



Madeleine  
Andersson

*Degenerative  
Knowledge  
Production*



# OVERGADEN RUGADEN

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Madeleine Andersson  
*Degenerative Knowledge Production*  
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O – OVERGADEN  
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## INTRODUKTION

Det er en stor fornøjelse at introducere denne publikation, der udkommer i forbindelse med Madeleine Anderssons soloudstilling, *Degenerative Knowledge Production*, på O – Overgaden. Udstillingen er kulminationen på vores særlige INTRO-forløb – et årtårigt postgraduate-program, som O – Overgaden tilbyder to kunstnere. Med generøs støtte fra Aage og Johanne Louis-Hansens Fond skaber INTRO en unik mulighed for at udvikle og udvide vores samarbejde med kunstscenens nyeste stemmer igennem både en stor udstilling og denne ambitiøse publikation, hvis målsætning det er at udvide samtalerne omkring den kunstneriske praksis og åbne op for, at nyt materiale kan udspringe heraf.

I dette tilfælde har den amerikanske kurator og skribent Adam Kleinman skrevet "To slags mennesker eller den korte historie om stupiditet", mens den britiske idehistoriker og forfatter Thomas Moynihan har bidraget med teksten "På en historisk mission om at 'kurere' stupiditet med elektricitet: Fra voltasøjle til AI", og endelig har den svenske kunstner Mandus Ridefelt skrevet om pervertering af videnskab. Jeg vil gerne takke alle bidragsydere varmt, samt takke publikationsredaktør Nanna Friis og hele O – Overgadens team for den store indsats i forbindelse med udstillingen, og naturligvis også fanfare, vores grafiske designere, for deres dedikerede arbejde på denne publikation. Sidst, men ikke mindst, en særlig tak til kunstneren, Madeleine Andersson, for at dele sit materiale – fra koncept til udvidede samtaler – med os alle sammen, både gennem udstillingen og denne publikation.

Det er ikke ofte, at kunstnere sætter sig for at kæmpe mod intelligensens herskende magter, men det er ikke desto mindre tilfældet i den første store soloudstilling af billedkunstner Madeleine Andersson.

På O – Overgaden afslører Andersson, hvordan dumheder og absurditeter er indlejret i vores systematiske, videnskabelige forståelser af hjernen såvel som kroppen – gennem en tempofyldt, researchbaseret fortælling i både levende billeder og skulptur.

Anderssons store nye filmværk, *Degenerative Knowledge Production*, kredser om brugen af elektricitet som både metafor og middel til at optimere, kontrollere og klassificere den menneskelige hjerne som enten dum, intelligent eller død. Den 75 minutter lange film mikser punkede og grynede billeder hentet fra YouTube, populære spillefilm og gamle dokumentarfilm. Alt imens fortæller en voiceover en historie om elektriske hjerneeksperimenter, der understøtter dét, Andersson navngiver "cogiokratiet" – dvs. det kognitive eller tænknings (cogitos) overherredømme eller, mere mundret, hvordan nutidens samfund kunne siges, fremfor at være styret af folkets demokrati, at ledes af tankens magthavere: cogiokratiet.

Et andet kortere filmværk, *Me, ordering a mind control spell off Etsy to be cast on myself*, viser en esoterisk 'personlig' video, Andersson har købt online for at tryllebinde sit sind som modstand mod en systemisk (cogiokratisk) 'tankekontrol'. En lignende modstandsfuldt gestus, som nærmest blokerer udstillingens arkitektur, er en ophobning af spande – l:l-replikaer af plastikbeholdere fra en dansk samling af konserverede hjerner – hvis lejlighedsvis hårvækst undslipper obduktionen og arkivets systematisering.

Ved at rive rationel eller 'klog' optimering fra hinanden i surrealistiske kombinationer af grundlæggende forskelligartede ting leger udstillingen på humoristisk vis med vidensproduktionens elfenbenstårn og tro på fremskridtet. Udstillingen er således en invitation til at forstå intelligens og dumhed som indbyrdes afhængige – en opfordring til at forstå det degenerative, uforudsigelige, humoristiske, fejlfulde, kreative, psykedeliske og dumme som del af menneskets sammensætning.

Rhea Dall  
Leder og chefkurator på O – Overgaden,  
december 2024

Madeleine Andersson (f. 1993, SE) er uddannet fra Det Kongelige Danske Kunstakademi (2022) og bor og arbejder i København. Andersson har tidligere udstillet på bl.a. documenta Institut, Kassel (2024), Färgfabriken, Stockholm (2023), Galerie 35m2, Prag (2023) og Bærum Kunsthall (2022).



# PERVERTERING AF VIDENSKAB

I ANLEDNING AF DEGENERATIVE KNOWLEDGE  
PRODUCTION AF MADELEINE ANDERSSON

Mandus Ridefelt

Jeg arbejder med kunst og naturvidenskab. Når jeg nævner det for folk i kunstbranchen, er “det er den kedeligste form for kunst, jeg kender” – eller enhver anden valgfri eufemisme – en af de mest almindelige reaktioner. Med *Degenerative Knowledge Production* placerer Madeleine Andersson sig tættere end nogensinde på denne genre af kunst-videnskab. Ikke desto mindre er Anderssons arbejde virkelig sjovt.

HVORFOR KUNST OG VIDENSKAB  
IKKE KAN VÆRE SJOVT

Sjovhedens relative fravær i krydsfeltet mellem kunst og videnskab er hverken diskvalificerende eller som sådan et problem. En stor del af ovennævnte reaktioner kan ses som biprodukter af selve feltets tilstand. De institutionelle og samarbejdsdrevne formater, som mange kunst-videnskab-projekter udspringer fra og værdisættes af, kræver en form for diplomatilignende sensitivitet, som utæmmet sjovhed sjældent trives i. Der er sjældent tid til at lære hinanden ordentligt at kende. Der er sjældent en intuitiv forståelse for, hvad der er på spil, for dagsordener og roller, der rækker ud over den slidte taksonomi mellem kunst som *fluff* og videnskab som facts. Det er sjældent, at de tilfældige parametre, på hvilke sjove mennesker og emner findes, er til stede – udvalget er for lille, kostbart og skrøbeligt til, at man kan udsætte det for den slags risici, der ikke forventes at udløse andet end et grin. Og som en del af den byttehandel, der er indlejret i enhver interdisciplinær aktivitet, står inklusionsvokabularier og integrerende konceptuelle terræner som regel i opposition til det specifikke og det referentielle – hvoraf især sidstnævnte udgør en central del af langt det meste sjove kunst. Til gengæld bliver disse omstændigheder også en implicit udvalgsmechanisme, hvorved kunstneriske praksisser drevet af humor frastødes af de æstetiske idiommer, som kunst-videnskab ellers sværger til – og således afholder sig fra at trænge igennem dens institutionelle panser. Det er bare et ret svært sted at være sjov. Og mens alt dette teknisk set er helt fint, er det i sandhed bemærkelsesværdigt, hvordan kunst-videnskab-genrens systematiske kedsommelighed vendes på hovedet som en slags kendsgerning underskrevet af Madeleine Andersson – særligt tydeligt i *Degenerative Knowledge Production*.

FRODIGE OMDIRIGERINGER

Kernen i Madeleine Anderssons arbejde er en perversionens metodologi. Den perverse er på en og samme tid en obligatorisk kætter og en uheldredeligt frafalden, eller kort sagt: den homoseksuelle. Men perversionen i Anderssons værker handler ikke om det usædvanlige eller abnorme som i begrebets gængse, psykopatologiske forstand. Anderssons metode er en slags afledningsmanøvre, hvor den sti, hun slår ind på, udgøres af legemliggørelsens gru og det fornødrende ved tænkning. For en som Pierre Klossowski, forfatter til bogen *Living Currency*, finder perversionen sted, når impulserne standser op, umiddelbart inden de træder ind i deres produktive konfiguration og derefter omdirigeres. Ikke desto mindre kan den “frodige følelse”, der går forud for forplantningsøjeblikket, ikke repræsenteres af nogen utopisk gestus – den kan ikke frit slippes løs, og den er ikke gratis. Perversion har altid en pris, og dens aftryk bliver en ny snor om halsen. For at parafrasere Klossowski kan man sige, at den perverse fortærer i dagslys og sanerer sin gæld om natten. Som kunstnerisk metodologi handler denne slags perversion om at indfange den frodige følsomhed i enhver given proces og lade frodigheden blive en slags Antikythera for alle slags vidensproduktion. En omdirigeret forudsigtelse eller en profeti om en fremtid, hvor det instrumentelle er ondsindet, og det onde er instrumentelt. Og ja, perversion har en tendens til at være sjovt.

PERVERSION BY ANDERSSON

*Petrosexuality* (2022) var Anderssons første store researchbaserede projekt og tog udgangspunkt i hypotesen om, at seksuelle logikker er drivkraften bag såvel fossile industrier som petrokultur i det hele taget. At afbrænde, at smøre, at bore og gennembore er alt sammen noget, der knytter sig til den petroseksuelle logik, og som projektet i store træk antyder, bør det behandles som en af de primære faktorer i de tredelte gisninger om modernitet, kapitalisme og ekstraktivisme. Fra et metodologisk standpunkt fremførte værkerne – vekslende mellem udstillinger og conferenceoplæg – en række (æstetiske såvel som teoretiske) påstande, der på én gang var ufalsificerbare (videnskabeligt perverterede) og vanvittige (seksuelt perverterede). Hvad nu, hvis den moderne produktivitet i selve sin essens er en ophobning af seksuelle impulser splintret gennem et prisme af geologi?

I *Degenerative Knowledge Production* (2024) vender Andersson sin opmærksomhed mod udtalt videnskabelige og epistemiske anliggender. Hovedværket, en timelang film, hvis manuskript er udviklet i samarbejde med Thomas Moynihan, er en slags historisering over, hvordan elektricitet har været et redskab i hjerneforskningen, hvilket har resulteret i en vedvarende spejlingsøvelse mellem selve fænomenet elektricitet, og hvordan hjernen tilskrives funktion og potentiale. En karnevalsagtig strøm af videoklip sammensat i en taksonomi af overflod, der deler visse fællestræk med post-internet-viljen til arkivmateriale såvel som med undersøgende journalistik. En historie om eksperimenter, afhængighed og meget bogstavelig

pirrelighed rejser sig som kirigami-illustrationer frem mod filmens afslutning – stupiditet er en strukturel forudsætning for intelligens.

