

# Functions of realist art in Sweden, circa 1970

Lena Svedberg & Olle Kåks

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What is the function of realist expression in the art of the 1970s, that is, after Modernism? A lesson from Modernism was that an actual “real” could never be reached, touched, or attained in art, nor even directly represented. Realist art also relates to material-technological regimes and discourses that make up reality. Following the models of Lacanian psychoanalysis and of Benjaminian materialist analysis of shifting technologies of reproduction, a desire for the “real” could be felt throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s, as realist aspirations became central again in many parts of the world, not least from our vantage point of Northern Europe and Sweden. In some respects this realist vogue was similar to that in the nineteenth century in Europe and Russia, but it also differs, we argue, from all historical versions, from bourgeois realism to socialist realism. What was at stake is better captured by the term social realism, but most of all by what was referred to at the time in Sweden as “new realism”.

In 1976, the Swedish art critic Bengt Olvång expressed his eagerness for artists to focus on the content or subject matter that needed to be communicated to the public, rather than on form or style. Recalling an old dichotomy, Olvång distinguished between an interest in the actual content and a contrasting mode of representation devoted to ap-

## abstract

The concepts of social realism and new realism are developed in relation to the artworks of Lena Svedberg and Olle Kåks. A comparison between the artists' uses of the concepts of social realism and function is presented. How the realist approach during the years around 1970 played out in the force field of society and the psyche, the collective realm and the individual, is exemplified by our two very different case studies. Svedberg's political narratives compose montages in which fictional, metaphorical figures are inserted side by side with political leaders drawn from newspaper clips. Kåks's allegory-like oil painting shows a stone worker working in the face of his imminent disappearance. They both reveal myths as opposed to historically manifested commodity relations.

**KEY WORDS:** Realism, Lena Svedberg, Olle Kåks, Jacques Lacan.

pearance, aesthetic sensibility, or downright abstraction, which he vehemently disliked.<sup>1</sup> Preferring realist to abstract art begs the question what kind of realism is meant. In order to express what he viewed as the “right” kind of realism in images, ambiguous as they are, a further distinction is needed: the independent left-wing realism that Olvång and his peers championed, as opposed to residues of academic, bourgeois painting habits lumped together (inaccurately) as right-wing. Sometimes, this distinction is described as *critical* versus *affirmative* realism. Before affirming their relevance, however, we should perhaps ask ourselves whether criticality cannot enter from either side, or both, or whether the left's repeated emphasis on the critical as a positive value is not also affirmative in itself.

In Sweden, there has never been any politically imposed aesthetic doctrine on realism (socialist, capitalist, or any other kind). But there was keen interest in realism as an idiom in the visual arts, and it had decidedly political ramifications. The cultural climate during the 1960s and 1970s was “leftist” or socialist. By the 1960s, “reality” was permeated by mass media images and new technology (television and early computing in particular). Popular culture had become overtly sexualized and violent. The “new” realism that saw the light of day around 1970 in Sweden was not uniform.



Lena Svedberg,  
*Indomitable Aldman*  
– *Superhero of the id*,  
1969, first picture (ink  
and gouache washes,  
pencil drawing, and  
photo collage on paper.  
Series of 57 paper  
sheets, each 50 x 70  
cm.) Moderna Museet  
Collection, purchased  
1970.

known as *Herr Aldman – Superhero av värld-salltet/Mr. Aldman – Superhero of the Universe* (1969). This work originally had the more evocative English title *Indomitable Aldman – Superhero of the id*.<sup>4</sup> Our second case is Olle Kåks' s oil painting *Stenarbetaren/The Stoneworker* (1970). While the former could be described as a paradigmatic example of critical social realism, with its explicit political content and strong satirical edge, the latter is typically referred to as affirmative – poetic, individualist, or bourgeois. The two artists, who had not much in common, were actually compared in a questionnaire on realism by the influential art journal *Konstrevy* in 1970.

Lena Svedberg's work, which was strongly associated with the underground journal *Puss* is described by the editor Leif Nylén as not only contrary to, but indeed "contradicting", the work of Olle Kåks.<sup>5</sup> Nylén's opinion seems to have been that Svedberg was very clear about her political position while Kåks was not.

**BESIDES THE FACT** that both artists appear as examples of realism in this 1970 issue of *Konstrevy*, is it still justified to discuss both of them in terms of social realism? Furthermore, are the terminological camps of criticality and affirmation still apt to characterize their respective artwork? In the decades that have passed since these images were conceived, Svedberg's reputation has arguably outstripped Kåks's, despite the fact that her career was prematurely interrupted, while Kåks had a long productive life and was featured during the 1980s and 1990s as a key Swedish painter, during which time Svedberg was marginalized together with others in the genre of political satire.<sup>6</sup>

Keeping in mind, also, that "it would be a mistake to distinguish over-hastily [...] between an affirmative and a critical realism",<sup>2</sup> we try to keep an open mind about this issue for the time being.

Before we look for "functions" of realist art in Sweden, as our title announces, this term needs explaining. A function does not merely indicate how something works; it is tantamount to a foreseeable outcome. There is an element of calculation here, which could be connected with the overall repoliticization of culture in Europe during the long 1960s in particular. The *Online Etymology Dictionary* traces the meaning of this word to the 1530s, when the noun referred to "one's proper work or purpose; power of acting in a specific proper way", drawn from the Latin *functionem* for "a performance, an execution".<sup>3</sup> The performative aspect of function is key; functions are not only foreseeable outcomes, they constitute processes of arriving there. A function is the realization of an aim.

Our first case of functional realism is Lena Svedberg's series



Lena Svedberg, *Indomitable Aldman* amid “the information”; with all the lost UN declarations for the safe return of Palestinian refugees; and with J.F. Kennedy uttering his famous phrase.

After this brief introduction to Lena Svedberg’s and Olle Kåks’ work, followed by a section on realism and the trajectory from social to new realism, an interpretation follows, including background information. The concepts of social realism and new realism are developed in relation to the artworks. Then a comparison between the artists’ uses of the concepts of social realism and its function is presented with a conclusion. How the realist approach during the years around 1970 played out in the force field of society and the psyche, the collective realm and the individual, is exemplified by our two very different case studies.

### A note on realism

The “real” in realism does not refer to reality pure and simple, i.e. to some unmarked condition of being in the world. Realism is not a descriptive reference to the real or reality, but a critical term. Realism is indistinguishable from desire.<sup>7</sup> It could be the desire, for example, of Caravaggio in the mid-1600s to break with the prevailing decorum of religious iconography, or the desire of Gustave Courbet in the mid-1800s to reveal the true nature of social existence as concealed by bourgeois ideology and the conventions of academic painting. Realism can also imply the aesthetic desire to make the world visible, as in Gustave Flaubert’s novels or in Édouard Manet’s paintings of mundane objects.<sup>8</sup>

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, photography had

been embraced by painters to enhance their realist ambitions. During the 1960s, photorealism was openly deployed in order to challenge the historical institution of more or less realist painting and representation – indeed even the institution of art as such – and to embrace new technologies and popular mass culture. The photorealist artists sought to undermine facile references to a realist code, by pointing to the constructed and artificial character of any realist picture.

