifeless body to the audience.

“OK,” she spits in the faucet.

The woman gets undressed making sure that the man does not see her naked body and steps into the shower and closes the shower curtain. There is a green glow about her. The man steps down from the structure and brushes his teeth and when the woman comes out of the shower, the man gets in. The woman packs a duffel-bag and we hear a car honking outside.

“The cab is here,” she shouts looking out a window and walks off the stage carrying her bag. The man runs out of the shower and gets dressed, dries his body and picks up his small luggage in one movement.

The stage is shrouded in darkness and a film is projected on a screen. We see an old man propped up in

chair and the man and the woman face him with their backs to the camera.

“OK, we start. It is an honour to be here Mr Ettinger,” the woman says. (The old man sighs.)

“We just came from the institute,” the man says.

“Sorry?”

“We just came from the institute,” he repeats in a louder voice.

“Yeah?”

“Yeah, very impressive!”

“What can I do for you?” Ettinger asks.

“How did it all start?”

“I really don’t know why that interests people, but apparently it does,” Ettinger says. “I grew up in the 1920s reading science fiction magazines. In the early 1930s, in one of the science fiction magazines, there was a story published called the ‘Jameson Satellite’ by Neil Jones. In the story, professor Jameson wanted to have his body placed in orbit around earth after he died. He imagined a temperature that would be close to absolute zero where he could be preserved for a long time. And of course he was wrong, the temperature of a satellite in earth orbit is not near absolute zero. But anyway, in the story that is what happened. He died and he was placed in orbit around earth and millions of years passed and the human race died out. But eventually he was found by a race of aliens or cyborgs, organic brains and mechanical bodies. They revived his brain, put it in a body and he became one of their companions and involved in a series of adventures. But the main point of the story is that if it is possible for advanced aliens to revive a frozen brain, why wait for a millions years. Why not do it right now, for everybody who wants it? That was the beginning of the Cryonics idea. There has been many partial precursors. Egyptians thought they could revive bodies. So they mummified the bodies, removed the brain with the hope to revive the body.”

“Do you know why they removed the brain?” the man asks.

“Because they thought it was impairment to the mummification and they also removed the guts. Anyway, I did not do anything at the time, because I was not in a position to do anything. I did not have the qualifications, resources or influence. Well the idea is quite obvious and I was sure that someone more qualified than myself would come along and pick it up and promote it. But, that did not happen.”

## **Act 2 – Overlooking Lake Huron, MI**

The stage is a park that overlooks a magnificent and

sun-soaked view of Lake Huron. Nothing interrupts the horizon and there is a strong wind and dead leaves in splendid colours dance across the stage. A car rolls in from the right and parks between an oversized SUV and a sign, which reads “No Parking”. The man and the woman step out of the car. They stretch their arms over their heads.

“God, it is freezing!”

They go back into the car. She offers him some almonds; he accepts and gulps them down.

“Look, we have to go through the questions.”

He takes out a plastic container and chopsticks and she takes a turn munching on an apple and a sandwich. Both look out over the vast lake through the wind-screen with great pleasure.

“This is the worst Sushi I ever had, but the almonds are amazing!”

“I want to ask Ettinger about what kind of future he thinks he will wake up in.”

“That is pure speculation.” He attacks the sushi rolls and spills soya on his shirt without noticing. “It is so windy today. I am worried that we are going to miss our flight back to New York.”

“It is beautiful here.”

“Yes, it truly is.”

“The families look so happy when they are freezing their relatives. So different from a funeral.”

“Yes, it is amazing kind of hope that the centre offers people. It is poetry in motion.”

“Like the wind playing with the leaves.”

“It is going to rain,” he turns around and faces the audience.

“Really?”

“Yes look at that sky, all lead.”

The lights are dimmed again. We again see the projection of Ettinger.

“In 1948, I was in the army hospital,” he says. “I read about the work of Jean Rostand in France. He froze and revived frogs’ sperm after treating them with glycerol to protect them against the effects of freezing. The sperm was later used to produce healthy frogs. It reminded me about the freezing idea and provided me some scientific evidence that living tissue might survive the freezing process. So I wrote a short story, expanding the cryonics idea and that was published in the 1948 issue of ‘Startling Stories’. But, nothing happened. Eventually, it became clear that something had to be done. So I wrote two pages focussing on the life insurance aspects of cryonics and I sent that to 200 people chosen randomly from ‘Who is Who in America’ - again no interest.”