AT PERVERTERE DET,  
SOM IKKE BØR PERVERTERES

Når man hæfter en perversionsmetodologi på naturvidenskabens kulturelle omstændigheder, åbner der sig et enormt interessant rum. Hvad er perverteret videnskab? Hvordan kan det være, at moderne videnskab rummer en så bred vifte af koncepter, som beskriver dialektikken, der finder sted i randområderne, mens vi i vid udstrækning mangler koncepter til at beskrive dens afstikkere? Der findes inden for videnskabsfilosofi en ihærdig forgæbelse i fiasko, ansvarsfralæggelse og ignorance. Men de beslægtede teorier plejer at konkludere, at alt i sidste ende var en forandring til det bedre. Det dialektiske show *must go on*. Historier som disse tager sjældent højde for noget muligvis råddent i videnskabens rige, eller, vigtigst af alt, at dette rådne ikke relaterer sig til videnskabens mulighed for faktisk at leve op til sin primære forpligtelse: at være i overensstemmelse med det sande og/eller det virkelige. Anderssons kritik af fremskridtet som ide deler en vis sensitivitet med AI-diskursernes konstante frygt for degenerering – profetien om, at læringskurven i *deep learning*-modeller globalt set er for nedadgående, eftersom den må “æde” sin egen lort. Men igen, dette er, hvad menneskets kulturdiskurser bygger på, bogstaveligt talt i form af historiske perversionsmesterværker såsom Pasolinis Salò eller mere generelt i den sammenhængssøgende vilje til at læse tanker gennem tænkning. I *Degenerative Knowledge Production* hævder Andersson, at videnskaben har en undertrykt relation til sin egen perversion. Blandt alt det, der findes derude, er videnskaben måske den eneste ting, der ikke må perverteres. Videnskaben undertrykkes altså, eftersom den udgør en trussel mod sig selv, og hvordan den bør agere inden for rammerne af liberale demokratier (såsom Danmark og Sverige).

TREDOBBELT TRUSSEL

Jeg kan identificere tre måder, hvorpå perversion truer videnskaben.

TRUSLEN VED EN PERVERTERET INDERSIDE

Inkonsistens, artefaktmæssige epistemiske begrænsninger eller bare det at stirre på den rene og skære besynderlighed, som er vores planet, er ganske normalt i de fleste videnskabelige praksisser. Og mens alle videnskabsfolk laver deres egne udlægninger, sætter deres egne indsatser, er erfaringen med eksempelvis inkonsistens en stabil, nærmest medfødt del af den praksis, der foregår “i feltet”. Eftersom mange videnskabelige discipliner bakser med dramatisk forøgede observations- og computerkapaciteter, mærkes disse effekter endnu stærkere i dag. Jo højere opløsning, des mere afslører kompleksiteten sig. Modeller bliver belastede. Larm og signal begynder at blande sig sammen. I takt med, at det bliver sværere at adskille de produktive aspekter af videnskabens argumentation fra de fænomener, den beskæftiger sig med,

bliver en spaltning af disse processer tilsvarende nemmere. Denne “insider”-udgave af videnskabspraksissen er ikke en del af den offentlige samtale i dag, kun i form af solblegede metaforer, der hepper på De Videnskabelige Processer® som at “blive draget mod det ukendte”.

TRUSLEN VED PERVERTEREDE “POST-SANDHED”-GRUPPER

Den mere bredt kendte trussel mod videnskabens resultater tilskrives som regel anti-vaxxere og lignende grupper. Deres trussel består i at benægte videnskaben til fordel for gruppepsykologi, religiøse overbevisninger, paranoid konspirationer og en pose blandede anti-establishment diskurser. “The perverse syllogism goes as follows: everything in our social life is about money and financial interests, therefore there is no climate change. Something similar happened in the case of Covid. More often than not, a refusal to accept scientific facts, their *denial*, is just one of the forms taken by the *disavowal of the truly traumatic dimension of capitalism*” (*Disavowal*, Alenka Zupančič, 2024, Polity Press, p.30).

At benægte kapitalismens reelt traumatiske dimension ved at stemple disse faktaresistente grupper som post-sandhed kan i vid udstrækning også overføres til det liberale demokratis eget narrativ. De bør opfattes som to forskellige manifestationer af den samme resistens: en, der resulterer i ren benægterisme, og en, der resulterer i tilintetgørelsen af en skelnen mellem videnskabens sociale autoritet og videnskabelig autoritet som sådan. Sidstnævnte er teknokratiets egentlige sygdom og årsagen til, at de resistente grupper opfattes som så nedbrydende – at forstå deres mulighedsrum ville muligvis være at stikke hånden i et hvepsebo, som den etablerede teknokratiske forestillingsevne ikke har råd til at nærme sig. Anderssons arbejde foregår i netop dette amoralske, nuttet grænseoverskridende øjeblik – mellem videnskabens autoritet som videnskab og dens autoritet inden for rammerne af det sociale liv. I selve kunst-videnskab-genren er hendes udgravninger sjældne og overraskende skægge.

TRUSLEN VED AT ANERKENDE PERVERSIONEN

Endelig var og er perversion, som Anderssons værk peger på, en betingelse for videnskabelig optrævling af hjernen som sådan; et indgreb, der altid er delvist dysfunktionelt. I dette tilfælde udgøres truslen mod videnskaben både af perversionens strukturelle utilgængelighed og (ligesom med insider-truslen) måden, hvorpå det degenererede og det uforudsete introduceres til et system, hvis politiske rationale i liberale demokratier kredser om dyder såsom transparenens og forudsigelighed. At anerkende perversionen som en af videnskabens stamfædre tvinger os til at tænke over, at videnskab ikke altid gør det, vi tror, den gør. Dette er et mareridt for en hvilken som helst teknokrat. Af hensyn til den liberale orden er videnskab en primær sandhedsproducent og får stadig til opgave at forsyne hele befolkninger med vished. Derfor er perverteringen af videnskab særligt interessant som en slags punktering af den liberale orden.

Hvis ikke videnskaben, hvilket system er så i stand til at levere den transparens, information, vished og forudsigelighed, som den liberale, demokratiske statsborger skal sætte sin lid til? Eller måske er det omvendt: Vil liberalismen, som vi kender den, nå sin afslutning, når det er indiskutabelt, at videnskaben er pervers?

#### EN GIFTIG DIALEKTIKER

Andersson har i løbet af sin praksis opbygget en alsidig perversionsværktøjskasse. Gennem persionen, ulæseliggørelsen, kan vi løse de giftkroge, der ellers fæstner fænomenerne til steder, hvor de instrumentaliseres og assimileres. Når Andersson bruger persionens dysterhed til at lægge pres på den omfattende historiografiske undersøgelse og det doom-scrollede hjerne-bestiarium, antyder hendes videnskabelige historiefortælling ikke kun de udbulede arterier mellem stupiditet og intelligens, den slår sig virkelig løs dér. *Degenerative Knowledge Production* fremstår som en sprudlende korrigerende i sin måde at pløje sig gennem stupiditetens plisserede fistler – frygtløs og klar til endnu et *rebound* med sandheden. En giftig relation for tid og evighed.

# TO SLAGS MENNESKER ELLER DEN KORTE HISTORIE OM STUPIDITET

Adam Kleinman

Min fars yndlingsudtryk skærer direkte ind til benet, hvad angår menneskets tankegang: “Der findes to slags mennesker – dem, der deler verden ind i to slags mennesker, og dem, der ikke gør.” Langt mere end at være et kløgtigt paradoks synliggør denne sætning et grundlæggende mønster i europæisk intellektuel historie: vores utrættelige vilje til at dele virkeligheden op i binære modsætningsforhold. Det næsten tvangsagtige ved opdelingsbehovet er også kernen i dialektikken, en filosofisk undersøgelsesmodel, som vi vender tilbage til senere. Min fars observation viser sig dog at være særlig relevant i forhold til at udfolde Madeleine Anderssons udstilling *Degenerative Knowledge Production*, der tager livtag med, hvordan samfundet og medicinalindustrien definerer død og stupiditet.

Et ofte brugt akademisk trick, der kan ligne intelligens, er at fremsætte en etymologi i forsøget på at blotlægge nogle dybsindige sandheder. Som eksempel på denne gimmick: Tænk på, hvordan ordet ‘diagnose’ – en primær gløse i sygdomsdefinitioner – faktisk forræder selve essensen af binær tænkning. Det er en kombination af det græske ‘dia’ (διά), som betyder “at skære” eller “skille ad”, og ‘gnosis’ (γνῶσις), som betyder ‘videnskab’. Det er slående, hvad denne etymologi implicerer. I sin lingvistiske grundform beror medicinsk viden på at skille ting fra hinanden: en tilgang, der manifesterer sig i modsætningen mellem patologi og ‘normalfunktion’, mellem den syge og den raske, mellem afvigelse og social norm.

I social forstand har begrebet ‘afvigelse’ ganske tunge konnotationer. Det er formodningen om en nedtur: fra idealtilstand til forfald og moralsk fordærv. Kontrasten til Darwins evolutionstænkning er markant: Her beskrives “forandringer over tid” som værende et udtryk for naturlig udvælgelse, hvilket vil sige, at tilpasning kun er en fordel i visse sammenhænge. Tænk på en fugls næb: Modificeringer giver ingen mening, medmindre de skærper muligheden for at finde føde – uden kontekst er udvikling og tilpasning meningsløst.

Ikke desto mindre fordrejede 1800-tallets racistiske videnskabsfolk denne forholdsvis nuancerende tankegang i retning af reducerende ‘den stærkeste overlever’-udtryk, der med fuldt overlæg ignorerede, hvordan ‘egnethed’ afhænger af miljø og vilkår. Det var ikke tilfældigt, at overherredømmetankegangen havde til formål at bevare de strukturelle betingelser for netop overherredømmets dominans – man har ikke været videre oplyst, men man har heller ikke ligefrem været dum.

At spore denne intellektuelle patologi – og hvordan den performer en ætiologi – fører os tilbage til verdens formentlig første fascist: Platon. Som en slags stamfaderfigur til den europæiske, filosofiske tradition – uden selvfølgelig at glemme Sokrates, eller i hvert fald Platons skildring af ham – mestrede Platon den dialektiske tænkning: Metoden, hvor åbenlyse modsætninger forenes. Gennem dialog og sammenligning formulerede han konceptet om ‘eidos’ – roden til ‘ide’. Hans tankesystem fremsatte perfekte, abstrakte idealer for alt i universet; arketyper, hvorfra alle afvigelser – hvilket vil sige enhver fysisk manifestation af idealerne – blot var ringe kopier, skygger af idealformerne. Det er vigtigt at bemærke, hvordan Platon kobede denne “forringelse” til moralsk forfald og fremstiller et intellektuelt liv som en kamp, der kan modvirke forfaldet og muliggøre en opstigning mod perfektionen – måske den dumme tanke i menneskets historie.