In all the above examples of realism, there are distinct and known enemies: the Church, academic painting, abstract formalism, and the established capitalist art world, respectively. We can collect these clearly delineated discursive references and call them “antithetical realism”. These are used to set up a dialectical game in which representations of thesis or antithesis are sometimes

located only in the mind. Had the term *realism* been merely an open reference to the real and reality, which is precisely what the rhetoric of realism still maintains, the opposite or counterpart would simply have been the unreal, nonreal, fictional or imaginary. But the paradox of realism – in all its forms and political tonalities – is that the non-realist case is never just an empty negative term, the nonreal or fictional in place of the factual. Instead, we argue, it is *another ideal*, hence a function. According to *Encyclopedia Britannica*, realism in the arts refers to “the accurate, detailed, unembellished depiction of

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Pictures of an unidentified person, Norman Mailer, and Fidel Castro.

nature or of contemporary life. Realism rejects imaginative idealization in favor of a close observation of outward appearances.<sup>9</sup> Such commonplace polarization fails to register the dialectic tensions which any strong desire for “unembellished depiction” reveals. For Courbet, whose Realist manifesto of 1855 famously opened the field of realism in the arts, the new style was “the negation of the Ideal”,<sup>10</sup> and by ideal, he referred to the classical academic tradition. It can be argued that this active negation, which has been connected with the onset of Modernism, lays bare the strong desire of the movement. In the case of Socialist realism, however, the outcome was that the real emerged as a new ideal. In socialist realism, the element of idealization is part of the scholarly definition of the movement:

**Following the example of Courbet, they [the Socialist realists] declared that art should lay bare the ills of society. It was argued, however, that after the Revolution these ills has been removed and the function of art now lay in an idealization of the benefits of the dictatorship of the proletariat.<sup>11</sup>**

Realist art’s “function” is thus to bring about an “idealization” that works as a motivation for the new terms of political existence and compensates for the lack of economic incentive and market fame. This form of realism is hard to dissociate from idealism (but for the fact that the latter also includes bourgeois culture, academic values, and imagination). Idealism is said to be the intellectual opposite of materialism, thus we need

an algorithm designed to calculate relations between historical materialism and collective imaginary response, if we are to believe Benjamin. Why? Because otherwise we miss something important: the interpretation as part of the phantasmagoria, the dialectical dream image.

### From social realism to new realism

In Sweden in the 1960s and 70s, a powerful wave of social realism made itself felt. The term is typically said to represent “a democratic tradition of independent socially motivated artists, usually of left-wing or liberal persuasion.” Furthermore, it “almost always utilizes a form of descriptive or critical realism”.<sup>12</sup> With the preceding distinction in mind, between “affirmative” and “critical” realism, we may wonder whether here is yet another way of addressing a conflict of sorts within the concept of social realism: “descriptive or critical” – as if the critical version did not proceed by describing, and the descriptive version was neither “left-wing or liberal”, that is politically oriented, and merely bent on describing outward appearances. The truth of most examples of social realism in art is rather that they embrace elements of both. On the other hand, the statement connects to contemporary news reports, television, documentaries, and popular culture, which belong to a world of global interaction deeply entangled in capitalism. In relation to composition and narration, social realism was often built on semiotic structures of inversion or grotesque turns.

In art history, realism is typically conceived of as a style based on the artist’s attitude vis-à-vis reality or the world. The style of



Lena Svedberg.



The periodical Puss [Kiss].

realism in nineteenth-century Russia or France is fairly recognizable, with its peasants, workers, and shaggy members of the proletariat, in a palette of ochre and dark greens.<sup>13</sup> Socialist realism was never one style, but rather “a method of creation”.<sup>14</sup> Neither was it merely an attitude, which would falsely suggest the presence of a choice or alternative for the artists, as in France or Russia of the mid-nineteenth century. Instead it was a program invented to prevent the bad and promote the good in equal measures, and ultimately to create a new socialist human being.

**HOW COULD REALISM** – visualizations of the actual, the genuine, the gory, and the particular – function as a critical idiom for social justice in this situation? In order to follow the systematic nature of functions, realism is expected to have certain effects, as in “press button and watch outcome”, or as one would calculate the trajectory of a bullet in order to kill. For this to happen, the interpretation of an image needs to include the beholders’ emotional response. Here is how Walter Benjamin explains “the opposition between materialist and universalist modes of representation”:

**The universalist mode is always idealistic because undialectical. Dialectic in fact inevitably moves toward representing each thesis or antithesis that it encounters as the fresh synthesis of a triadic structure, and in this way it penetrates ever deeper into the interior of the objects and only via the latter does it represent a universe. Any other concept of a universe is without object, idealist.**<sup>15</sup>

Agit-prop socialist realism clearly makes use of this assumption to serve society.<sup>16</sup> So did social realism, in a critical way. How could we argue that one or the other pictorial representation produced the real workers’ art – a realist statement on that experience?

Just as there was not one Social realism, the Swedish left was not at all united. In 1967, the artist Carl Johan De Geer was sentenced to prison for an exhibition at Galleri Karlsson<sup>17</sup> that included Swedish flags and antinationalist slogans. In response to this incident, his fellow artist Lars Hillersberg founded the notorious underground magazine *Puss [Kiss]*. In the late 1960s there was violent dissension within the left, with numerous factions and new organizations.<sup>18</sup> And whereas bourgeois and rightist camps raved against Minister of Culture and Education Olof Palme as a state socialist, the radical left identified the Swedish Social Democratic Party not as an ally, but as an enemy.<sup>19</sup>

The term more widely used than social realism in Sweden at the time was neo-realism [nyrealism].<sup>20</sup> Its French roots in *nouveau réalisme* notwithstanding, it turned out differently in the local Swedish context than in Paris in the early 1960s, and was more associated, perhaps, with the photorealist tendencies of the pop art movement that were introduced at Moderna Museet in 1964.<sup>21</sup> The new realist wave took massive inspiration from the politicization of culture, and balanced uneasily between wanting to speak to the uneducated working class and to left-wing intellectuals. On the whole, however, it took a critical stand against modern capitalism and the art market as part of it, in solidarity with the workers and ordinary people. Some of the art was blatantly political – on a par with quickly-made propaganda material for demonstrations – while other examples of this art were more ambiguous and indirect, even gloomy and despairing.