So something, a link was required. So I wrote a book. The first version of *The Prospect of Immortality* was the result and I published it myself in 1962. It did arouse some interest. I also found out that a man, named Evelyn Cooper wrote a book called 'Immortality Physically Scientifically Now'. It had some aspects that were similar to my book. So, Evelyn and I got together in Washington and formed 'The Life Extension Society'. A book club was the main focus and we published a monthly newsletter called 'Freeze Wait and Reanimate'. Membership to 'Life Extension Society' was essentially a subscription to the newsletter. It cost 2 dollars per year and we had about 2000 subscribers.

Around 1965 a group formed in New York, which later became known as the 'New York Society of Cryonics'. Its leaders were Curtis Henderson and Saul Kent and Saul is still active in cryonics. He became very successful selling vitamins and food supplements and has given a lot of money to the cryonics and life extension movements. Around the same time, Curtis Henderson started a company called 'Cryospan' and they started to freeze people. But they did not have a well-thought-out business plan, so they had to give up and give the patients back to their families.

In 1976 we formed the Cryonics Institute. Our first patient was my mother in 1977, our second patient was my first wife in 1987. In 1993 we moved to the facility in Clinton Township that you saw today. When we got our website things started to pick up. My second wife was our 36th patient in the year 2000 and currently we have 101 patients.

### Act 3 - 101<sup>st</sup> patient

A dozen giant round white plastic containers approximately 3.5 meters tall and 2.5 meters across fill the stage. A few withered flowers look sad in a big, grid-like structure. A computer is connected to a large white sarcophagus, which oozes of something resembling dry ice. The light is cold and green, making everything look like it is mummified. A skinny, grey man in his mid-fifties walks across the stage. His skin has the same colour as the subdued colours that surround him. He wears faded jeans and a great big white pullover with big grey flower motifs that underline his anachronistic features. He looks with great suspicion at the man and the woman who follow him.

"Our 101<sup>st</sup> member was brought in at midnight," the older man says patting sarcophagus as if it were a horse that he is eager to sell, "and he is now being chilled down to the temperature of liquid nitrogen. You can see it here on the screen," he makes an arrogant gesture and the man and the woman look with great interest on the computer screen.

"Were any members of the family present?" the woman asks while the man is taking photographs of the screen. She is shocked as if the ghoulish nature of her voice was not hers.

"No, he was alone," the older man quickly warms to the two visitors, but retains a cool distance. "It is relatively rare that they come." He mounts a set of wooden stairs and holds onto a long nozzle which looks like a ray gun and is connected to a long hose and suspended from the ceiling. "We use this to fill in the liquid nitro-

gen,” he poses and the young man takes photographs which make him more confident with the violent-looking gadget as if it was a great big weapon.

The woman asks him about the shape of the containers.

“There are ten patients in each. The round ones are far more effective. Each patient only costs about \$ 100 per month, while the old ones cost three times more. They work like giant thermos flasks.” He jumps down with gymnastic grace and reaches into a small container with the letters “EMV” on the side, which oozes white smoke and throws out some liquid nitrogen on the floor. The woman screams and the two men give ghostly laughs in unison.

“How come you do not get cold-burns?”

“It is incredibly cold, so it vaporises instantaneously. But if I stick my hand into it, I will get hurt badly.” The gray man returns to his bored state. “Come here, I want to show you something.”

The three of them walk over in a robot-like fashion to a double row of framed photographic portraits. They either look old or depict old people. He points at photograph of an old woman.

“This is our first patient, Robert’s mother.” He points at a young woman next to her. “And this is the second patient, his first wife. This one, was a young man who died of leukaemia and this one is Robert’s second wife.”

There is an awkward silence while the two look with great interest on the photographs.

“Most of the members are male, while most of the patients are women.”

“How does that work?” The younger man looks confused, underlining his pale features.

“Well men are more attached to their wives and sisters than the other way around,” all three of them laugh.

The film reappears on the dark stage.

“You had a vision when you were young and you worked consistently towards this goal,” the man says. “I wanted to hear what kind of resistance you have met from the powers that be. For instance, the institute is technically a cemetery, because of regulations, while the ideology of your project is the opposite of that.”