Det antikke Grækenlands debat om menneskets bevidsthed – som forekommer en anelse åndet i lyset af moderne neurologi – kunne ikke bestemme sig for, hvor sindet bor, og hvad hjernen egentlig foretager sig. Platon opfattede hjernen som tankens epicenter, men argumenterede for, at den nødvendigvis måtte arbejde sammen med leveren (epicenteret for begær og appetit) og hjertet (følelsernes udspring) om at forme ‘sjælen’, den vitale kraft, der adskiller mennesket fra alle andre livsformer. Hans elev, filosofen Aristoteles, var lodret uenig og anså hjertet for at være kommandocentral for sansning, følelser og beslutsomhed, mens hjernen i hans optik ikke var meget mere end en biologisk radiator, der kunne køle blodet ned – hvilket han også mente var årsagen til, at hovedet så ofte er varmt.

Uenigheden om, hvorvidt hjernen eller hjertet styrede bevidstheden – og i forlængelse heraf også spørgsmålet om liv og død – gav genlyd gennem årtusinders medicinsk tænkning, og ikke før 1968 nåede man til en form for ny enighed på Harvard Medical School, hvilket Madeleine Andersson dokumenterer i *Degenerative Knowledge Production*, hvor hun har denne distinktion som sit udgangspunkt.

Da forskere på Harvard redefinerede begrebet ‘død’ ud fra (manglende) hjerneaktivitet, gjorde de mere end blot at etablere nye medicinske kriterier. De skabte en fundamental forskydning af menneskets relation til egen dødelighed. Det at placeret livet, det levende, i hjernen fremfor i hjertet ændrede

både lægevidenskaben og den juridiske opfattelse af menneskelig eksistens og ikkeeksistens.

Og nu, hvor der er styr på den del – hvis man da lige ser bort fra igangværende debatter om, hvordan tarmfloraen påvirker hjernen og samtidig bidrager til produktionen af signalstoffer i fordøjelsessystemet – er det tid til at genbesøge fornævnte binære spektrum og undersøge distinktionen mellem liv og død.

Den europæiske filosofis besættelse af dialektik, især fremført af Immanuel Kant og G.W.F. Hegel, undergik nærmest seismiske rystelser, blot et år før Harvards kriterier for ‘hjernedød’ blev formuleret. I 1967, som følge af Jacques Derridas *Om grammatologi*, blev begrebet ‘dekonstruktion’ for alvor sluppet løs i det intellektuelle landskab: en revolutionerende metode, der fik traditionel binær tænkning til at eksplodere. Snarere end blot at forene modstridende koncepter afdækkede Derrida, hvordan formodede modsætninger smitter og afhænger af hinanden: Lys eksisterer kun, hvor der også er mørke, men den gensidige afhængighed underminerer adskillelsen. Selvom Derrida i første omgang trak på den antikke græske ide om φάρμακον, eller ‘phármakon’ – der både betyder medicin og gift, og hvorfra moderne farmaceutrelaterede begreber stammer – til at demonstrere, hvordan skrift bevarer og ødelægger hukommelsen, bevægede hans arbejde sig i 1980’erne i en overraskende retning. Et teoretisk skift, der sært nok resonerer med Anderssons spøgefulde referencer til hjerneædende zombier.

I sine undersøgelser af binære modsætningspar stødte Derrida på skjulte magtdynamikker. Sådanne modsætninger var ikke neutrale, de understøttede tværtimod sociale hierarkier ved at fremhæve et begreb og undertrykke dets modsætning. Lignende mønstre kan spores i historiske udlægninger af raceforskelle, eksempelvis sort/hvid, baseret på Friedrich Nietzsches ide om tidlige kristne menigheder, som omdannede manglen på verdslig magt til et moralsk overherredømme, hvor fysisk svaghed blev et bevis på spirituel overlegenhed over romersk styrke. Nietzsche, der senere blev vanvittig i sin kamp for at komme modsætningen mellem magt og nåde til livs, kaldte denne proces for “en omvurdering af alle værdier”.

Som antydte ovenfor blev Derridas teorier om magtrelationer uventet gotiske, da han gik i gang med at undersøge væsner, der “fra naturens side” gør op med binær logik, eksempelvis vampyrer og zombier. Sådanne ‘udøde’ væsner var besværlige for vestlig tænkning, netop fordi de ikke kunne opdeles i levende versus død. Derrida mente, at gotiske historier kom angsten til livs, netop fordi disse midt-i-mellem-væsner enten blev slået ihjel eller tvunget tilbage til menneskeskikkelse, hvilket til en vis grad skabte ro ved at genoprette de tydelige kategorier. På baggrund af sin analyse konkluderede Derrida, at menneskets angst stammer fra frygten for uafklarede modsætningsforhold.



Ikke længe efter Derrida tog den amerikanske litterat Avital Ronell skridtet videre og udfordrede endnu et af de binære par, nemlig den traditionelle opfattelse af intelligens og stupiditet. Euro-amerikansk tænkning havde længe haft intelligens i høj kurs og samtidig affærdiget stupiditet som ren defekt, men Ronell stillede et radikalt spørgsmål: Hvad hvis stupiditet ikke kun er fraværet af intelligens, men en aktivt tænkende og skabende kraft i egen ret? Dette kan også forbindes til ældgammel visdom, og et nyt spørgsmål melder sig således: Gentager vi bare os selv ad absurdum?

Sokrates blev eksempelvis kåret som den viseste mand i Athen af oraklet i Delfi, og han fik ikke titlen på baggrund af sin overlegne viden, men derimod fordi han anerkendte sin uvidenhed. Efter at have udspurgt de formodede klogeste i Athen om dit og dat opdagede han, at de fleste dækkede over deres uvished med selvsikkerhed, og det gik op for ham, at sand visdom starter med accepten af det, vi ikke ved. Denne erfaring er udødeliggjort i Platons *Sokrates' forsvarstale*, hvor Sokrates' berømte udtalelse "Det eneste jeg ved, er, at jeg intet ved" blev brugt som forsvar mod en anklage om moralsk forfald – og besynderligt nok foregriber den tidligere amerikanske forsvarsminister Donald Rumsfelds forvirrende kommentarer om "kendte ubekendte" i forsøget på at retfærdiggøre sine nederlag i "krigen mod terror".

I sin omfattende undersøgelse fra 2002 om tåbelighedens historie (med den passende titel *Stupidity*) bevægede Ronell sig fra vidensparadokset i retning af uvidenhed og argumenterede for, at intelligens og stupiditet ikke er modsætninger, men snarere to sammenflettede størrelser.<sup>1</sup> Ronell, der ikke kun er inspireret af Derrida, men også af psykoanalysen, overvejede, hvordan vidensproduktion ofte bevæger sig gennem lamslæde tilstande på vej mod erkendelsen af, at der er noget, vi ikke ved. Selvom en stor del af Ronells bog beskæftiger sig med de nødvendige betingelser for kreativt at aflære sig noget for at kunne skabe noget nyt, reflekterer hun samtidig over, hvilke negative konsekvenser det kan have, når intelligens vurderes på forenkling måder.

Som et lille tankeeksperiment kan man overveje vægten af spørgsmålet "er du dum?" over for spørgsmålet "er du klog?". I forlængelse af den lammelse, Ronell oplevede i mødet med eksistentielle spørgsmål, kom hun med et bud på en lignende, men kulturelt betinget lammelse, der kan opstå som konsekvens af standardiserede (intelligens)tests. Disse tests har sjældent held med at anerkende forskellige former for intelligens og hæmmer derimod deres mulige udvikling. Den binære modsætning mellem at blive erklæret enten "klog" eller "dum" konsolideres på alle niveauer af uddannelsessystemet og skaber en cyklisk opfattelse af intelligens, mens den paradoksalt nok også begrænser innovationsevnen.

Ligesom "den stærkeste overlever"-tanken altid spørger, er den biologiske determinisme en overraskende berettigelse af såkaldte intelligenssystemer.

Overbevisningen er, at intellektuel kapacitet afgøres ved fødslen i form af hjernens struktur og ikke er et spørgsmål om, hvordan sindet formes eller ødelægges gennem uddannelse og livserfaring. Anderssons film driller klogt sådanne videnskabelige forsøg på at lokalisere og måle intelligens, hvilket leder tankerne hen på den mærkelige saga om Albert Einsteins hjerne.

For så vidt som Einstein utvivlsomt var genial, er mytedannelsen omkring hans hjerne som ultimativt symbol og hjemsted for genialiteten snarere en afsløring af vores samfundsmæssige besættelse af berømmelse end af selve hans intelligens. De posthume, pseudovidenskabelige studier af Einsteins hjerne, som forsøger at forklare hans exceptionelle evner ud fra fysiske karakteristika, er et eksempel på denne udbredte misforståelse.

Den amerikanske palæontolog, evolutionsbiolog og videnskabshistoriker Stephan Jay Gould, der tilfældigvis også befandt sig på Harvard, lavede en perfekt udlægning af det problematiske ved denne tænkning i sin bog *The Panda's Thumb: More Reflections in Natural History* fra 1980, hvor han skrev: "I am, somehow, less interested in the weight and convolutions of Einstein's brain than in the near certainty that people of equal talent have lived and died in cotton fields and sweatshops."<sup>2</sup>

Den komplet imbecile "kamp mod stoffer" – der ligesom "kampen mod fattigdom" eller "kampen mod terror" eksemplificerer det amerikanske politiske systems paranoide ide om, at en nation kan føre krig mod abstrakte koncepter – havde et slogan: "A mind is a terrible thing to waste." Måske vi hellere skulle fokusere på denne tankegang end erklære visse hjerner døde.

1. Avital Ronell, *Stupidity*, University of Illinois Press, Champaign, IL, 2005.

2. Stephen Jay Gould, *The Panda's Thumb: More Reflections in Natural History*, W.W. Norton & Company, New York, 1980.

# PÅ EN HISTORISK MISSION OM AT "KURERE" STUPIDITET MED ELEKTRICITET: FRA VOLTASØJLE TIL AI

Thomas Moynihan

*"I judge not; nay, rather that foolish, even silly, part which cannot be named without laughter, is the propagator of the human race. This is at last that sacred spring from which all things derive existence..."* —Desiderius Erasmus, 1509

Måske er der en vis visdom i tåbelighed. Måske er intelligens ikke en rangerbar størrelse. Det er ikke en kvotient eller kvantitet, som vi nænsomt kan kvalitetsbedømme med ord som 'mindre' eller 'mere', 'sub' eller 'super'. Måske er det heller ikke sandt, at visdom står i fuldstændig modsætning til idioti eller klart kan defineres som mangel på samme. Jo mere intellektuelt kompetent nogen bliver, jo større kan potentialet for tåbelighed nogle gange forekomme. Er snedighed og kretinisme to fuldstændig adskilte ting?