## Lena Svedberg

Lena Svedberg composed the synopsis for her *Indomitable Aldman – Superhero of the id* (1969) for the 1969 Paris Biennale des jeunes artistes (Paris Youth Biennial) together with Peter Wanger. It was customary for the editors of *Puss* to bring in cues and clippings or photos for Svedberg to draw.<sup>22</sup> In this case Peter

Wanger provided a story for Lena Svedberg to illustrate. They decided to make a parody of the Superman comic genre. Aldman was given two superpowers: one was the ability to inflate to the size of a highrise building, and the other to roll himself in tar and feathers and fly.<sup>23</sup>

A close-up of Aldman sets the tone of the plot on the very first page: the right side of his face looks normal while the left side stares psychotically. The protagonist with this Yiddish-sounding name looks like an antihero, a ridiculous drunkard with a large nose. However, in the last four images, he ends up as an “acclaimed hero of / Labour (by the central committee)”. His characterization as “indomitable” links to the Id of Freudian psychoanalysis. He cannot be curbed or tamed; he is constantly overtaken by impulses.<sup>24</sup> In 57 scenes, Svedberg and Wanger compose a narrative based on events that were then unfolding, with a focus on Palestine and the Middle East but also including events in the USA and Cuba, as well as in Europe (e.g. “the Democratic Republic of North Ireland”).<sup>25</sup> With grim humor, she renders world politico-economic and religious conflicts. Her methods and techniques are ingenious. We propose that this montage or constellation reveals myths while at the same time absolving the artist from the responsibility of making an adequate representation of the Israel-Palestine conflict. The faces in the images fall into three categories. Historic, public persons are evidently based on media footage. Aldman and the Lady are drawn freehand but remain recognizable. There are other characters in the plot that are harder to identify. The latter two categories tend to be involved in sexual activities and/or slovenly dressed. Throughout the story, colors remain restricted to an impeccable triad of black, white and beige, with occasional red accents.

**SVEDBERG'S METHOD** for producing social realist pictures is complex: In the first register of realism identifiable public personalities like politicians, performers, activists, etc.), the faces are copied from contemporary media. Then there is a second register of reality consisting of the “anti-heroes” of the story: Aldman (the “Jew”) and the Lady (she remains nameless, but has all the attributes of a Madonna/prostitute figure) both grotesque stereotypes but also therefore recognizable. Finally, there are more or less abstract characters, caricatures, shrunk or stretched and sometimes based on press portraits, but in a cut-and-paste technique with sexualized overtones that create absurd settings. The narrative cartoon elements in Lena Svedberg's *Aldman*, including speech bubbles, anchor the story in a satirical tradition in which a fleeting and particular image, with comments on political events in the contemporary world, intersects with the historical relations of production. We believe that Svedberg thus produced pictures close to those envisioned by Walter Benjamin in relation to the Western capitalist art world.<sup>26</sup> If it came at the price of heavy dependence on current debates in the media, it would not have made any difference. The longevity of art that

is a quality of Olle Kåks's worker motif would be sacrificed for the benefit of more urgent popular education in the form of Brechtian agit-prop.

In the second picture, Aldman has collapsed on a table with a bottle in his hand. A caption tells us that he “gathers strength through meditation”. The Lady throws herself on him. Our interpretation of the *Aldman* suite relies heavily on Fredrik Liew's 2014 catalog, published in connection with the exhibition that he curated at Moderna Museet that year. Thanks to his generous publication of one of the pictures, we have arrived at a slightly different characterization of the Lady, who becomes more of a pushy brothel madam.<sup>27</sup> In picture number four, the Lady cries and urges Aldman to help her find the country she left 22 years ago (“Find it for me, huh”).<sup>28</sup> If this promised land has been lost for 22 years and Svedberg made the suite in 1969, her claim leaves us at the year 1947. This was just after World War II; India and Pakistan were separated, and Israel was created from Palestine. The UN had many reservations, as we shall see.

A few pages later, Aldman lands in Beirut helped by one of his superpowers – flight by tar and feathers. In what looks like a newspaper stand, he runs into Noam Chomsky (if we have identified him correctly).<sup>29</sup> The US polymath (linguist, philosopher, and anarchist political activist opposed to the US invasion of Vietnam) is known to support a proposal under which Arabs and Jews would live together in Palestine/Israel. The picture sheet contains several references to historic French rebellions, such as “L'enragé” – “the enraged” – a satirical periodical of the 1968 student revolts, named after a faction in the Revolution of 1789. Aldman, with an issue of *Puss* in his hand, seems dumbstruck by all the media messages and asks, “Could you give me some information?” Like some modern counterpart to Dante Alighieri's guide Virgil in *The Divine Comedy*, Chomsky (?) gives Aldman a tip: “Try at the market place”.<sup>30</sup>

**THE STORY LINE GOES ON:** “On his way to the market Aldman finds a resolution that could have changed the course of history but Aldman has lost his glasses”. Poor Aldman desperately searches through his pockets. Nailed to the wall behind him is a poster that reads “Resolution ONU [French: UN Resolution] 194 (III) § 11 [issued in 1948, concerning the right to return for Palestine refugees]; 1456 (XIV) 1959, 1604 (XV) 1961 [...]” – listing all UN resolutions made since 1948. Perhaps we are to understand Aldman's lost glasses as a bad excuse for not seeing these lost opportunities.

Some pictures later, we see Aldman as a small figure behind J.F. Kennedy. In the black picture space, Aldman can be seen as a puppeteer saying “hypocrite lecteur” (“hypocrite reader”) to a hand puppet Kennedy speaking his famous words “Ich bin ein Berliner” (written over his mouth in capital letters) while he seems to don an Arab headdress. The next picture is dominated by a face saying: “[I]’m the superjew”,

## “WITH GRIM HUMOR, SHE RENDERS WORLD POLITICO- ECONOMIC AND RELIGIOUS CONFLICTS.”



while Aldman's head pops up as if behind a screen, confirming: "mon semblable" [my kin]. In the next scene, Aldman is juxtaposed with Norman Mailer against the same theatrical black background. Mailer says, "[I]'m the white negro", and Aldman counters, "mon frère" (my brother). This is a reference to Mailer's article "The White Negro: Superficial Reflections on the Hipster".<sup>31</sup>

So nothing is what it seems to be. Svedberg has included the words "hypocrite lecteur", "mon semblable", and "mon frère" from Charles Baudelaire's introduction to *Les fleurs du mal* (1857), a poem called "Au lecteur".<sup>32</sup> It is an instruction for a reader who is about to learn of the malevolent side of mankind: double *entendres*, false consciousness and depravity. All these pictures seem to mock UN world political negotiations as if the outcomes were already decided behind the scenes. An oil pipeline comes to serve as the mythical Ariadne's red thread that helped her lover Theseus find the way out of the Minotaur's labyrinth. The pipeline helps Aldman to find the place where the leaders of the Vatican, the USA, the Soviet Union, Israel, Palestine, Egypt, France, South Africa, and Ethiopia have gathered to plot. It seems they came to the region not only with the agenda to stabilize it; they also had geopolitical and economic motives connected to oil.