“For many years, we operated openly. But at one point the institute was recognised as something unusual and got special attention from the Attorney General. But he concluded that our operation was not illegal which meant that other organisations in other states also started operating. Alcor started in California and then moved to Arizona. They froze the baseball player Ted

Williams and that aroused special attention. For some reason a lot of sports people were opposed to the idea. They thought somehow it was not dignified for him to be frozen; they preferred burial or cremation. So special attention came from state and local authorities. At one point, legislators in Arizona wanted to pass legislation outlawing cryonics and putting Alcor out of business. Here in Michigan, the cemetery people and mortuary people investigated us. It is illegal to act both as a cemetery and a mortuary. They have to be separated. So in the end, we were licensed as a cemetery and not a mortuary. But in practice nothing changed. The same people do the mortuary work and we do the rest.”

“Your first patient was your mother, how did it feel?” the woman asks.

“When you have someone in the family frozen, it does not remove the grief, but it does soften it. It makes it easier to bear. You don’t feel good about it, but you feel slightly better.”

#### **Act 4 – Clinton Township, MI**

The lights dim, the man and the woman sit in the car at centre of the stage and the rain is pouring down incessantly on the vehicle. They drive in silence and dead leaves twirl in the air, creating a kaleidoscope of colours and the stage is drowned in bombastic music. The lights dim and the music fades out. The long dark silence is broken by the sound of the projector.

“Have you decided in what order the patients are going to be revived?” the man asks.

“People die under variety of circumstances, more or less favourable. A lot of people misunderstand the scientific challenges we face. When you ask them what cryonics is, most commonly they will tell you we freeze people and wait until we can cure the disease that killed them. That is only part of the problem and not the hardest part. In many cases there is a delay between the time of death and time we can start our work and there is some deterioration. So we have to be able to repair that as well. Then there is the freezing process itself and we have made much progress. In fact, we don’t freeze people anymore. We vitrify them. Are you familiar with the term?”

The man and the woman shake their heads

“Vitrification, is a process whereby tissue becomes solid. But the crystals that ordinarily characterise solid bodies, are not present. Or they are present, but much smaller and much fewer. And by preventing crystallisation or reducing the number and size of the crystals,

we reduce the amount of damage done to the patient. Anyway there are a variety of patients, in regards to how they died, how soon they were treated and by what method they were treated. So, there will be a range of intervals at which they can be revived."

"How long do you think it will take?" the woman asks. "It is guesswork - anywhere between 50 to 200 years."

The man and woman nod.

"There is a reason to believe that memory is freeze hardy. Back in the sixties, Audrey Smith, an English cryo-biologist, partly froze hamsters so that half the water in their brain changed to ice and they made full recoveries."

"What about personality? Is memory and personality the same thing?" the man asks.

"The Soul is a notion that a lot of people talk about, but they don't have any clear idea what they mean by that. As far as I am concerned, your body is you. Your brain is you. I don't know what they mean by soul. Being revived after death or being legally dead is not new, thousands of people are revived after clinical deaths in hospitals. They suffer traumas and their heart stopped and their breathing stopped. But nobody asks what happened to their souls." The old man pauses. "From the subjective perspective of the patient, no time will have passed. You just go to sleep and you wake up. If the doctors have done their work properly, when you wake up you will be good health you will have your memories intact. You will understand that you slept for a long time and you will go about your business."

## **Act 5 – Detroit, MI - In City of the Dead**

Out of the twirling leaves and manic rain the car emerges and the man and the woman sit in the car in the centre of the stage. But, their ghoulish paleness is replaced by a vivid warmth. On the screen where we just saw the old man we see images from the deserted motor city. We see derelict and burned down buildings and traces of looting in the unending suburban landscape. Cars pass in all directions, but no humans or animals can be seen. It is as if even the cars drive themselves. The camera circles the Renaissance Centre and sees the misplaced hotels and the shining GM signs that seem to be the only thing that penetrate the grey-ness. The film meanders under great big underpasses and swivels around motorway ramps until the image stops in front of a characterless shopping mall. Two beams of light come on and the man and woman step out of the car and run towards a gleaming "Toys'R'Us"

sign holding jackets over their heads to hide from the rain. The film stops, the car rolls off the stage like a giant ghost. The soft lights come on and the man and woman reappear inside a charred structure and a low humming, machine-like sound fills the whole theatre. The woman is smoking.