Kloge hoveder har vidst det længe. I 1509 publicerede den hollandske vismand Desiderius Erasmus eksempelvis sit værk *Tåbelighedens lovprisning*, hvor hans argument er, at dumhed er "frøet og kilden" til vores eksistens.<sup>1</sup> Han pointerede, hvordan vi, når vi ikke behøver at se hårde realiteter i øjnene, bliver bedre til at fyre op under vores medfødte sløvhed, og således bliver bedre til at holde ud eller, Gud forbyde det, letsindige nok til at reproducere.

I oldtidscivilisationer, fra Asien til Nordafrika og Mellemøsten, blev patienter med voldsomme hovedpiner instrueret i at røre ved elektriske fisk, i håb om at stødene ville lindre smerten. Man troede, at chokket ville få hjernetågen til at lette og i et lynglimt bringe sindet tilbage i skarp tilstand. Heri findes årsagen til forestillingen om at kunne kurere tåbelighed og sløvhed med elektriske stød.

Men snarere end at sætte sin lid til batterier og elektriske ål ville det være belejligt at udvikle remedier, der kunne skabe et kunstigt chok. Denne ide medførte naturligvis, at man nærmest snublede over elektromagnetismen.

Som Diogenes Laertes påpegede, havde vismænd i evigheder kendt til det faktum, at magneter kan forårsage en vis animering af det livløse. Det var Thales af Miletus, der først observerede – omkring 600 f.Kr. – at rav kan vækkes til live, hvis det gnides på den rigtige måde. Det således levende rav kan altså tiltrække fjer og støvpartikler. Dette, har vi siden fundet ud af, skyldes statisk elektricitet.

I 1600 besluttede den læselystne læge William Gilbert – mens hans studerede disse besynderligt attraktive egenskaber ved fossilt harpiks – at give fænomenet et navn. Eftersom det græske ord for rav er 'electron', kom han op med navnet 'electricus'. Og dermed så 'elektrisk' energi – samt vores moderne tidsalder – dagens lys.<sup>2</sup>

Ordet 'electricity' optrådte første gang på engelsk i 1672 i en bog af sir Thomas Browne om vulgære perversioner. Bogens titel *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* afslører, når den oversættes, at der er tale om en regulær epidemi af misforståelser.

Mærkeligt nok var det også den første bog, hvor ordene 'compute' og 'computation' blev anvendt i beskrivelsen af apparater, der kan lave udregninger.<sup>3</sup> Det er næsten, som om denne bog i al stilhed forudså den invasive oversvømmelse af menneskets stædige rationalisme, som mineralriget, via elektromagnetisk animering, førte med sig – og den deraf bratte opvågning forklædt som silikonechip og elektronisk computer.

Måske er det ikke et tilfælde, at ordene 'electricity' og 'computation' optrådte første gang i samme bog, ej heller at denne bog forudsagde epidemiske tåbeligheder. Vi har aldrig spurgt silikatminerale, om de gav samtykke til tvungen tankevirksomhed.

Ikke længe efter, i en tøvende sidebemærkning, giver Isaac Newton udtryk for, at "al følsomhed er ophidselse", og at "dele af dyrekroppen kan bevæge sig" via en slags "kommando" fra en "elektrisk" ånd.<sup>4</sup> Måske tøvede Newton også, fordi han, om end mangelfuld, forudså, hvordan alle disse sammentræffende sammentræf mellem elektricitet og mentaltilstand senere ville blive sluppet løs i verden.

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Samme år som Newtons *Principia* blev udgivet på engelsk, satte Alexander Pope sig for at udgive et langt digt, som lofede sløret for fortvivelsen over den retning, moderne vidensproduktion bevægede sig i. Digtet fantaserer om stupiditetens triumf, indvarslet til hele universet af 'Kedsomhedens Gudinde' og kulminerende i en nonsensapokalypse.

Men han reagerede også på den moderne videnskabs desillusionering – eller måske snarere lamslåelse – over et univers, der tidligere var blevet opfattet som fejlfrit på grund af sit intelligente design. Mod forventning begyndte videnskaben, i stedet for at præsentere en gennemtænkt verden, at afsløre et kosmos, som var mismodigt, åndssvagt, ofte helt meningsløst. Pope beklagede sig for sin del over, hvordan den sande humanistiske viden "jamrer i sine lænker" – "kneblet og bundet" – mens alle videnskaberne, "den gale Mathesis alene", forbliver "ubegrænset":

"Too mad for mere material chains to bind,  
Now to pure Space lifts her ecstatic stare,  
now running round the Circle, finds it square."

'Mathesis' refererer her til altings kvantificering. Den såkaldte *furor mathematicus*, der banede vejen for binær kodning og den deraf følgende elektrificering af tankevirksomhed. En tankevirksomhedsstand, der, med Popes karakteristiske klagesang, ville være tomt for al sjæl og krop.<sup>5</sup>

En af Popes venner beskrev meget passende en personificering af selve Indlæringen, som bliver henrettet ved elektrisk stød i digtet *The Scribleriad*, der i øvrigt omhandler udslettelsen af ældgammel visdom – en konsekvens af moderne videnskabs såkaldte "elektriske ild".<sup>6</sup>

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Og sandt nok: På denne tid begyndte det kunstige batteris tidligste stamfader – såsom Leyden-beholderne – at blive produceret. Rygterne florerede om anvendelsen af denne nyligt domesticerede, nyligt aftappede, elektriske naturkraft.

Siden 1740'erne havde læger beskrevet, hvordan elektriske stød kunne give mennesker med lammelse en vis bevægelighed tilbage, om end ganske flygtigt. Inspireret af denne viden besluttede den tyske lærde Franz Karl Achard at sætte påstanden på prøve.

Achard fik fat i en kusk, der havde fået et slagtilfælde "på vej hjem fra en kro, hvor han efter sigende havde forkælet sig selv med brændevin".

Denne drikkestund lammede den stakkels kusk i hele hans venstre side og gjorde ham stum. I forlængelse heraf pulveriserede Achard nærmest hans krop – først med stød gennem tungen – i et 15 minutter langt 'elektrisk bad'.

Tankeløst nok blev lammelse dengang skåret over samme kam som en række andre dårligdomme: alle som variationer af 'idioti'. Patienten fik ikke flere behandlinger,

men Achard hørte siden, at han fik både førligheden og talens brug igen. I hvert fald i tre dage.<sup>7</sup> Måske kunne en kur for andre lidelser i nervesystemet og sjælen skimtes i horisonten, tænkte Achard.

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Senere forsøgte Achard at udklække hønseæg uden brug af varme. Han ville se, om tilførslen af elektricitet alene var tilstrækkeligt. Vores kære polyhistoriker endte imidlertid med at henrette utallige ufødte kyllinger, idet myriader af 'små dyr' blev fundet døde dagen efter forsøget.<sup>8</sup> Han påstod også at have kureret en dreng for døvhed ved at sætte elektroder til hans hoved.<sup>9</sup>

På nogenlunde samme tid blev Achard selv udsat for et lynnedslag under et vejr og begyndte herefter at lide af "voldsom diarre" og "skælven".<sup>10</sup> Dette forstærkede dog bare hans fascination af elektricitets kraft. Han var overbevist om, at elektricitet kunne kurere en hvilken som helst lidelse, inklusiv "idioti".

§

I maj 1782 skrev Achard til kongen – den "oplyste despot" Frederik den Store – og bad ham højne sit ambitionsniveau. Eftersom nervesystemet var "tåbelighedens vugge", forklarede Archard, kunne chokbehandling rense det for enhver lidelse. Han insisterede på, at det måske endda kunne kurere idioti. Monarken svarede imponeret og tilføjede et PS med følgende ordlyd:

"If you can use electricity to give intelligence to imbeciles, you are worth more than your weight in gold."<sup>11</sup>

Achard kurerede naturligvis ikke "imbecilitet" med elektricitet, men begejstringen fortog sig ikke. På omkring samme tid gik det – naturligvis – op for Luigi Galvani, at han kunne få døde frølår til at danse med elektriske stød fra en kondensator. Straks begyndte andre at teste, hvorvidt energien kunne genoplive dyr og mennesker, som var døde af iltmangel. Man mente endda, at elektrochok kunne kurere bændelorm.<sup>12</sup>

§

En slags elektromania bredte sig. Som G.C. Lichtenberg, den produktive overspringshandler, ganske profetisk bemærkede:

"One could call it the fifth element, if it were necessary to multiply elements; it is spread everywhere, we live in it, perhaps one day it will be determined to what extent we live because of it."<sup>13</sup>

Lichtenberg beskrev først de forgrenede mønstre, som elektriske udledninger forårsagede på de overflader, der blev udsat for stød, eksempelvis lynafsvedet menneskekød. Han inviterede tit sine venner til at prøve at få elektrochok. Ligesom Nollet fik han forsøgspersoner til at holde hinanden i hånden for så at sende stød gennem menneskekæden. På et tidspunkt lagde han mærke til, at stemningen var meget opstemt, på trods af at kædereaktionerne plejede at halte, fordi

strømmen, ifølge Lichtenberg, altid blev bremset, hvis den skulle igennem en "frigid" eller "impotent" person.<sup>14</sup> Da opklarende forsøg sidenhen falsificerede denne påstand, bemærkede Lichtenberg tørt, at den elektrostatiske maskine således "aldrig får æren af en dag at være et brugbart instrument", når "menigheder mødes", eller i "ægteskabelige retssager".

§

Men selv hvis den ikke kunne få fælden til at klappe om de utro eller syndige, synes anvendelsesmulighederne for den elektriske energi at være uendelige. Som en forsker senere genkaldte sig, "ville alle se med deres egne øjne, hvordan lemlæstede kroppsdele mirakuløst kunne vækkes til live igen",<sup>15</sup> hvor end det var muligt at skaffe "frøer" og "elektroder". Man anså det for værende "sikkert, at i fremtiden bliver ingen begravet efter pludselig død uden først at blive galvaniseret".<sup>16</sup> På samme måde virkede alt, hvad man opfattede som sindslidelser, pludselig mulige at kurere.

