

- works
owe to Michel Foucault, who always associated knowledge and power, I would say that "Crystal Computing (Google Inc., St. Ghislain)" (2014) has, paradoxically, when seen from the purely visual aspect, always struck me as very beautiful landscape art...
- IV The visuals of "Crystal Computing" truly straddle landscape, natural and industrial art. Foucault's theories of power, knowledge, place and the body have been important to me. In practice, I have been more influenced by Bruno Latour's Actor-Network theory, according to which, like people, things (and thinking in even bigger terms, places and space) also have their roles and effects in a network. To learn about something, it's sometimes interesting to look at the place where the thing takes place.
- From here, I get to the material existence of the local, and to representing the local; these are always different to one another. I don't have a direct interest in showing that the object and its representation look completely different to each other, but rather in thinking about how else something could be shown. What is there to see when there isn't anything to be seen? The little boxes formed in information technology works, such as in satellite images, have a very nice look, but besides that they also have an informative effect: for example, the fact that big server farms are always built in some middle-of-nowhere place. Or at what time do these boxes start taking shape? The prowling in the bushes that goes on in "Crystal Computing" highlights very well that this is an industrial massif that looks the part. This information may be already known, but being there and re-recording it creates a greater connection with the real place, which can deepen or change knowledge through the feeling produced. I think that video-based intermediation is capable of conveying this.
- AT As I understand, you alternate living and working in Berlin and Tallinn, and in recent years you have exhibited outside Estonia more often than you have done at home. How would you describe your sense of the world? I ask half-jokingly whether life today is a sort of "Trans-Europe Express", a genuinely integrated trans-nation-state European Union as, say, Kraftwerk conceived of it: "Wir fahr'n fahr'n

fahr'n auf der Autobahn", "Wir laufen 'rein in Düsseldorf City"?

- IV I'm mostly in Berlin and as time permits I often travel between different points, but I haven't developed this feeling of amalgamation. Train travel is a good way of getting a sense of the territory: travelling the Berlin-Luxembourg-Berlin route a few months ago reminded me again that Europe doesn't just consist of midpoints; there's also a periphery that is quite different from the centre.
- As many of my works are video-based and lend themselves nicely to being circulated over the Internet, many of my exhibitions or screenings take place without me being present. This creates an interesting abstract feeling: in general it's good that someone somewhere saw certain works of mine but still, if I had my druthers, I'd be there in person to have a better idea of how people received them, or the place itself. And generally, it's wise to pay attention when sending material to open calls, as there are many exploitation schemes where artists are the content producers that the event organisers monetise for a profit. And this brings up the dilemma: do you keep your works to yourself and exhibit them to a small select audience, or release them to everyone at once? To keep up a certain level of interest, I've shown my newer works only at exhibitions, and as time goes by, I roll them out gradually via the Internet.

The Screen, Archive and Waiting Room in Recent Estonian Photography

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When we think about the two central concepts of this exhibition – screen and archive – it's obvious that photographic images are native inhabitants of both. The image on a diapositive (a positive photographic slide) is projected onto the fabric of a screen, transparency comes to life on a light table, a photograph is developed on paper, and coloured points of light burn bright on an LCD screen and create an endless number of images on the same surface, one after another: a photograph requires a surface on which to materialise, to create its illusion.

At the Tartu Art Museum exhibition "From Explosion to Expanse. Estonian Contemporary Photography 1991–2015", I traced a narrative of the history of Estonian art and art photography, from the socially

active 1990s to the information-saturated present-day, with its languor, increasing attitude of blaséness and aesthetic levelling. The paradox of reaching a plateau is that the photographic image increasingly pursues ways to intrude into space, to be more than a two-dimensional index denoting something that has been photographed with just one thing in mind. In today's critical theory-guided art, a photograph often draws attention to its own surface to emphasise its own independent identity, not as an objective fragment of life, or truth preserved by a lens. Now the surface of the photograph is open to intervention, and it can be opened and peeled as Anu Vahtra does; separate objects can be placed on it and then re-photographed, or sculptural frames can be built on it to continue the logic of the image, as Sigrid Viir has done. Images meant

for LCD screens can be blown up and cut out of the background in Katja Novitskova's sculptures, traces of fold lines can be pressed onto photographs, in the manner of Marge Monko, or pop-ups can be produced from Photoshopped collages, which is Laura Kuusk's technique. It is clear that contemporary photography needs more than just a screen to be projected upon. These images, most of them found and appropriated, actually enter our space as artists' works.