"Please don't throw the ashes out of the window, I don't want any complaint from neighbours," he says, fiddling with some small gadget.

"What?" She motions to the burned surroundings.

"Nothing."

"You know this is an old habit, smoking by the window."

"Do you want to go to the casino in Canada?"

"No, do you?"

"I want to go back to New York."

"Me too."

"But this storm is crazy, we will never get to the airport on time and I doubt that any flight will take off." The lights come on again and the sound stops.

"I think it has stopped raining," she says and sticks her hand out of a window.

"Great, let's go."

"Did you forget to start the dryer before we left?" she says. "What's your plan for tomorrow, anyway?"

"Some work, some art. No concrete plans yet. You?"

"I am definitely having tea in bed," she says.

A small version of the car appears on stage and they drive off into a colourful sunset.

The projections lights up and the camera zooms in on the old man's face.

"When you are revived," - there is an amazing spark in his eyes as he speaks - "Your problems will not be new or strange, your problems will be understood. There will be people, institutions in place to help you adjust. You will be rehabilitated. I don't know how long it will take or which methods will be used, but you are going to be rehabilitated and make connection with the current society. People, who become our patients, if their memories are preserved, will understand what has happened to them and be prepared for an awakening in a different kind of world. They will face new people and new situations and they will all grow into it adapt to it. People have adapted to strange situations throughout history. I don't want to talk about being immortal as nobody can conceive immortality even though I have written about the prospect of immortality.

"I wrote another book in 1972 called 'Man Into Superman'. I wrote about possible futures with the hope that I might motivate more people to become inter-

ested in cryonics. I realised that in writing about that future, I inevitably conveyed the impression that there will be radical changes ahead. But most people do not like radical changes. They want their present to last forever. They want they want a gold-plated and chocolate-covered version of what they live. Maybe they accept some small improvements, less discomfort, fewer annoyances. They don't want a radically different future. That is a basic problem.

Curtain



## **The Encounter**

### **A Play in Five Acts**

*This is the last part of the trilogy of texts that have been published in Nowiswere by Per Hüttner and Fatos Üstek. In the last issue, they speculated on what would happen when they went to Detroit to meet Robert Ettinger, the father of Cryonics. In this text, they recount what really took place in the U.S., including a surprising amount inconsistencies in temporality and a performative intervention at the Blago Bung 5, at Emily Harvey Foundation, New York.*

#### **Act I – Newark airport and Upper East Side, Manhattan.**

A man and a woman stop in front of the luggage belt at the airport. They turn on their mobile phones and hear a custom-made beep. A blurry video clip of an old man pops up on both their screens in eerie synchronicity. The man seems to be in some kind of bluish igloo. “Dear Friends,” he says. “This is a message from Robert in Clinton Township. I am waiting for you to visit on Tuesday. I wanted to welcome you to America and hope that you have a wonderful time in New York,” he fiddles around with two red tubes and both mobile screens go dead simultaneously. The man and the woman look at each other and smile.

Their luggage arrives, the taste of jetlag and tiredness linger on their tongues. They walk through immigration and customs and catch a yellow cab into the city. The sun sets over the brownstones in a way it only can in New York City and they arrive at the flat. After a short dialogue with the uniform-clad doorman, they take the lift and step into their breathtakingly beautiful Upper East Side apartment, which has been lent to them by an absent good fairy whose spirit lingers in their minds and gives a golden hue to reality.

The following morning, they are seated at opposite ends of the large white dinner table in the spacious kitchen. They work with their respective laptops simul-

taneously and nibble at almonds. “Something is in the air,” she thinks but cannot quite put her finger on what it is. As she tries to push the thought away she receives an e-mail from Robert.

“Dear Friends,” she reads out loud. “I am writing you because something uncomfortable happened today. This morning, stepping out of the house on my way to the supermarket, I met the mailman. Nothing unusual about this, you say. But it was the mailman from my childhood and he had not aged a day. As you understand, this is quite an irregularity of an impossible kind. I eased myself into the car and drove to the mall pondering the event. At the parking lot, an old lady passes me, wearing a pink dress with small-embroidered flowers. I recognized the garment and realised that it was my mother’s hand-tailored dress from the thirties. I froze for a moment and then tried to make out her face, but she was already too far away. I did not bother to try to catch up with her, since I am not a fast runner any more. I shopped absent-mindedly, forgetting to buy what I had gone there for in the first place. When I reached the checkout counter, the girl scanning the bar codes of my shopping was my first girlfriend, whom I dated before the war. She was still 17-years-old. I gawked, but could not say anything. Is this connected to your visit?”