LENA SVEDBERG'S constellations of words and images from different contexts ape appearances, feign sincerity, and suggest that the only possible outcome was insincerity. What if we did a reading of her satirical *Aldman* story based on Walter Benjamin's theory of dialectical images?<sup>33</sup> It could set up connections between the oil economy and political arrangements to secure access to it. It could also use the three registers of reality to spell out the dialectics as a thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. But to make any sense of this message of words and pictures is a daunting task 40 years later. According to Peter Wanger, Lena Svedberg worked faster than he did so in the end she came to decide how the story would unfold.<sup>34</sup> There were many loose threads as a result. The images were perhaps not meant to last longer than the Paris Biennial where Svedberg's audience would recognize their own truth, the *Jetztzeit*. Some characters can be recognized from the press such as the Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat with his keffiyeh, the Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser, and the French President Charles de Gaulle. These become clues that make it just possible to get a basic grip on the story. Those who read French and English may also identify political topics related to names or titles. But it would require an extensive search to identify verbal quotations (and paraphrase) from political leaders, theorists, and social activists. We need to approach Svedberg's imagery through other kinds of contexts to understand the tone and the critical social realism of *Aldman*. What could explain her emotional investment?

There is the obvious biographical context. Lena Svedberg

was born in 1946 in Gothenburg. Two years later her family moved to Stockholm. Her father Nils Svedberg was an economist and lawyer at the Swedish National Audit Office. Through Swedish missionary and foreign aid organisations he got the opportunity to work as one of many foreign advisors to the Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie. That was in 1959, and thirteen-year-old Lena Svedberg and her younger sister Lotta went with their parents. Their mother Greta Svedberg coorganised an infrastructure through which Swedish couples could adopt Ethiopian children. Having spent five years in Addis Ababa, Lena Svedberg returned to Stockholm in 1964.<sup>35</sup> She must have been startled by the contrast, having followed her mother to various Ethiopian villages, on returning to a welfare state. Back in Stockholm she pursued her artistic career. At the Royal Academy of Fine Arts, she met Lars Hillersberg and they became friends.

HER TOOLS WERE cheap materials, a visual style based on figuration, and a satirical plot in cartoon format where a snappy formulation could be made graphically expressive. In fact many graphic artists preferred ephemeral and visually effective reproductions on paper to unique oil paintings or sculptures. Indeed, graphic media had proved their worth in the 1968 Paris student revolt.<sup>36</sup>

The May revolt in Paris 1968 had one of its cores in the École des Beaux-Arts, where during some hectic spring weeks an *Atelier populaire* produced no less than 30 posters, most of them made as serigraphs and linoleum cuts, primitive in technique, basic in content. Of course General de Gaulle was primarily caricatured and criticized. The pictures varied in quality, but no one could miss the fierceness of the attacks. In Sweden, a corresponding activity arose.<sup>37</sup>

Just as some media were thought of as more effective than others, the Paris Youth Biennial was considered an interesting venue, particularly since this 1969 edition took place only one year after the Parisian students' revolt. Another Swedish contribution to the Paris biennial, Anders Petersen's photographic series *Café Lehmitz*, can be seen in Liew's 2014 catalogue below Lena Svedberg's *Aldman*. The *Puss* editors also sent an issue.<sup>38</sup> Could it have been the 1969 issue with a cover by Ulf Rahmberg, visible in the scene where Aldman asks Chomsky for "information"? There are many similarities between the graphically effective and poetic slogans associated with the French artists collective Situationist International's *Atelier populaire* and the posters by Svedberg's editor colleagues at *Puss*, Karin Frostenson, Carl Johan De Geer, Lars Hillersberg, and Ulf Rahmberg.

The last four pictures present a clear verbal message, but the figures are more difficult to identify. The first two seem to include representatives of the Black Civil Rights Movement but

## "INDEED, GRAPHIC MEDIA HAD PROVED THEIR WORTH IN THE 1968 PARIS STUDENT REVOLT."



Courbet, *The Stonebreakers*, oil on canvas, 1849 (destroyed)

Olle Kåks, *Stenarbetaren (The Stoneworker)*, oil on canvas (210x240 cm), 1970. Norrköpings Konstmuseum

there are also others; some are performers known to have spoken up against racial discrimination in the USA. A caption in red runs across the last four sheets: “Aldman is / ACCLAIMED HERO OF / LABOUR (by the central comittée) / Happy End.” Written in black on the first of the four is the legend: “But the Lady leaves for where her skills still are needed” – and indeed the Lady cries in the lower left corner of the picture space: “I’ll go to Tel Aviv where they still need me.”<sup>39</sup> So we are left to guess whether the Lady’s last words imply that Tel Aviv is particularly sinful. In the second of the four concluding pictures, there are militant activists from the USA: the philosopher Angela Davis; the author-artist Valerie Solanas (in a hat); Stokely Carmichael, the member of Black Panther Party’s armed branch (wearing glasses); Eldridge Cleaver, the founding member of the Black Panther Party (in the middle on lower row); among others.<sup>40</sup> In the last but one picture, Aldman sits on musician Frank Zappa’s shoulders, hands raised to the sky, in celebration of the fact that he has been “ACCLAIMED HERO OF LABOUR (by the central comittée)”. Besides Frank Zappa, the group includes Malcolm X (?), a leader of the Nation of Islam; the philosopher Susan Sontag (?); and the US comedian Lenny Bruce (and a man whom neither of us can identify). In the final picture, there is a photorealistic portrait image of Fidel Castro with “Happy End” written by hand, and a typed note glued to the lower right corner. It says:

Presumptive U.S. buyers are notified that the last picture, representing the Cuban minister president Fidel Castro, can be removed on request and the words Happy End repainted in white on the nearest adjacent picture, which depicts no persons connected to countries against which the U.S. maintain trade blockade.

Love

Lena [Svedberg] & Peter [Wanger]

## Olle Kåks

The Swedish artist Olle Kåks (1941–2003), painter, graphic artist and sculptor, was trained at the Royal Academy (1962–1968) where he later became professor of art (1979–1987) and rector (1987–1999), and remained a board member until his death. In contrast to the short life and ambivalent career of Lena Svedberg, Kåks was an important proponent of the most established field of high art in Sweden from the later 1970s until his death.

His oil painting *Stenarbetaren (The Stoneworker)* is fairly large and was finished in 1970. It was one of eight paintings shown in the exhibition *Svenskt alternativ (Swedish Alternative)* at Moderna Museet the same year. The show then travelled to the Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, to Louisiana in Denmark, and to two venues in Norway in 1971. While the eight paintings of the suite are now dispersed in various locations, this one is an important part of the collection of Norrköpings Konstmuseum in Sweden. The scarce literature on Olle Kåks tends to highlight his personal views and private struggles, as the following quotation may exemplify:

**The metaphors in these paintings are both intricate and provocative. Here the artist shows the fluctuation between vulnerability and the newly achieved confidence in his work as an artist. With their considerable size, 240 x 210 cm, the paintings captured the attention of the spectators and place them right in the center of the narrative.**<sup>41</sup>

This line of reading is not what I will pursue in this essay, but the last sentence, on the position of the whether, is important. But what narrative could possibly be alluded to here? In my interpretation, this painting is hardly narrative at all, but more an emblem or allegory. Not even the suite of eight paintings form a legible narrative, as far as I can see. What is indeed “intricate”





Gerhard Nordström, *Ödehuset* [*The Abandoned House*], 1974.

is how realist elements appear as if mounted on a blank canvas or empty space, seeming precisely to undo any coherent realist content or message.