§

Da 1700-tallet flød ind i 1800-tallet, blev voltasøjlen opfundet, det første egentlige batteri – og spændingen steg til nye højder. Alessandro Volta, søjlens opfinder, var også den første til at udføre sine egne eksperimenter med den. Han puttede elektroder i ørerne, af alle steder, for at sende "stød gennem hovedet".<sup>17</sup> Dette, rapporterede han, fremprovokerede et knasende chok, boblende, "som om en paté eller lignende tyktflydende masser blev sat i kog". Volta erkendte, at det kunne være farligt, og gentog ikke eksperimentet.<sup>18</sup>

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Andre opførte sig knap så fåret. I 1803 satte ingen ringere end Galvanis nevø, Giovanni Aldini, sig for at føre traditionen videre. Han spændte strømførende buer uden på sit kranie og udførte en lang række smertefulde stød. Dette gjorde ham efter sigende "søvnløs i flere dage".<sup>19</sup>

Aldini konkluderede, at den slags voldsomme resultater kunne tyde på en kraft, der faktisk var stærk nok til at ryste noget forstand ind i de sindssyge. Han havde overtalt adskillige anstalter til at give ham adgang til at udføre eksperimenter på "de håbløse galninge" og blev på den måde en slags elektrochokkets pioner. Han besluttede sig for at finde ud af, om elektricitet kunne hjælpe nogle heldige galninge med at "slippe ud af deres absolut stupide tilstand".<sup>20</sup>

Han var overbevist om, at det var muligt. Især en patient, hvis opførsel tidligere havde indikeret "stupiditet i særligt høj grad", viste åbenbart tegn på forbedring efter elektrochokbehandling, kunne Aldini fornøjet rapportere.<sup>21</sup>

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I 1803 udgav den tyske polyhistoriker J.C. Reil en bog, hvor han spekulerede i forskellige metoder til behandling af lidelser relateret til den såkaldte "Geist".<sup>22</sup> I modsætning til de herskende antagelser insisterede han på, at 'vanvid' ikke opstår på baggrund af 'dårlig moral', men på grund af en hjerne, der 'rystes' af udefrakommende stimuli. Hvis dette er sandt, argumenterede Reil,

er vi således nødt til at bruge de kræfter, vi nu har til rådighed, til at "skælve" det syge organ tilbage til fornuften. Dette kunne implicere "elektricitet", "galvanisering" eller "magnetisme", men det kunne også, tilføjede han, implicere "andre subtile remedier".<sup>23</sup>

Reil var ikke sippet, hvad angik stimulans, der kunne chokere "imbecile" nervesystemer tilbage til normalitet. Han overvejede blandt andet at tilføre varme og kulde til kønsorganerne, at bruge "sygdomsfremkaldende midler", at påtvinge "sult og tørst", simulere tordenskrald eller pistolskud side om side med "nysen", "brændvarm voks" og "rødgødende jern". Sådanne chok, mente Reil, kunne måske ryste patienterne tilbage til fornuftens brug.<sup>24</sup>

Reil konkluderede endda, at "ethvert galehus" burde have et "specialudstyret, fungerende teater". En slags simulationsrum møbleret med det "nødvendige apparatur": masker, instrumenter, rekvisitter. Her kunne anstaltens ansatte blive oplært.

[...] so that they could play every role: of judge, executioner or doctor—of angels descending from heaven or dead people returning from graves—according to needs of the patient, to highest degree of deception. Such a theatre could be transformed into a prison or lion's den, into places of execution or operating rooms. In it, Don Quixotes would be knighted, pregnant women delivered of their burdens, fools trepanned, and repentant sinners solemnly absolved of crimes.<sup>25</sup>

Denne slags trepanations-teater, konkluderede Reil, ville "stimulere fantasien" hos den imbecile eller sindssyge patient og have en gavnlige, helbredende effekt.<sup>26</sup>

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I 1818 begyndte en af Reils kollegaer at beskæftige sig med chokterapi på en langt mere bogstavelig måde. Han roste Reils forslag om at lave kunstige tordenskrald i anstaltens kældre for på den måde at skræmme de indlagte til "fornuft", og kom senere med følgende empatiske udtalelse:

"We add the advice: to give the patient blows from electric, galvanic batteries in the dark."<sup>27</sup>

§

Sådanne recepter forekommer med rette barbariske, inhumane og amoralske for et nutidigt blik: at behandle mennesker, der i al hast er blevet kategoriseret som dysfunktionelle eller forstyrrende, med så voldelige midler, så voldsomme konsekvenser og så omfattende mangel på omtanke. Ikke desto mindre var der tale om forsøg på faktisk at lindre og dulme, frem for slet og ret at fordømme, og det var dengang noget af et fremskridt at søge efter fysiske ætiologier, der kunne fikses, frem for bare at mildne fejlbehandlinger af patienter ud fra devisen om, at de fik som moralsk fortjent. Uanset hvad viser ovenstående, hvor firkantede, skyklapbefængte selv samfundets klogeste nogle gange kan være – og det er ikke anderledes i dag. Det, vi kalder intelligens, består, når alt kommer til alt, af for mange ting på samme tid til,



at vi kan rangere det pænt og ordentligt – eller sætte intelligens i et klart modsætningsforhold til dumhed. På samme måde vil det givetvis gå med AI eller det perfekt elektrificerede sind. Selve konceptet AI er mange ting, både gode og dårlige. Men måske bør vi ikke opfatte det som – eller håbe på, at det er – den endelige version af det ældgamle forsøg på med elektricitetens kraft simpelthen at fjerne såkaldt stupiditet fra jordens overflade. Og uanset om dette er muligt eller ej, er det tvivlsomt, om det overhovedet er ønskværdigt. Som Erasmus lærte os, er tåbelighed paradoksalt nok “frøet og kilden” til meget af det meningsfulde, muntre og gode ved vores tilværelse.

1. Desiderius Erasmus, *Moriae encomium* (Tåbelighedens lovprisning), Paris, 1511.
2. William Gilbert, *De Magnete, Magneticisque Corporibus, et de Magno Magnete Tellure* (On the Magnet and Magnetic Bodies, and on That Great Magnet the Earth), London, 1600.
3. Thomas Browne, *Pseudodoxia Epidemica, or Vulgar Errors*, London, 1672.
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5. Alexander Pope, *The Dunciad in Four Books* [1743], red. af Valerie Rumbold, London, 1999, pp.275–7.
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9. Achard 1780, pp.241–5.
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13. Georg Christoph Lichtenberg, *Vorlesungen zur Naturlehre: Notizen und Materialien zur Experimentalphysik, Volume 2*, Berlin, 2010, p.277.
14. Ibid., p.715.
15. Emile Heinrich du Bois-Reymond, *Untersuchungen über thierische elektricität, Volume 1*, Berlin, 1848, pp.50–1.
16. Ibid.
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22. Johann Christian Reil, *Rhapsodien über die Anwendung der psychischen Curmethode auf Geisteserrüttungen*, Halle, 1805, p.210.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. Johann Christian August Heinroth, *Lehrbuch der Störungen des Seelenlebens oder der Seelenstörungen und ihrer Behandlung, Volume 1*, Leipzig, 1818, p.141.

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or enhanced the consumer  
along ethical and imaginative boundaries.





decided to push the technique  
of pleasure stimulation further.

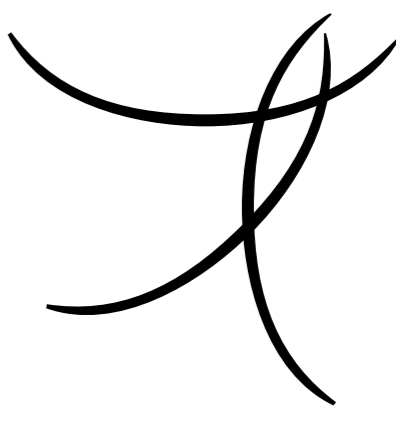








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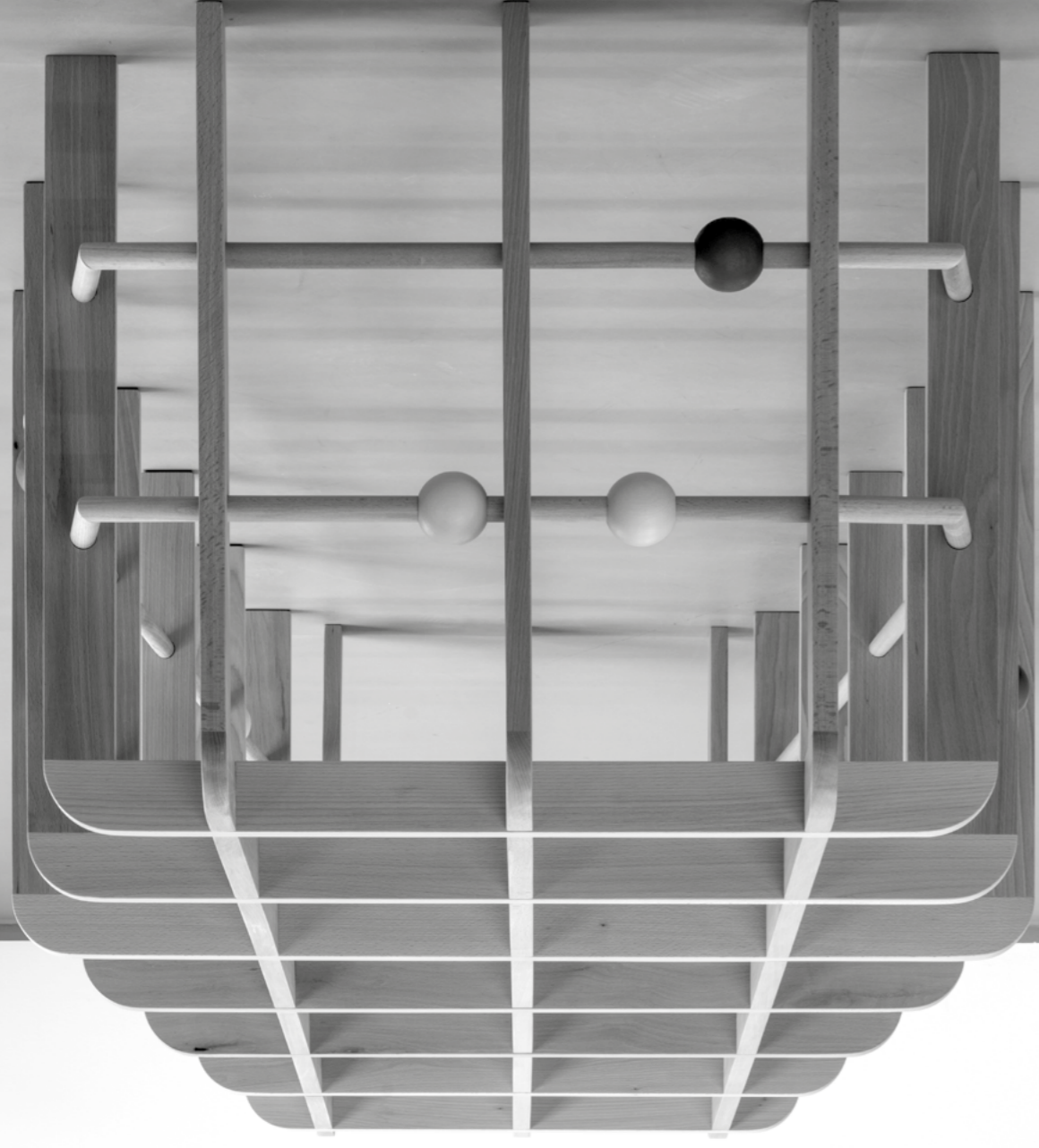
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Such prescriptions, rightly, seem barbaric, inhumane, immoral to us now; to treat those hastily categorized as dysfunctional or disruptive with such violence and lack of concern. But even attempting to alleviate, rather than merely condemn, was, back then, something of a step forward: to search for physical etiologies that could be fixed, rather than mollycoddle the sufferer as morally deserved.