## Act 2 – Blago Bung, Emily Harvey Foundation, Soho

The man and woman stand on the wooden floor which serves as an impromptu stage. She remains standing up while the man sits down in a chair. He is covered in several layers of winter clothes and two hats and shivers. “Welcome,” she hesitates. “I do not know where to start or how to explain this. He has always loved ice-cream, but now he won’t even open his mouth.” She tries to serve him ice cream but he shrugs with his mouth shut. “We had a session this morning with Dolores, a past life regression therapist. It was a wonderful, enriching and beautiful experience. She visualised events that are part of our previous existences,” she smiles insecurely.

“But something unexpected happened when we were on the subway back home,” she goes on. “He acted very strangely and I couldn’t communicate with him.” She waves her hand in front of his face. He does not react. “I assumed that it was related to the therapy, so I called Dolores. She explained that something probably triggered him to go back into a hypnotic state. He is stuck in a previous existence or in limbo between lives. She says.” The woman does not seem convinced by her own words. “He has been shivering all day. Oh man, he has been shivering like hell, not unlike a malaria crisis. But what he is going through is worse!”

At this point the man starts to wander around in the audience randomly touching faces of visitors with his

ice-cold wet fingers, while smiling at them awkwardly. “He has been murmuring all day,” the woman says while she pulls him back and tries to sit the man back into his chair. “He keeps repeating that he is cold. To be honest with you I wanted to cancel the performance tonight. But I was reassured by the fact that he responds to my gestures. When I smile at him, he smiles back. So whenever I talked about cancelling the performance he would protest loudly.” He grunts and she pulls him back because he tries to venture into the audience again to touch faces.

“The reason we came to the United States, is to go to Michigan to meet Robert Ettinger, the father of cryonics. ‘What is Cryonics?’ you ask. It is a practice of freezing people and pets after they are clinically dead, so that one day when science has advanced they will be able to resuscitate them and cure whatever ailments that caused their death.” She sits him down in the chair again, trying to get eye contact with him.

“We are less interested in Cryonics or the effects that the process have on the identity of the patients. It is rather the visionary qualities and the amazing commitment Robert Ettinger has towards his work that make us want to interview him.”

The man stands up and walks off the stage with an awkward gait.

“Per, Per would you please come back!” she shouts after him “I have to make sure that he does not get up to some mischief.” She grabs her bag and the hat that has fallen off the man’s head and runs after him.

### **Act 3 - Institute of Cryonics, Clinton Township**

“What a drive,” she says. “It really looks like time has come to a standstill in this town.”

“Yes, if it weren’t for the modern cars on the freeway I would say that we had been teleported to the 1970s,” he replies. They drive through a dull suburban area where every building looks alike. They pull up with great anticipation at the house they have Google-Earthed earlier. They find a note posted at the front door.

“Dear Friends, I had prepared a small reception for you and invited all my wonderful friends. I was very eager to meet you both and wanted them to do the same. It is all about sharing. But I have to face it, we are not so young anymore, we wake up early and rarely gather at social events. So my friends showed up early and we got carried away eating and drinking. We really had a lot of fun, but now I feel very tired and will have a rest. When I sleep, I sleep very deeply. Go into my bedroom (on the left at the end of the corridor) and try to wake me up. But if you cannot wake me, just go to the centre. I will join you there as soon as I wake up. Feel free to have some coffee and cake.

Your friend Robert.”

### **Act 4 - From Detroit to New York City**

After numerous unsuccessful attempts to wake Robert, they have to drive back to the airport in order to catch their flight. When they have returned the rental car and reach the terminal, they find that their flight back to New York has been cancelled due to an unexpected tornado in Chicago.

But before they can reflect more on the situation, a handful of blazing coaches arrive outside the terminal building. A blonde guy with the whitest smile and the most beautifully well-groomed hair, greets them.

“Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome, Bienvenu, Willkommen, Hosgeldiniz, to the American Coach Museum – an experience from the future now!” The blondino smiles. “Your luggage has now been loaded in our high-tech luxury coaches and you will soon find that cancelled flight is actually a blessing.”