Narrative or not, let us begin by addressing what is actually seen going on in *The Stoneworker*, alternating from form to content and back again. The painting displays a man working, obviously a stone worker wielding his hammer. He is dressed in a clearly recognizable blue worker's outfit. The cap alone was a clear enough sign of the worker in 1970, which is no longer quite the case. His gloves and shoes are a little clumsy, big and protective. He is all alone, which is emphasized by the empty space that opens up around him. Also, his central position highlights his singularity, if not his individuality. The viewer can make out that the man is not young, but elderly, near retirement. The worker holds a similar pose – although viewed from a different angle – to one of the two workers in Gustave Courbet's famous – now sadly lost – painting *The Stonebreakers* from 1849.

Whether or not this reference to Courbet is intentional, it was clearly in tune with a general interest in the French version of Realism and its socialist underpinnings during this period. For example, *Konstrevy* no. 4 of 1970 featured a theme section on Realism, in which eight contemporary Swedish artists responded to a questionnaire on Realism (continued in the next issue). Also included were an article on Courbet and an article on Realism in the GDR and the USA. But whether Kåks found this connection to be important or just amusing is hard to determine. Regardless of his view, it adds importantly to the historical trajectory struck between new and old realist aspirations, which share a similar sense of social conscience and even revolutionary pathos.

**OLLE KÅKS IS NOT** a typical exponent of realism, much less of *social* realism, since the qualifier is commonly understood as a leftist political marker connoting Socialism. His work is typically associated with a kind of lyrical relationship to nature, and has always toyed with elements of abstraction, often in productive friction with realist elements. His imagery has been connected with something “quiz-like” and his style with elements that

normally contradict realist aspirations: “enigmatic symbols”.<sup>42</sup> The realism displayed in this picture has only some rather vague signs of the social, such as the worker's clothes and tools, and, importantly, the plastic line with dangling flags or cards used at the time to prevent people from interfering with temporary construction work in public spaces, to which I will return.<sup>43</sup> Apart from these signs, however, the composition as a whole seems strikingly empty, dismal and deprived of life and sociality – or should we use the term abstract here? The core definition of abstraction in art has nothing to do with purity or spiritual elevation, although these links have become established, but with subtraction or concrete withdrawal, i.e. that something that previously existed or at least was expected has been taken away. If that applies to this painting,

we can only guess what exactly has been removed.

In the standard work on the artist, Olle Granath's monograph *Olle Kåks: Ett konstnärsporträtt* (1980), a biographic clue is provided to the reading of this image: “How he experienced his own entry into the working classes is described in ‘The Stoneworker’, where a man sits and works his chisel into a thin sheath of granite which separates him from a black abyss.”<sup>44</sup> Whether the artist and future academic dignitary himself had the experience of entering the working classes by depicting a worker is not for us to say. But it is telling that the quote concentrates on the abstract element in front of the scene, the “black abyss”, without also mentioning the corresponding white “sky”. Both these parts of the pictorial construction must be – actually: are – interrelated, which contributes to our experience of it.

**LET US TRY** to divide this picture further into its parts, in order to come closer to its dramatic construction. Apart from the first pair: the white field above and the corresponding black below, the figure and his granite plateau are another part, we suggest, that is an interconnected pair. Neither of them is actually completely true to nature, as it were, in this respect sharing some affinity with the completely abstract first pair. Is not the worker seen as if in a haze, sketched as a topos or a symbol, rather than in flesh and blood? And is not the stone platform rendered almost organically, reminiscent of the wrinkled cheeks of Jan Håfström's famous monument of his grandmother in a painting from 1972?<sup>45</sup> The stone crust looks as fleshlike as the worker appears dry and bleak, as either an allegorical figure or a dream image of an anticipated future (in which the proletariat has vanished). His reality, so to speak, based on his apparent materiality must be questioned.

Returning to the more obvious plane of content, the centered worker, with a face just as anonymous and partly hidden as that of Courbet's counterpart, appears isolated as an image within the overall picture. The unidentified worker is portrayed as an “unknown soldier” digging his own grave, or the last man left on earth, oblivious to the fact that visually

speaking, the world around him has all but disappeared. Yet the worker works. The worker is identified according to a social typology by his activity. The unknown worker still works, going through the motions regardless of the environment, where the reasons for executing real work and the contextual clues as to what kind of work appear to have vanished. Is this heroic, or the reverse: mindless robotlike activity on the brink of the abyss?

What the worker seems unaware of, as opposed to the viewer, is the huge black nothingness, or “constitutive blank” in Wolfgang Kemp’s term opening up beneath the thin skin of the rock. Cracking this open will at least endanger his position, if not cause his fall. Something is about to crack here, and the fate of the worker and his entire class seems unclear. And what about the other blank here, the all-white “sky” or emptiness surrounding the figure? Is this merely an unoccupied space, if also eerily unrealistic, in which the occupation of the worker becomes legible? Or does it signify something more specific?

The whole picture is quiet enough but pervaded by a sense of danger. It prompts us to ask questions, and to figure out how this scene became possible. To conclude so far, the composition is fraught with conflict or internal disruption, in the sense of the worker being isolated twice from both a stabilizing background and foreground (as any conventional realist painting would require). In their stead, a blank white “sky” hovers beyond and a pitch-black abyss opens up in front and below the figure. Also, the worker is in a kind of symbiotic relationship, it could be argued, with the earth or foundation on which he both sits and on which he works (by chipping it away). Let us turn now from these two interconnected pairs to the third and arguably most important part of this picture.

**IN HIS ANALYSIS** of some French nineteenth-century paintings, in which blanks are conspicuous, Wolfgang Kemp devises three elements: “a blank; a participant in the action [...] and an element helping to create the picture’s perspective...”<sup>46</sup> Much the same is applicable here, although the image has two blanks, not one. It has one actor and one “element helping to create the picture’s perspective”, and that element is, first and foremost (literally as well as figuratively speaking), the plastic line with dangling cards that crosses our visual field. Needless to say, we could easily point out that the depicted figure is himself rendered in perspective, with the help of foreshortening and placement – a little distanced from us, and with some suggested space behind him. The placing of the plastic line is on a different level, however. It suggests, indeed contains, another perspective, by its reference to *trompe l’oeil* – the old trick that fools the eye into believing that it sees something as real that is not. *The Stoneworker* clearly plays, consciously or not, with this Baroque tradition, in its play-

ful use of the plastic demarcation line crossing the scene horizontally, the supports of which are nowhere to be seen, located somewhere outside the picture frame. This plastic element thus almost literally or plastically stretches the image screen horizontally, as if the relatively flat picture continues on both sides. As if the picture, large as it is, is not large enough for the pictorial elements, the drama, it contains.