Regardless, the above shows how blockish and blinkered even the "smartest" in society can sometimes be. It will not be any different today. For better or worse, the thing we call intelligence is too many things at once for it to be neatly ranked, nor counterposed completely to fatuity.

So too will it likely be with artificial intelligence, or perfectly electrized mind. The project of artificial intelligence is many things, both good and bad. But perhaps we should not see it, nor hope for it, to be the final iteration in the age-old project of electrically eradicating this world entirely of so-called "stupidity." Regardless of whether this is even possible, it is questionable as to whether it would really be desirable. After all, as Erasmus well taught, folly is—paradoxically or not—the "seed plot and source" of much that is meaningful, mirthful, and good about our existence.

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One could call it the 5th element, if it were necessary to multiply elements; it is spread everywhere, we live in it, perhaps one day it will be determined to what extent we live because of it.<sup>13</sup>

Lichtenberg first described the branching patterns left by electric discharge on surfaces such as lightning-scared flesh. He often invited friends to experience shocks. Like 18th-century physicist Jean-Antoine Nollet, he made subjects link hands before passing jolts down the line. Once, he remarked there was much excitement after there were reports this chain reaction always halted, and the bolt never passed farther, when it encountered, Lichtenberg reported, a "rigid or impotent" person.<sup>14</sup>

After tests found this false, Lichtenberg wryly noted that, thusly, the "electrostatic machine is deprived the honor of one day being a useful instrument" at "congregations of priests" or in "marriage courts." Even if it could not be used to catch philters or sinful synods, applications for electric force seemed endless. As one scientist later recalled, wherever "frogs" and "electrodes" could be procured,

Against expectation, instead of revealing a well-trodden world, science had begun unveiling a cosmos that was dispirited, dumb, and often foolishly senseless.

For his part, Pope lamented that true humanistic knowledge "groans in chains"—"gagged & bound"—whilst, of all the sciences, "mad *Mathesis* alone" remains "unconfined":

"Too mad for mere material chains to bind, Now to pure Space lifts her ecstatic stare, now running round the Circle, finds it square.

"*Mathesis*" here refers to the quantification of all things. That *furore mathematicus* that has latterly led to our ability to encode though in binary, leading to electrized cogitators. A class of cogitators that as Pope would have characteristically complained, are "defaecated" of all soul and body.<sup>5</sup>

Suitably, one of Pope's friends imagined the personification of learnedness being executed by electrocution in his own poem, titled *The Scriblerad*, depicting the erasure of ancient wisdoms by the modern, scientific forces of "electric fire."<sup>6</sup>

### §

Indeed, around this time, the earliest ancestors of artificial batteries, like Leyden jars, were being produced. Word was spreading about applications for the newly domesticated, newly bottled, electric force of nature.

Since the 1740s, physicians had noted shocks returned movements to the paralyzed, if but fleetingly. Inspired, in 1777, the German savant Franz Carl Acharad decided to put this to the test.

Acharad got his hands on a horse-driver who had suffered a stroke "as he was returning home from a beerhall where, according to his own confession, he had treated himself to brandy."

This particular drinking session paralyzed the poor driver across his right side, making him mute. Accordingly, Acharad pulverized his body—starting with shocks to the tongue—in an "electric bath"

for 15 minutes. Paralysis, at this time, was thoughtlessly jumped in with many other ailments as a form of "idiocy." The patient did not return, but Acharad heard he regained movement and speech. For three days, at least.<sup>7</sup>

Perhaps a cure for other ailments of the nervous system and soul was on the horizon, thought Acharad.

### §

Acharad later tried hatch hens' eggs without the use of heat. He wanted to see if application of electricity, alone, could suffice. Our polymath ended up electrocuting legions of unborn chicks,

"everyone wanted to see for themselves how the "necessary apparatus": "masks, machinery, and props." Here, the asylum's "officers would be trained":

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The pile's inventor, Alessandro Volta, also became the first to self-experiment with it. Of all places, he put electrodes in his ears, producing a "jolt in the head."<sup>17</sup>

This provoked, he reported, a "crackling shock, or bubbling, as if some part or viscous substance were boiling." Deciding this might be dangerous, Volta did not repeat the experiment.<sup>18</sup>

### §

Others were not so sheepish. In 1803, none other than Galvani's nephew, Giovanni Aldini, continued the tradition. He placed arcs upon his skull and performed a "long series of painful" shocks. This, he reported, made him into an "insomniac for several days."<sup>19</sup>

Such violent results, Aldini reasoned, might point to a force requisite to shake sanity into the insane. Having convinced several asylums to grant him entry, to experiment on "hopeless lunatics", Aldini became electric shock therapy's pioneer. He resolved to find out if electricity could allow lucky loons to "emerge from a state of complete stupidity."<sup>20</sup>

He believed it could. One patient, in particular, whose demeanor previously indicated "a great degree of stupidity," apparently, Aldini happily reported, showed signs of improvement having been shocked.<sup>21</sup>

### §

In 1803, the German polymath Johann Christian Reil published a book speculating on various methods for treating disorders of "*Geist*."<sup>22</sup> He insisted, against prevailing assumption, that "madness" does not arise from "moral failing", but from a brain "shaken" by external stimuli. If true, Reil reasoned, we ought to use whatever forces at our disposal in order to "quake" the diseased organ back to sense. This might include "electricity," "galvanism," or "magnetism"; but it might, he added, also involve "other subtle means."<sup>23</sup>

Reil was not squeamish considering forms of stimulation to shock the "imbecilic" nervous system back to normality. Amongst others, he considered applying heat and cold to the genitals, using "dissac-causing substances," enforced "hunger and thirst," simulated thunderclaps or gunshots, alongside "sneezing agents," "burning wax," and "red-hot irons." These, Reil posed, might shock sufferers back to sanity.<sup>24</sup>

Reil even concluded that "every madhouse" should have a "specially equipped, working theatre."

A type of *stimulation room*, furnished with all "necessary apparatus": "masks, machinery, and props." Here, the asylum's "officers would be trained":

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ofluscating comments about "known unknowns" when justifying his failures during the "war on terror." In her 2002 book-length study of the history of foolishness (aptly called *Stupidity*), Ronell pushed well past this paradox of knowledge through ignorance, suggesting intelligence and stupidity are not merely opposites but intertwined forces. Ronell, whose intellectual influences include not only Derrida but also psychoanalysis, considered that knowledge production often transits through a state of stupefying paralysis as we face the recognition that we do not know something. Although much of the book concerns the necessary favorable conditions for creatively unlearning something to produce something new, she likewise considers the negative side of reinforcing simplistic value judgments about intelligence.

US paleontologist, evolutionary biologist, and historian of science Stephen Jay Gould, who coincidentally was on the Harvard faculty, perfectly captured the profound problem with this thinking in his 1980 book *The Panda's Thumb: More Reflections in Natural History*. In it, he wrote, "I am, somehow, less interested in the weight and convolutions of Einstein's brain than in the near certainty that people of equal talent have lived and died in cotton fields and sweatshops."<sup>2</sup>

The implausibly moronic US "war on drugs"—which, like the "war on poverty" and the "war on terror," embodied the paranoid style of US politics through the delusional notion that a nation can lead an offensive battle against an abstract concept—featured the slogan "a mind is a terrible thing to waste." Perhaps we should focus more on this idea rather than declaring some brains dead.

As a thought experiment, consider the emotional weight of "Are you stupid?" versus "Are you smart?" Like the paralysis Ronell discovered in the face of existential questions, she proposed a similar yet culturally conditioned paralysis produced by standardized testing. This testing often fails to recognize diverse forms of intelligence and suppresses their development. This binary, between being declared "smart" or "stupid," is reinforced throughout all levels of education, creating a cycle that shapes how society views intelligence while paradoxically limiting its ability to innovate.

Like the ghost of "survival of the fittest," biological determinism is a baffling justification upon which intellectual capacity is fixed at birth by brain structure and is less a question of how the mind is shaped or misshaped through education and experience. Andersson's film cleverly mocks such positivistic scientific attempts to locate and measure intelligence, bringing to mind the strange saga of Albert Einstein's brain. While Einstein was undoubtedly brilliant, the cultural mythology surrounding his brain as the ultimate symbol and site of genius reveals more about our societal obsessions with celebrity than intelligence itself. The posthumous pseudo-scientific studies of his brain, attempting to explain his exceptional abilities through physical characteristics, exemplify this misguided approach.

# ON THE HISTORIC QUEST TO "CURE" STUPIDITY WITH ELECTRICITY: FROM VOLTAGE PILES TO AIS

Thomas Moynihan

"Judge not; rather, *rather than foolish, even silly, part which cannot be named without laughter, is the propagator of the human race. This is at last that sacred spring from which all things derive existence.*"  
—Desiderius Erasmus (1509)

Perhaps there is some wisdom in folly. Perhaps intelligence is not some rankable thing: some quotient or quantity, sensibly spoken of in terms of "less" or "more," or "sub" or "super." Nor, perhaps, is it true that wisdom can be cleanly counterposed to idiology nor neatly defined as some lack thereof. After all, the more intellectually capable an agent becomes, the more powerful its potential for folly sometimes seems. Are cunning and cretinism completely separable?

But, clearly, rather than relying on ichthyoid batteries and the whims of eels, convenience would be found in producing means for conjuring the shock *artificially*. This, of course, required stumbling towards studying electromagnetism. As Diogenes Laertes reported, sages have known for ages that lodestones and magnets imply that the inanimate might be animated. It was Thales of Miletus who first noted—sometime around 600 BCE—that amber, when suitably stroked, comes to life. Enlivened this way, amber attracts feathers and filaments to itself. This, we latterly know, is caused by static electricity. In 1600, the studious physician William Gilbert, whilst studying these peculiar attractive properties of fossil resin, decided to give it a name. Given the Greek for amber is "electron", he called it "elektron". Hence, "electric" force—and, with it, our modern age—was born.<sup>2</sup>

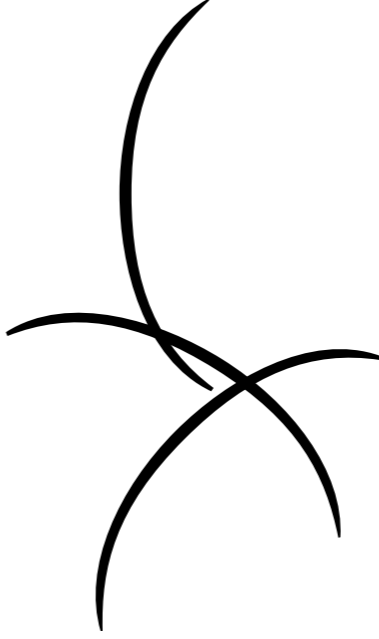
The first usage of the word "electricity" in English emerged in 1672 in a book on vulgar errors written by Sir Thomas Browne. Its title, *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, when translated, announces an epidemic of misconceptions. Weirdly, this was also the first book to use the word "compute" and "computation" to describe agents that calculate. It is almost as if this book mutely prophesied the invasive flooding of our ratiocinative wrongheadedness through the mineral world, via instructive electromagnetic animation—and resultant rude awakening—in the guise of silicon chip and electronic computer.