As to the other keyword of the exhibition, "archive", contemporary photography is locked in an unusual dialogue with this concept. Increasingly, artists refer to the corpus of existing images to bring into the digital environment, photos that were created using analogue means and that were also meant solely for reproduction by such means, printed in magazines, enlarged on paper, or projected as slides on a wall. The hyperrealism of technology amplifies the characteristic traits, personality and flaws in analogue material. To look at a digitalised negative, to see the particularities of the emulsion, the imperfections, surface asperities and dust is a refreshing change of scenery for eyes that have seen so many flawless and sharp images captured by digital sensors and fine-tuned with filters. Marge Monko's research trips to the Estonian Film Archives and the Agfa-Gevaert archive in Mortsel are the basis for many of her works; she also collects old magazines, advertisements and graphic designs on specific themes. Laura Toots and Maria Kapajeva draw on their own family photos and video archives for their works. Paul Kuimet brings a 17th century sundial to life on 16mm film. Various physical archives also exert a pull: Dénes Farkas visits the world's seed banks, and Krista Mölder photographs the Kumu Art Museum's repositories. It seems as if the photographers are trying, with the help of digital means, to save what is facing imminent destruction, trying to capture and typologise something that can in turn preserve and typologise our private lives, culture and scientific legacy.

Acting in this type of semionaut-prosumer manner, meaningfully appropriating found material, can be considered a second contemporary trend in photography. Can it also be called post-photography? Well, in the broader sense, certainly: now everyone can be a photographer and photographers are "artists-working-with-photography", more editors and curators than creators.¹ David Bate (author and Professor of Photography at the University of Westminster) is more careful, and reserves the term post-photography for digital photography as a mere data space in which

the photograph loses its ability to deliver social references.² Although unabashedly aesthetic, the works of these above-mentioned Estonian artists are nevertheless social; they increasingly defy easy answers but still seek contact with human heritage.

Sigrid Viir's Waiting Room Improvisation

Sigrid Viir is an Estonian photographic artist who came out of the Estonian Academy of Arts photography department (BA, 2009) and has garnered international acclaim for executing her vision from a clear artist's position. Looking at the Estonian artists who are more active and demanding of both the viewer and themselves, many were trained at the Estonian Academy's photography department, earning a BA or MA in the late 2000s. It would not be unjust to note that the primary context for these artists' works is formed by themselves, as well as by their fellow students, colleagues and friends. For instance, Viir is engaged in a number of collaborative projects and exhibitions with Kristiina Hansen and Johannes Säre and, along with Karel Koplimes and Taaniel Raudsepp, she is one of the board members of the artwork-enterprise Visible Solutions LLC.

Sigrid Viir's work is diverse, ranging from photo installations to videos and performance interventions, and addressing themes ranging from the family and private sphere to linguistic and economic metaphors. In the most general sense, Viir's preoccupation is symbolic order: a language-based representation system that governs subjects unbeknownst to themselves and which encompasses sexual relations, social and political structures, as well as laws, religious precepts and metaphorical games. Since 2013, she has gone from photography as a process of documenting and revealing to photography as a physical structure. Her artist's position, a battle against *comme il faut* behavioural correctness has gained strength: in her case, this is not a vocal protest but a quiet, flattening pressure she brings to bear on symbolic order so as to form cracks and fissures in its shell, preventing the possibility of complacently viewing the works without some unease.

We will take a closer look at Viir's earlier works, some from her school days. As the artist is committed to her creative quest, these visually varied works help us understand the foundation on which her latest, aesthetically and installatively integral series are positioned.

The series "Metamorphosis" (2007) is, in spite of its modest visual presence, a secret door leading to Viir's artistic work. The chewed-up and saliva-macerated wads of gum stuck on the underside of a table with a careless thumb and still bearing a thumbprint, later becoming cracked as they solidify – which the artist shows us in close-up – are classic abjects. Think about how you might feel if you happened to unexpectedly touch one of them on the underside of an arm rest. "It lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated," says Julia Kristeva.³ It is now simple to see how other works also relate to the abject, the constant boundary between the normal and the repellent: a woman in men's clothing – in a backwards shirt seen from behind her back ("Shirt", 2007), nudity with parents, containing a ban on looking and incestuous titillation ("Nude with Parents", 2009), dirty piles of melting snow in spring, a peeled potato with only the "eyes" left intact ("Awful Pretty Pipe Neck", 2016), polish apples in a plastic bag ("Snapshot Photos on the Moon", "Black Holes Filled with Sugar Cubes", "Snowball as a Noble Gift", "Polish Apple in a Lift", 2016)... The oddly constructed scenes in the series "Routinecrusher, Wanderlust, Tablebear, etc." (2009–2011) are visually ergonomic with regard to the viewer, yet rationally absurd; it is as if these and the preceding works pose the question: can we still enjoy something that does not submit to rational order?

One of the most perspicacious works of recent times is "Hans_55" (2016), which centres on a photo taken by the German photographer Hans Silvester of members of the Surma and Mursi tribes of Ethiopia adorned by plants and natural pigments: one still from a piece of theatre presented for the photographer, meant to satisfy Western civilization's craving for the exotic and the authentic. There are sugar plantations in the region so the West can have its Coca-Cola, and this is referred to by soda bottle-shaped concrete stands on which the photographs are supported. Viir, for her part, has decorated the tribal images with the accoutrements of everyday life in the West – optical glass, caps of ballpoint pens and a Post-it note – instilling in the viewer's consciousness the guilty-conscience context in which we see this 'free, carefree' tribe.