The compositional element of the plastic line creates the effect of a line appearing to hover both beyond the picture horizontally and in front of the picture itself, at least when we gaze in the direction of the worker. The latter effect suggests that this element is not really painted but indeed real. The plastic line thus heightens the sense of a real of the picture, but decreases, at the same time, our reception of the image in the picture – the worker working – as itself real. The realism of the stoneworker could be attributed iconographically to the fact that the artist has depicted a worker, but formally, the case is less clear-cut.

According to Michael Fried’s line of reasoning, this sort of composition toys with devices of absorption, where the figure is uncommunicative, neither willing or able to extend a glance towards us, totally preoccupied as he is with his activity.<sup>47</sup> The

effect of such a pictorial rhetoric, in contrast to melodramatic compositions of theatricality where figures reach out in gestures and look towards us, as in Lena Svedberg’s *Aldman* series, is to capture the viewer more effectively than would the painter could do in a more active and explicit way. We do not know whether this painter would have entertained such theories. Kåks eventually became a bourgeois painter of naked female flesh and semi-abstract decorations, with no obvious political implications – other than being ostensibly

“private” and voluptuously laid back, which is of course a clear political option as well. But, again, that level of interpretation is not what is pursued here. We think the picture as it stands or hangs has an agency of its own, regardless of any level of authorial intention.

In 1974, Kåks’s contemporary Gerhard Nordström, one of the most overtly political of the new realist painters of the period, composed an oil painting called *Ödehuset* (*The Abandoned House*). The pictured house is of a kind typical in southern Sweden. It looks empty with a rather overgrown garden. Nothing at all is visible in its windows. The mostly white house seems filled with blank nothingness or pure darkness, similar to the kind we see in Kåks’s *Stoneworker*. From where the viewer stands, we are also cautioned visually not to enter, even trespass, into this garden which is temporarily fenced off with a few horizontal planks, painted yellow and red, and a bit of the same kind of plastic line that we see in Kåks’s picture, with yellow and red cards moving in the wind. In this composition too, the presence of this utterly mundane contemporary device is played against some kind of imminent

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danger – at least against an unknowable void, dark, uncanny, and apparently meaningless. The fact that this slightly later painting uses the same signs is suggestive. Both images make use of these abstract marks to warn us not to enter, either because the house is “abandoned” or because we could fall into the void. That is to say; the plastic line is itself active, as a performative imperative: *do not enter!*

Perhaps we should refrain from asking what this line of plastic *means*, which hinges upon its intentionality or semiotic efficiency, and consider instead what it *does*. What is its pictorial function in *The Stoneworker*? Clearly, it bars us from entering the image, it disallows us phenomenological access to the figure at work. It keeps us at a distance. But does this make us unable to identify and share space with the laborer, and force us into the position of onlooker, locked in compulsory contemplation only?

The really real plastic line – above or in front of the canvas – warns us against stepping into an image: the painted fiction of the worker about to work himself away. The plastic line evokes a warning, not to the worker but to us. It does not belong to the depicted work space, it belongs to our part of the social sphere. It even allots us a space – a socially real realm in which to act and socialize, criticize and discuss pictures like this. Seen in this way, the viewing of the image flips, and the whole direction of the picture is reversed. The picture is not about the worker or work but about us. It warns us, perhaps, not to remain passive in view of this scenario. It *depicts* a scene ingrained in history – the history of the working classes, and of stone masons in particular, as well as of art history (Courbet) – but it *constitutes* a performative: *You are hereby warned!* The worker belongs to history, but the demarcation line is completely contemporary: beware of the abyss, mind the gap between “the social” and its outside, use whatever sociality you can muster instead, on your own conditions, now ... That may not be what the plastic line says, or what the artist intended, but it is part of what it does.

**FOLLOWING BRUNO LATOUR'S** thorough problematization of “the social”, we could perhaps suggest that the plastic line in this picture is defining the social as image, associated with both the Imaginary order in Jacques Lacan’s scheme and with the Symbolic order (of discourse, language, and signs), and hence perpetually at a distance from where we are standing, like a projection or, rather more to the point, a rejection. Something is thrown, not forward but back at us. The Real – the third term of Lacan’s model – is, despite appearances, on our side.<sup>48</sup> It is therefore unrepresentable; indissoluble from us, yet impossible even to image or imagine, to conjure up. It turns the “realistic” image into something merely ideal, a symbolic and thus meaningful representation, ontologically speaking. What the exposi-

tion of the “real” worker working discloses, in the last phase, is the Real of the unfathomable abyss over here.

The stone-worker has, for us, become a thing of the past, to paraphrase G.W.F. Hegel. It speaks of the nineteenth and earlier parts of the twentieth century, and of a recently urbanized and increasingly industrialized form of capitalism. This is not to suggest, however, that no one worked with hammers or chisels on stone any more circa 1970, which would simply be incorrect. But the figure in its splendid isolation, formally and linguistically, has become a memorial, a monument or “image” of another era. Thus the image of the heroic yet realistically unidealized stoneworker is not only an illusion or dream image but an image of the past lingering in the present. The image of the stone worker, in the picture by Kåks with the title, marks a distance, spatially by the plastic line and temporally, where he – in the dark of the abyss – is in the present tense, as yet invisible, unidentifiable, in flux.

The fact, the really real fact, of this picture, is that it is utterly imaginary and a composite image of three “realistic” elements which do not quite add up to a whole. The reality of this picture is not *of* this picture, but outside it. This outside, however, is constructed as such by the picture. The thrust of the canvas is reversed, inside out, towards us, as if an outside gaze penetrated us from within the picture. The real, we realize, is situated before the depicted scene, which is why we can say that the worker works in the mind of the viewer, in a nontangible interior space that is as anonymous as the working worker. This, finally, is another way of saying communal, emphatically non-private. This interiority points out a place of sharing, as social as can be, like politics or death. This is its function. “There, where apparently there is nothing, everything is in fact inscribed...”<sup>49</sup>

**“THE REALITY OF THIS PICTURE IS NOT OF THIS PICTURE, BUT OUTSIDE IT. THIS OUTSIDE, HOWEVER, IS CONSTRUCTED AS SUCH BY THE PICTURE.”**

### Comparison and conclusion

In this article, we have touched on different forms of artistic realism, from nineteenth-century versions to social realism, ending up with the Swedish variant of “new realism”. Olle Kåks’s new realism was a particular idiom of an older social realist paradigm. Lena Svedberg’s version of social realism was partly rooted in Benjaminian fascination with French caricatures and partly in the French *Atelier populaire’s* and the Situationist International’s posters. In the tension between these two historical sources, she creates an experience of capturing a now-moment in which the past returns in flashbacks. This experience could in turn be interpreted as a dialectic at standstill – a historical truth in Walter Benjamin’s sense.