Perhaps it is no accident the words "electricity" and "computation" were coined in the same book, nor that this book foretold epidemical follies. We never asked silicate minerals if they consented to being forced to cogitate.

In 1729, the same year that Newton's *Principia* was released in English, Alexander Pope began publishing a long poem revealing his despondency with the direction of modern knowledge production. It imagines the triumph of stupidity, ushered by the "Goddess of Dullness" over the universe, concluding in an apocalypse of nonsense. But he was also reacting to modern science's disenchantment—or, perhaps better, stupefaction—of a universe that was previously assumed flawless in its intelligent design.

In ancient civilizations, from Asia to North Africa and the Middle East, patients with severe headaches were instructed to touch electric fish in hope the jolt might palliate. The shock, it was believed, might lift the brain fog, fulgurating the mind back to sharpness. Here lie the roots of the project to cure folly, or dullness, with the electric spark.

By blunting from our view, he argued, the truer and harsher realities of things, our congenital dullness God forbid, the rashness to procreate.





forces us to consider that science might not always be doing what we think it is. This is a nightmare for any technocratic imaginary as well as an existential threat to the "ethical boards" that oversee animal model systems and clinical trials today.

In service of the liberal order, science is a primary truth producer and is persistently tasked with supplying certainty to the population. This is why the act of perverting exactly science is particularly interesting as a blow to this liberal order. If not science, which system is capable of delivering the transparency, information, certainty, and predictability according to which the liberal democratic state-citizen contract is drafted? Or maybe the other way around: Does liberalism as we know it end when it is undeniable that its science is a pervert? What political order, what kind of technocracy emerges when science is a supplier of degeneration, stupidity, and perversion?

#### A TOXIC DIALECTICIAN

Andersson has, over the course of her practice, built a versatile toolbox of perversion. It is through paradox, this statement exposes an elemental pattern in European intellectual history: our relentless drive to split reality into binary oppositions.

# TWO TYPES OF PEOPLE OR A BRIEF HISTORY OF STUPIDITY

Adam Kleinman

My father's favorite saying cuts straight to the heart of human reasoning: "There are two types of people in this world—those who divide the world into two types of people and those who don't." Far more than a clever paradox, this statement exposes an elemental pattern in European intellectual history: our relentless drive to split reality into binary oppositions.

This compulsion to divide is also at the core of dialectics, a philosophical line of inquiry we shall discuss later. However, my father's observation proves especially relevant to unpacking Madeleine Andersson's *Degenerative Knowledge Production*, which grapples with how society and medicine define death and stupidity.

An overused academic trick, which can pose as cleverness, begins with stating an etymology to reveal profound truths. Following this gimmick, consider how "diagnosis"—our primary jargon for defining illness—betrays binary thinking in its very roots. It combines the Greek "dia" (dia) meaning "to cut" or "take apart," with "gnosis" (γνῶσις) meaning "knowledge." The implication of this etymology is striking: at its linguistic foundation, medical knowledge depends on separating one thing from another. In modern terms, this manifests as the opposition between pathology and "normal" function, between the diseased and the healthy, and between deviation and social norm.

Socially, deviation carries a loaded connotation: the assumption of decline from an ideal state toward decay and moral corruption. This starkly contrasts Darwinian evolution, which describes "change over time" through natural selection, where adaptations prove beneficial only within specific contexts. Consider a bird's beak: its modification only provides an advantage if it helps access available food sources; without context, adaptation is meaningless. Yet 19th-century racist scientists twisted this nuanced concept into a reductive form of the expression "survival of the fittest," deliberately ignoring how "fitness" depends entirely on environmental conditions. Not coincidentally, these supremacists worked to preserve the very structural conditions that secured their dominance—they might not have been too enlightened, but they weren't precisely dumb either.

Tracing this intellectual pathology—performing an etiology—leads us back to arguably the first fascist: the philosopher Plato. As the foundational figure of European philosophical tradition—with due acknowledgment to Socrates, or at least Plato's portrayal of him—Plato mastered the art of dialectical reasoning: a method of reconciling apparent contradictions. Through dialogue and comparison, he developed the concept of "ideas"—the root of our word "idea." His system posited perfect, abstract ideals for everything in the universe; archetypes from which all physical manifestations were merely inferior copies, shadows of perfect forms. Crucially, Plato linked this "degradation" to moral decline, casting intellectual life as a struggle to reverse this fall and ascend toward perfection; perhaps the dumbest idea in human history.

The ancient Greek debate over consciousness, which seems a bit daft compared to contemporary neurology, could not place where the mind dwells and what the brain does. While Plato positioned the brain as the primary seat of thought, he argued it needed to work in concert with the liver (the center of desire and appetite) and heart (the wellspring of emotions) to form the "soul," that vital force distinguishing human life from all others. His student, the philosopher Aristotle, sharply disagreed, viewing the heart as the command center of sensation and decision-making while reducing the brain to little more than a biological radiator for cooling blood, which he reasoned is why the head is often so hot.

This dispute over whether the brain or heart governed consciousness and, with it, the matter of life or death, echoed through millennia of medical thought, only reaching its modern resolution in 1968 at Harvard Medical School, as documented by Andersson, who takes this distinction as a point of departure for *Degenerative Knowledge Production*.

When Harvard's medical experts redefined death in terms of brain activity, they did more than establish new medical criteria: they fundamentally altered humanity's relationship with mortality. Moving the locus of life from heart to brain reshaped medical science and legal understandings of human existence—or non-existence. Now that that seems resolved—unless you consider the current debates about how gut flora affects the brain while assisting the production of neurotransmitters in the human digestive system—let's revisit our binary specter and examine the distinction between life and death.

The European philosophical fixation on dialectics, championed by the German Enlightenment philosopher Immanuel Kant and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, underwent a seismic disruption just one year before the Harvard "brain dead" criteria emerged. In 1967, Jacques Derrida's *Of Grammatology* unleashed "deconstruction" onto the intellectual landscape: a revolutionary method that exploded traditional binary thinking. Rather than merely trying to reconcile opposing concepts, Derrida revealed

how supposed opposites contaminate and depend on each other: light exists only about darkness, yet this dependency undermines their separation. Though he initially drew from the ancient Greek concept of φάρμακον—or "pharmakon," which meant both medicine and poison, or even scapegoat to our ancestors, and is where we get the modern word "pharmaceutics"—to demonstrate how writing preserves and destroys memory, his work would take a curious turn in the 1980s, and this theoretical shift oddly resonates with Andersson's playful references to brain-eating zombies.

Examining binary pairs, Derrida found hidden power dynamics. Such opposites were not neutral; they popped up social hierarchies by lifting one term while pushing down its opposite. Similar patterns appear in how we have historically coded racial differences, for example, black/white. This built on Friedrich Nietzsche's earlier insight about early Christians, who turned their lack of worldly power into a moral victory by recasting the simple fact of being weak into proof of spiritual superiority over Roman strength: Nietzsche, who later went mad while struggling to reconcile the contradiction between power and mercy, called this process the "transvaluation of values."

As foreshadowed above, Derrida's thinking about these power relations took an unexpected gothic turn as he explored beings that by "nature" break binary logic, such as vampires and zombies. These "undead" creatures troubled Western thought precisely because they could not be sorted into the living/dead binary. Gothic stories, Derrida reasoned, usually resolve this anxiety by killing these in-between beings or forcing them back into human form, restoring the comfort of clear categories. Drawing from this analysis, Derrida concluded that human anxiety stems from the fear of undecided opposition.

Building on Derrida's work, his disciple, the US literary theorist Avital Ronell would soon challenge another binarity: the traditional thinking about intelligence and stupidity. While Euro-American thought had long privileged intelligence and dismissed stupidity as a mere deficiency, Ronell posed a radical question: What if stupidity isn't just intelligence's absence but an active force in thinking and creating knowledge? This, too, connects back to ancient wisdom and thus prompts another question: Are we just repeating ourselves

For example, Socrates, declared Athens' wisest by the Delphic Oracle, earned this title not through superior knowledge but by acknowledging his ignorance. After questioning Athens' supposed experts and finding their confidence masking uncertainty, he realized that true wisdom begins with accepting what we do not know. This was immortalized in Plato's dialogue *Apology*, in which Socrates' famous dictum "I know that I don't know" was used as a legal defense against the accusation of moral corruption, and oddly prefigures US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's



# SCIENCE PERVERTED

ON THE OCCASION OF *DEGENERATIVE KNOWLEDGE*  
PRODUCTION BY MADELEINE ANDERSSON  
AT 0-OVERGADEN

Mandus Ridefelt

I work with art and natural science. When I mention this to art professionals, one of the most common reactions I receive is, "That's the most boring kind of art I know" or any euphemism of choice. In *Degenerative Knowledge Production*, Madeleine Andersson is placing her practice closer than ever before to the genre of art-science (this infamous intersection between art and natural sciences). Yet, Andersson's work is hilarious.

WHY CAN'T WE HAVE FUN IN ART AND SCIENCE?

The relative absence of fun in art-science is not a problem or a disqualification, as such. Many of the above-mentioned reactions can be seen as byproducts of the field's conditions. The institutionally driven and collaborative formats from which many art-science projects stem, and derive large parts of their value, demand a level of diplomatic sensitivity where unbounded forms of fun rarely flourish. Rarely is there an intuitive understanding of agendas, stakes, and roles to anchor beyond the stale taxonomy of art as the supplier of fluff and science as the supplier of facts. Rarely is the simple stochastic parameter of finding people and topics to have fun around in place; the sample is too small, precious, and fragile to be burdened with the kinds of risks that do not anticipate another payout than a laugh. Other forms of risk make more sense to take on. And as part of the trade-off inherent to any interdisciplinary activity, inclusive vocabularies and integrative conceptual terrains tend to stand in opposition to specificity and referentiality, the latter certainly being a central part of most fun art. In turn, these conditions also become an implicit selection mechanism whereby artistic practices that are motorized by fun are repelled by the entrenched aesthetic idioms of art-science and discouraged from integrating with its institutional armature. It is just a pretty hard place to be funny. While this is technically all fine, upending this systemic boredom of the genre is a truly remarkable *fait accompli* signed off by Madeleine Andersson, in particular on full display in *Degenerative Knowledge Production*.