"Waiting Room Improvisation" (2016), first presented at the Artshok Biennial, is also a challenge to the viewer. This work enters into an inspired dialogue with the venue chosen for the biennial: NO99 Theatre's rehearsal hall in a Stalinist-era building in central Tallinn, which is now the home of the most radical and interventionist theatre in the country. Viewers

entering through the brightly lit lobby find themselves in a dark hall and have to grope their way up rising rows of seats. In front of the viewer, above the stage, hovers a small light box, with a monochrome photo of a cloud. The viewers enter, take their seats and wait. They sit. Quietly. "Maybe it is a monitor, a screensaver? Will the cloud move? Will anything happen? NO? I'm confused..." Viir manages to hit on two extremes: the framed, closed nature of a waiting situation, and improvisation referring to playfulness, the unexpected, the joy of creation. She herself says: "It's not interesting. It's so long and slow that it appears to be motionless. It's a filter that has to be passed through to arrive. It's a pause. It's an opportunity to pop into the unknown and one can't be late for that." Once again, clear and cryptic at the same time. This is not a light pause to catch one's breath, which is offered, for instance, by Kristiina Hansen and Anond Versto's photograph "Sky Detail" (2011), a small piece of bright, deep blue summer sky that conjures up warm summer air in even the stuffiest room. No, this is clearly an impasse, a hopelessly snarled knot that won't start to unravel in the viewer's head in the form of words and meanings.

But let's wait a bit more. After a long enough wait, a pareidolic illusion starts taking hold: we see in the cloud the shape of a heart; we might recognize a paper aeroplane, but still Godot does not show. But we knew he wouldn't, didn't we? But still we hoped that if we waited silently long enough, the meaning would start to reveal itself, words would come and hitch themselves to the cloud and the light box. In some respects, the result of this expectation is similar to the Paul Kuimet film "2060" (2014), which in its perfection keeps the viewer going around on a Möbius strip without beginning or end. Both works, however, achieve something that in the current overproduction of news is more important than meaning: a meditative state of rest, a concentration of thought. If we're lucky, it's a rare moment when the mind is completely still and clear.

Yet, besides the cloud, there's something else in the picture, some sort of glitter. It turns out this is saliva that flew through the air in front of the camera at the moment the picture was taken.

Is this work social? As a picture, certainly not: at this point, we could talk about post-photography, as this picture does not add anything to our conception of the world that we didn't already know, but if only there wasn't that saliva, the abject that breaks the



Sigrid Viir "Polish" from three-part photo installation "Snapshot photos of the Moon, black holes filled with sugar cube, snowball as a noble gift, Polish apple in a lift", 2016

frame. Visually it's an odd sparkle on the surface of the picture, in the sense of the image file it is noise and detritus, and for our social perception it's something that breaks through the barrier of ambivalence and, whether we want it or not, we find ourselves in emotional contact with the work.

- 1 Shore, Robert. *Post-Photography. The Artist with a Camera*. London: Laurence King Publishing, 2014, pp. 7-8.
- 2 Bate, David. *Art Photography*. London: Tate Publishing, 2015, p. 145.
- 3 Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror. An essay on Abjection*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982, p. 1.

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Memopol-3 – The Magnifying Glass of Contemporary Privacy

I had to open a new personal e-mail account recently, an action one rarely does these days. A long time has gone by since I signed up for my previous one. I was shocked at the harsh reality of privacy violations. When syncing the new e-mail account in my smartphone, the mail exchange app wanted access to a massive amount of my personal information, literally every piece of data there was on my phone, including my gender, my image files and of course my contacts: e-mails and phone numbers, among many other things. Why on earth would an e-mail app need to know my gender or have access to the images on my smartphone? Of course, I was politely reassured in a brief sentence that I could change these privacy settings at any given time after I had completed the registration process.

This is the surveillance society and it has not yet reached its climax. When Timo Toots, one of the most prominent young Estonian artists working in media art, created his "Memopol" precursor in 2009, the world was a different place. Memopol clearly shows that the Orwellian surveillance society has exceeded all expectations, and we still don't realise how dangerous it is. Among many other media art projects,

Timo Toots has also been active in a number of socially engaging projects, and has organised residencies and workshops. However, the series of "Memopol" machines have stood out the most over the years, and have also won him one of the most important media art awards in Europe: the Ars Electronica grand prix for interactive arts in 2012. "Memopol" has been exhibited eight times all over Europe.

Experience Surveillance

The story of "Memopol" started in 2009, when Timo Toots created his first and smallest data machine, based on the info accessible via the Estonian electronic ID card; it was called "Hall of Fame" and it was in the format of a small billboard with data projected onto it. It was innocent looking and a fun game that carried a warning message: the threat to our privacy has never been greater. However, it seems that even then only a few people valued their privacy.

"Memopol I" (2010) and "Memopol II" (2011) were decidedly different in design from their precursor. Also based on the electronic Estonian ID card or