We have, furthermore, problematized the customary polarization between affirmative and critical realism, and emphasized that, contrary to established definitions, realism is not in itself contrary to idealism, but an idealist project of a different kind.



Within a sketched context of artistic practices in the twentieth century, we have presented two Swedish artists – Lena Svedberg and Olle Kåks – who were active around 1970. While they both worked with realist depiction, to say that their imagery and artistic personas were very different, as were their careers and posthumous reputations, is something of an understatement. In our attempt to approach them from the point of view of realist functions, however, we see their dissimilarities decreasing.

In Sweden, the invisibility of inequality meant that Olle Kåks's *Stenarbetaren/The Stoneworker* (1970) could be understood as fetishizing work beyond material rewards. Similar “compensation” in Lena Svedberg's *Indomitable Aldman* (1969) includes carnal pleasures (sex and food) and power (oil trade and military operations). These two strands are joined in the scene where the Lady is cooking macrobiotic food and discovers that its side effect is militarism.<sup>50</sup>

Svedberg's political narratives compose montages where fictional, metaphorical figures are inserted side by side with political leaders drawn from newspaper clips. Kåks's allegory-like oil painting shows a stone worker working in the face of his imminent disappearance. They both reveal myths as opposed to historically manifested commodity relations. Svedberg does this in montages of words and images, mixing fiction and fact – including the Brechtian cartoon format.<sup>51</sup> Neither of them lets go of the fact that realism has gone through many permutations with each new technology. Svedberg in particular copies from photo and film, but also the productive relations – a “second nature”, in Susan Buck-Morss's words, built on the fossil economy. Now, at the end of the combustion-engine epoch, we can also begin to evaluate attitudes to, and modes of, realism and the functions they served in world politics. ❌

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## references

- 1 Bengt Olvång, “Inledning” (1976), *Våga se! Svensk konst 1945–1980*, 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. ed., (Stockholm: Författarförlaget, 1983), 7.
- 2 Wolfgang Kemp, “Death at Work: A Case Study on Constitutive Blanks in Nineteenth-Century Painting”, *Representations*, No. 10 (Spring, 1985):102–23, esp. 106.
- 3 “(Nominative *functio*) [...] noun of action from *funct-*, past participle stem of *fungi* ‘perform, execute, discharge’,” <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=function>, accessed November 14, 2016.
- 4 The English title was chosen for an international audience since the piece was commissioned for the 1969 edition of the *Paris Biennale des jeunes artistes*. Translated into Swedish, it would be *Den Okuvlige Åldringen – det undermedvetnas överman*. Peter Wanger in an e-mail to Charlotte Bydler, May 16, 2016.
- 5 Leif Nylén, “Realism med förbehåll...”, *Konstrevy*, no. 4 (1970): 122–124.
- 6 Lena Svedberg committed suicide in 1972.
- 7 According to the first sentence of a current definition of realism in art, the term refers to a “[m]ovement in mid- to late 19th-century art, in which an attempt was made to create objective representations of the external world based on the impartial observations of contemporary life”. What lurks behind such “attempts” is precisely the desire to effect these representations. J.H. Rubin, “Realism”, in *The Dictionary of Art*, ed. Jane Turner (New York: Grove, 1996), 52.
- 8 Sara Danius, *Den blå tvålen: Romanen och konsten att göra saker och ting synliga*, (Stockholm: Bonniers, 2013); Michael Fried, *Manet's Modernism: or, The Face of Painting in the 1860s*, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996).
- 9 <http://global.britannica.com/art/realism-art>, accessed March 19, 2016
- 10 Rubin, “Realism”, 53.
- 11 David Elliott, “Socialist Realism”, in *The Dictionary of Art*, ed. Jane Turner (New York: Grove, 1996), 919.
- 12 James G. Todd Jr., “Social Realism”, in *The Dictionary of Art*, ed. Jane Turner (New York: Grove, 1996), 919f.
- 13 An excellent overview is still Linda Nochlin, *Realism*, (London: Penguin, 1971).
- 14 Elliott, “Socialist Realism”, 919.
- 15 Walter Benjamin, “Moscow Diary” [1926–1927], *October*, 35 (Winter, 1985) 4, 9–135; here 38.
- 16 Benjamin, “Moscow Diary”.
- 17 Galleri Karlsson on Odenplan in central Stockholm was managed by Bo A. Karlsson from 1964 to 1971. Among the artists he represented we also find Lena Svedberg and Lars Hillersberg.
- 18 Only a few years after 1968, rigorous adherence to doctrines was demanded. Crister Skoglund, “Studentrevolten 1968” (15–56), Anders Burman & Lena Lennerhed (eds.), *Tillsammans: Politik, filosofi och estetik på 1960- och 1970-talen* (Stockholm: Atlas, 2014), 22.
- 19 On Friday, May 25, 1968, Olof Palme was on his way home from the parliament and was tipped off by a colleague that the students were assembling at the Union house. The Swedish students had followed their French counterparts on television as they fought the police and apparently joined forces with the workers. Skoglund, “Studentrevolten”, 18–20.
- 20 “The concept of ‘realism’ changed in the last few years of the 1960s: from ‘neorealism’ to ‘new realism’. This was to do with a transformed intellectual climate coupled with the political development and the escalating oppositional movements of the time.” Thomas Millroth, “Bildkonsten”, *Signums svenska konsthistoria*, (Lund: Signum, 2005), 207.
- 21 Olvång, “Inledning”, 56–59; Anna Tellgren (ed.), *Historieboken: Om Moderna museet 1958–2008* (Stockholm and Göttingen: Moderna Museet & Steidl, 2008); cf. Katarina Wadstein MacLeod, *Den obäddade sängen: Anna Sjödhall och sjuttioalet*, in *Tillsammans: Politik, filosofi och estetik på 1960- och 1970-talen*, ed. Anders Burman and Lena Lennerhed, 389–416 (Stockholm: Atlas, 2014), in which Anna Sjödhall's fervently political feminist version of realism is contrasted with Ola Billgren's distanced version.
- 22 Carl Johan De Geer, interview with the authors, Stockholm, May 9, 2016.
- 23 Peter Wanger, e-mail to Charlotte Bydler, May 16, 2016.
- 24 Fredrik Liew, *Lena Svedberg: Herr Aldman – Superhero av världssalltet*, Stockholm: Galago and Moderna Museet, 2014, 8.
- 25 Lena Svedberg worked with sculpture, collage, ink, oils and gouache. The international exhibitions she participated in during her lifetime included the 1969 Paris Youth Biennial, and the 1972 exhibitions in Tokyo and Helsinki. After her death Eje Högestätt and Mailis Stensman published a brochure for her memorial exhibition at Malmö Konsthall that toured in Stockholm, Gothenburg, Malmö and Kalmar in 1975–1976. Ulf Linde published a short foreword on her and the *Puss* colleagues