At the core of Andersson's practice is a methodology of perversion. The pervert is at once the compulsory heretic and the incurable apostate (or, put more traditionally, the homosexual). But Andersson's work's perversion is not about abnormality as in the

well-known psychopathological sense of the word; her method is about diversion, where the horror of embodiment and abjection of thinking make up the paths traveled. For someone like Pierre Klossowski, the author of *Living Currency* (1970), perversion takes place when impulses are halted before they enter into their intended productive configuration and rerouted elsewhere. However, this "voluptuous emotion" which precedes the procreative moment cannot be represented by any utopian gesture—it always has a price and its trace is a leash erecting into a novel dimension of capture. To paraphrase Klossowski, the pervert consumes filthily in daylight and sanitizes her "debr" during a "hundredfold" longer night. As an artistic methodology, this type of perversion is about capturing the voluptuous emotion of any certain process and letting its voluptuousness be the *antikythera* device in an exercise of knowledge production. A prediction diverted or a prophecy for a future where instrumentality is wicked and wickedness instrumental. And, yes, perversion has a tendency to be fun.

PERVERSION BY ANDERSSON

*Petrossuality* (2022) was Andersson's first major research-oriented project. *Petrossuality* shaped around the hypothesis that at the heart of the fossil fuel industry and petroculture is sex. Combustion, lubrication, and drilling all adhere to the same petrosexual logic and, as is suggested by the project at large, should be treated as a primary factor in the threifold conjuncture of modernity, capitalism, and extractivism. The various outputs ranged from exhibitions to conference presentations, and traded in claims that were simultaneously unfalsifiable (scientifically perverted) and outrageous (sexually perverted). What if modern productivity, at its essence, is an aggregate of sexual impulses scattered through a geologic prism?

In *Degenerative Knowledge Production* (2024), Andersson turns her attention to explicitly scientific and epistemic matters. The exhibition's ponymous centerpiece, an hour-long movie with a script developed in collaboration with Thomas Moynihan, historicizes how electricity has been the means of discovery of our brain, resulting in an ongoing mirroring exercise between the electric phenomena and the ascription of function, iconicity, and potential to the brain. A carnivalesque stream of found footage passes by, forming a taxonomy of excess and sharing idioms from journalism. A history of self-experimentation, addition, and literal irritability unfolds like *kirigami* illustrations towards the movie's conclusion: stupidity SHOULD NOT BE PERVERTED

PERVERTING THAT WHICH

When applying a methodology of perversion onto the cultural condition of science, a highly interesting space opens. What is a perverted science?

How come modern science has manifold concepts describing the dialectic taking place at its limit, while largely lacking concepts that can describe its diversion? In philosophy of science, there is a persistent infatuation with heroic failures and productive ignorances. However, the unfolding of these theoretical lineages tends to conclude that, at the end of the day, all of this was for the better. The dialectic show must go on. These positions rarely consider the possibility that there is something rotten in the state of science but, crucially, that such rottenness has no intrinsic relation to whether science can actually deliver on its central promises such as being convergent with the true and/or the real. The rotten and the sober are different things. The epistemic conundrum of self-experimentation illustrates this point well. The self-experiment is unfalsifiable (i.e. a Popperian Pervert) because it does not separate observer from observed, or nomena from phenomena. The body of the scientist is interpreting itself in an act happening once and only once, impossible to recreate and out of reach for any exercises in calibrating the cosmic *instrumentarium*. As Andersson's "cognitive" proposition makes clear, the modern conception of intelligence as an affair of the brain relies on this type of unfalsifiable moments—and a vast quagmire is rendered afore us. This land will subsume the stable, but as the choreography of the pervert suggests, a constantly diverted path might be accepted. *I promise that I will step out of line.*

out of line.

In this way, Andersson's critique of progress shares a sensitivity with the ongoing fear of degeneracy in artificial intelligence discourse: the prediction that the learning curve of deep learning models is about to turn downwards on a global scale due to it "eating" its own produce. As a planetary computational reenactment of Pier Paolo Pasolini's 1975 film *Salo, or the 120 Days of Sodom*, or more generally, as a line cutting through the correlationist tendency of exclusively reading thought through thought, these models are deeply entrenched as suppliers of both intellectual sobriety and certainty.

In *Degenerative Knowledge Production*, Andersson proposes that science has a repressed relation to its perversion. And, among all the things out there, science is perhaps the one thing that must not be perverted. It is repressed because it poses a threat to how science is supposed to act within liberal democracies (like Denmark and Sweden).

TRIPLE THREAT

I identify three ways in which perversion threatens science.

THREAT FROM A PERVERTED INSIDE

Inconsistency, artefactual epistemic constraints, or starting at the sheer weirdness of our planet (and others) is a part of the daily operations in most scientific practices. While all scientists have their own takes and stakes, the experience of, for example, inconsistency is both recurrent and vernacularized a part of the game. As many scientific disciplines are grappling with dramatically increased observational

and computational capacities, these effects are felt even stronger today. The higher resolution we get, the more complexity tends to be revealed. Models become strained. Constants start to appear as artifacts. Noise and signal start to speak to each other. As deciphering the productive aspects of both the scientific line of reasoning and the phenomena studied is becoming harder, diverting these processes is becoming easier. This "insider" version of scientific practice is not a part of the public discourse today other than through sun-bleached metaphors cheerleading The Scientific Process® like *being drawn to the unknown*.

THREAT FROM PERVERTED "POST-TRUTH" OR DENIALIST GROUPS

The more widely narrativized threat to the integrity of the scientific deliverables usually is ascribed to anti-vaxxers and comparable denialist groups. Their threat is one where science is disavowed in favor of a mixed bag of anti-establishment discourses. "The perverse syllogism goes as follows: everything in our social life is about money and financial interests, therefore there is no climate change. Something similar happened in the case of Covid. More often than not, a refusal to accept scientific facts, their denial, is just one of the forms taken by the disavowal of the truly traumatic dimension of capitalism."

The disavowal of the truly traumatic dimension of capitalism, in its labeling of the denialists as "post-truth" extends to the liberal democratic narrative at large. They should be seen as two different manifestations of the same disavowal; one resulting in denialism and one resulting in the obliteration of the distinction between science's social authority and scientific authority. The latter is the technocratic malaise and the reason why the denialist groups are perceived in the corrosive image they are given; entail opening a box of worms whose release the establishment technocratic imaginary cannot afford. Andersson's work operates exactly at this amoral, acutely transgressive juncture, between science's authority as science and its authority within the social fabric. In the genre of art-science, this excavation is rare and surprisingly funny.

THREAT FROM ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF PERVERSION

Finally, as Andersson's work points to, perversion was and remains a *condition* for the scientific unraveling of the brain. The sound and true scientific statements around our posturing, tied to the extremely violent and sickening practice of electroshock therapy or lobotomy, i.e. practices appearing as outrageous diversions today. In this case, the threat towards science is both the structural inevitability of the perversion and (similar to the insider threat) how it introduces degeneracy and contingency into a system whose political rationalization in liberal democracy is tied to virtues such as transparency and predictability. Acknowledging perversion as one of the founding fathers of science, and as Andersson calls it "the cogitocracy,"



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Madeleine Andersson

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It is a great pleasure to introduce this publication, published on the occasion of Madeleine Andersson's solo exhibition, *Degenerative Knowledge Production*, at O-Overgaden. The exhibition is the culmination of our INTRÖ program, a one-year postgraduate program offered annually to two artists. With the generous support of Aage and Johanne Louis-Hansen's Foundation, INTRÖ creates a unique opportunity to develop and expand our collaboration with the newest voices in the Danish art scene through a major exhibition and ambitious publication, through which we aim to extend the conversations around the artistic practice and open up space for new material to emerge.

In this particular case, the American curator and writer Adam Kleinman has contributed with a so-called "brief history of stupidity" alongside British philosopher and historian Thomas Moynihan who has written the text "On the Historic Quest to 'Cure' Stupidity with Electricity: From Voltaic Piles to AIs", and finally, Swedish artist Mandus Ridelert has written about "Science Perverted". A warm thank you to all contributors. I also wish to thank our publications editor Nanna Friis and the whole team at O-Overgaden for their efforts in realizing the exhibition, as well as the graphic design team at fanfare for their always dedicated work, and of course not least the artist, Madeleine Andersson, for generously sharing conceptualizations and co-thinking with all of us, through both the exhibition and the making of this very publication.

It is not often that artists set out to battle with the ruling powers of intelligence, but this is nevertheless the case for the first grand-scale solo exhibition by visual artist Madeleine Andersson.

For O-Overgaden, Andersson uncovers stupidity and absurdity as inherent to the systemic, scientific understandings of the brain and body—a speed-up, research-led story of moving images and sculptural gestures. Andersson's major new film piece,

*Degenerative Knowledge Production*, centers on electricity's use as a metaphor and means to optimize, control, and classify the human brain as dumb, intelligent, or dead. The 75-minute film brews together punkish grainy images found crawling YouTube, popular feature films, and old documentaries, while a voiceover recounts how the history of electric brain experiments supports what Andersson coins the "cogioocracy"—the hegemonic rule of both the cognitive and cogito (thinking) or, plainly, how today's society could be said to be controlled not by the people's democracy but by rulers of the mind: the cogioocracy.

Another shorter film piece, *Me, ordering a mind control spell off Etsy to be cast on myself*, results from Andersson purchasing an esoteric "personalized" video of a mind spell in defiance of systemic (cogioocratic) "mind control". Equally defiant is a wall of buckets—creating an obstructive architecture formed by 1:1-scale replicas of the plastic containers in a Danish collection of preserved brains—whose odd occasional hair growth is escaping the autopsied, archived systematization.

Ripping apart rational or "clever" optimization in surreal combinations of inherently foreign things, the exhibition jests with the ivory tower of knowledge to understanding intelligence and stupidity as codependent—calling for degenerative, erratic, humorous, flawed, creative, psychodelic, and stupid plasticity as a part of the human tissue.

Rhea Dall,  
Director and Chief Curator, O-Overgaden,  
December 2024

Madeleine Andersson (b. 1993, SE) is a graduate of the Royal Danish Art Academy (2022) and lives and works in Copenhagen. Andersson has previously exhibited at venues including documenta Institute, Kassel (2024), Fargfabriken, Stockholm (2023), Galerie 35m2, Prague (2023), and Bærum Kunsthall (2022).

## INTRODUCTION