None of the other passengers seem to be convinced and everyone looks at reality with tired and disillusioned eyes.

“Tonight, you will enjoy the most electrifying sleep you have ever had. In our new and teslafied coaches you will experience the most profound sleep levels possible outside of Belgrade!” he continues.

Everyone sighs and steps onto the coaches that glimmer in the sunset. The vehicles pull out of the airport and ladies on high heels and retro-chic outfits, distribute pillows and surprisingly comfortable duvets to everyone. The extremely dexterous hostesses, also, turn seats into beds. All passengers can choose from a rich selection of high quality films to be watched on their individual screen. “This is really comfy,” she says while she immerses herself with *Time Machine*. “Yes,” he replies without looking up from *Stalker*.

He dozes off and finds himself in front of an impressive nineteenth century building. “Krunska 51” a voice says as he mounts the steps. He walks into a hall filled with displays and odd old electrical machines. The woman appears by his side and he sees a dozen other people line up next to them. He recognises them but cannot place their faces. She blindfolds him and the others do the same. He can smell the scent of freshly squeezed limes which stands in stark contrast to the dusty ambience. “Am I alone in experiencing this?” he asks himself.

The blindfold is removed and a sculpture of Nicola Tesla as a young, handsome young man with his hair parted in the middle like an ancient clerk seems to speak to him. The Serb’s cast lips start to move: “Parks Road” they curl around the consonants. A strong wind starts to blow and without a sound he is teleported to the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford.

He walks around the glass cases enjoying the beauty and the strangeness of the exposed objects. He bends over to look at the Yoruba statue of Queen Victoria. Her lips move and he hears the sound of a beautiful song leaving her mouth. Her singing is both high pitched and forceful. He turns and discovers that masks, dolls and sculptures have formed a magical choir singing most riveting songs on the relationship between music and mathematics. He can see the same people as before enjoy the music with him and he realises that they are all traveling on the coach with him. They all hum in unison. With an electrifying power to his tongue, the man is teleported to a grand and magical restaurant where a man with wild hair serves him the most divinely tasting titbits of unknown origin. When the woman puts a large glass of Burgundy to his mouth he wakes up with



a jerk. The woman looks at him and they know that they have shared the same dream. They gaze across at the other passengers on the coach. Without a word spoken it becomes clear that they have participated in something special together.

As they pass Hoboken NJ, the perky hostesses serve a light breakfast. They arrive in New York at sunrise. The woman's phone receives a message in the morning light. "It's Robert, he wants to speak to us."

## **Act 5 – Upper East Side, Manhattan**

The sun is very spring-like, though it's early November. She sits on the fire escape smoking a cigarette. "Is he online yet?" she asks. "No," he replies while drawing one of his elongated musical scores inside the room. "I guess we will never know," she says. "Brrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr". The Skype signal lights up their two computer screens simultaneously. "Hey Robert," she says.

"Hello children," the old man says. "Did you like what I arranged for you?"

"What do you mean?" The man and woman say in unison.

"Did you enjoy the bus ride and the dreams?"

"Yes, it was amazing," he says.

"Good!"

"But why?" The woman says.

"First of all life is about sharing a vision. That travels across all temporal boundaries."

"Beautiful," the man says.

"It also seemed that you thought of me like a museum, where my ideas and thoughts have been solidified under the currencies of time and experience. Thus, I needed to show you that museums are not compatible with my outlook on life. My vision is not to be vitrified for a possible resuscitation in a future, if so I would rather write a book and bury it outside my house. I also needed to make you appreciate what true change is and that it isn't always enjoyable."

"But it was enjoyable," the man says.

"We wanted to meet you," she says.

"Well, we can meet on your next trip," Robert says laughing.

"What do you mean next trip? You are 92-years-old," the man replies.

"So you want me to die?"

"Of course not," they both blush.

"Well, I have no intention of dying and anyway we met. I was just asleep."

"Were you?"

"Not really, I was just pretending."

"How devious of you!"

"Sure," he smiles "I have to run now. I need to take my girlfriend for a spin in my new convertible."

"It must be freezing in Michigan."

"No, I am down in Florida," Robert laughs again. "Just make sure you come back soon! I really enjoyed your company. Wave to them Jenny!"

A beautiful blonde in her mid-30s waves to the man and woman, they look at each other in surprise. Robert kisses her and the screen goes black.