- Lars Hillersberg and Ulf Rahmberg. Eje Högestätt et al. (eds.), *Lena Svedberg 1946–1972: Minnesutställning* (Malmö: Malmö Konsthall, 1975). Ulf Linde, Lena Svedberg, Ulf Rahmberg, Lars Hillersberg, (Stockholm: Konstakademien, 1975). Lotta Svedberg wrote a two-page essay on her older sister, “Lena Svedberg”, which was published in Håkan Wettre (ed.), *Siri Derkert, Vera Nilsson, Lena Cronqvist, Lena Svedberg*, (Göteborg: Göteborgs Konstmuseum and Konsthallen, 1975); reprinted in Högestätt. Besides these, Svedbergs work is found in surveys of the Swedish 1960s (e.g. Per Bjurström, *Tre decennier svensk grafik*, (Stockholm: Sveriges Allmänna Konstförening, 1976), 148; Olvång, *Våga se!*. In the late 1990s, there was renewed interest in satirical realist art of the 1960s. See e.g.: Bo A. Karlsson, Ulf Kihlander and Ola Åstrand, (eds.) *Hjärtat sitter till vänster*, exhibition catalogue, (Stockholm: Ordfront, 1998); Susanne Carbin, *Klass, kön och konsumtion: En analys av Lena Svedbergs bildserie Konsumentkvinnan*, (Stockholm: Stockholms universitet, 2004); Carl Johan De Geer, *Lena Svedberg*, (Stockholm: Orosdi-Back, 2011). When the curator Fredrik Liew showed *Aldman* to the public at Stockholm’s Moderna Museet in 2014, it was the first time the *Aldman* suite had been shown since 1976. Liew, *Lena Svedberg*, 5.
- 26 See Walter Benjamin, “Baudelaire, or the Streets of Paris” (1935), in: *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 1999), 10, to see how this happens: But precisely modernity is always citing primal history. Here, this occurs through the ambiguity peculiar to the social relations and products of this epoch. Ambiguity is the appearance of dialectic in images, the law of dialectics at a standstill. This standstill is utopia and the dialectical image, therefore, a dream image. Such an image is afforded by the commodity per se: as fetish. [...] Such an image is the prostitute – seller and sold in one.”
- 27 Liew, Lena Svedberg, 69: “[caption:] Suddenly all their troubles seem to be over / [the woman:] my beloved country there it is I recognize it / [Aldman:] congratulations”; Liew, Lena Svedberg, 70: [as Aldman and the woman hit the ground:] ...splash! / [signpost:] Welcome to Democratic Republic of North Ireland / [caption:] They land happily but there has been some changes made in the Lady’s old country. She tries a professional restart”; Liew, Lena Svedberg, 71: “[the Lady, showing her genitals:] Psst! Psst! Psst! Psst! I’ll make special price for you, monsieur [sic], OK? / [Frank Zappa:] socialism and the pill has [sic] killed your business, ma’am”.
- 28 Liew, Lena Svedberg, 8.
- 29 I follow Liew’s identification here (Lena Svedberg, 9–10), since Noam Chomsky would make sense in the Swedish leftist political activist context. See also Chomsky’s widely disseminated anti-Vietnam-war essay, *The Responsibility of Intellectuals*, *New York Review of Books*, February 23, 1967.
- 30 “Journaux: *Puss* [featuring Ulf Rahmberg’s cover with Superman as a penis], *Lenragé, Ramparts, Le Monde, tricontinental, I.F. Stone’s Weekly*. Liew, Lena Svedberg, 29.
- 31 Mailer’s article was published in *Dissent* (Fall 1957).
- 32 They also appear in T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* (1922) as pointed out by Liew (Lena Svedberg, note 9 p. 4 [Swedish] p. 15 [English])
- 33 Benjamin, “Baudelaire, or the Streets of Paris”, 10–11.
- 34 Peter Wanger in e-mail to Charlotte Bydler, May 10, 2016.
- 35 Lena Svedberg graduated in French before entering Idun Lovén’s art school in Stockholm (1964–1966). In the autumn of 1967 she was admitted to the Royal Academy of Fine Arts. As Lena Svedberg’s career started in Stockholm, her father remained in Haile Selassie’s service until 1973, when the Emperor was overthrown. Lotta Svedberg, “Lena Svedberg”, Liew, *Lena Svedberg*, 6–7.
- 36 Cf. the situationist slogans quoted in Christina Zetterlund, “Att göra politik: Om hantverk och konst vid tiden kring 1970”, in *Tillsammans: Politik, filosofi och estetik på 1960- och 1970-talen*, ed. Anders Burman and Lena Lennerhed, 371–388 (Stockholm: Atlas, 2014).
- 37 Our translation. “Majrevolten i Paris 1968 hade en av sina kärnceller i École des Beaux-Arts och under några hektiska vårveckor producerade där en *Atelier populaire* inte mindre än 350 affischer, oftast tillverkade som serigrafier och linoleumsnitt primitiva i tekniken, elementära i budskapet. De Gaulle var naturligtvis den som i första hand karikerades och kritiserades. Bilderna var av växlande kvalitet men skärpan i angreppen och upprördheten gick inte att ta miste på. I Sverige uppstod en motsvarande aktivitet.” Bjurström 1976, 145.
- 38 Liew, Lena Svedberg, 2; 16–17.
- 39 The five detailed faces that flank the Lady suggest modelling on historical persons. One may be Nina Simone, another Mick Jagger. But who are the others: more performers?
- 40 If Angela Davis and Stokely Carmichael are correctly identified, are the others also militant revolutionaries or Black Panther Party members?
- 41 Olle Granath, *Olle Kåks*, trans. Gillian Sjö Dahl (Malmö, 2001), 20.
- 42 Mereth Lindgren et al., *Svensk konsthistoria*, (Lund: Bokförlaget Signum, 1986), 465.
- 43 We are perfectly aware that this use of “the social” conforms to a myth, which falsely divides reality into a non social realm where social facts are distinguished as operative. Cf. Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*, (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2005).
- 44 Our translation. “Hur han upplevde sitt eget inträde i de arbetandes skara beskrivs i ‘Stenhuggaren’ där en man sitter och hugger in sin mejsel i ett tunt granitskal som skiljer honom från en svart avgrund.” Olle Granath, *Olle Kåks: Ett konstnärporträtt* (Stockholm: Wahlström & Widstrand, 1980), 37.
- 45 The painting is in the Moderna Museet collection, Stockholm.
- 46 Kemp 1985, 110.
- 47 Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot*, (Chicago & London: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1980).
- 48 E.g. Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan, (New York & London: Norton, 1981).
- 49 Kemp, “Death at Work”, 115.
- 50 Liew, Lena Svedberg, 62.
- 51 Bertolt Brecht went out of his way to entertain his audience while also educating them. In a similar effort, Peter Wanger collaborated with *Puss* artists: not only with Lena Svedberg, but also Lars Hillersberg, e.g. on the cartoon *Storfamiljen* (*Extended family*, *Bokomotiv*, 1979) – a deconstruction of the nuclear family norm.