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PETER BRÖTZMANN

## ALONG THE WAY

### BY THE WAY.....ALONG THE WAY.....

My guts decided for ALONG... and a wise Scotchman added the right explanation: the other phrase [BY THE WAY] trivialises the work in this context whereas ALONG THE WAY has a gravitas.

I can trust my guts, leading me for nearly 80 years through this life [without too much damage].

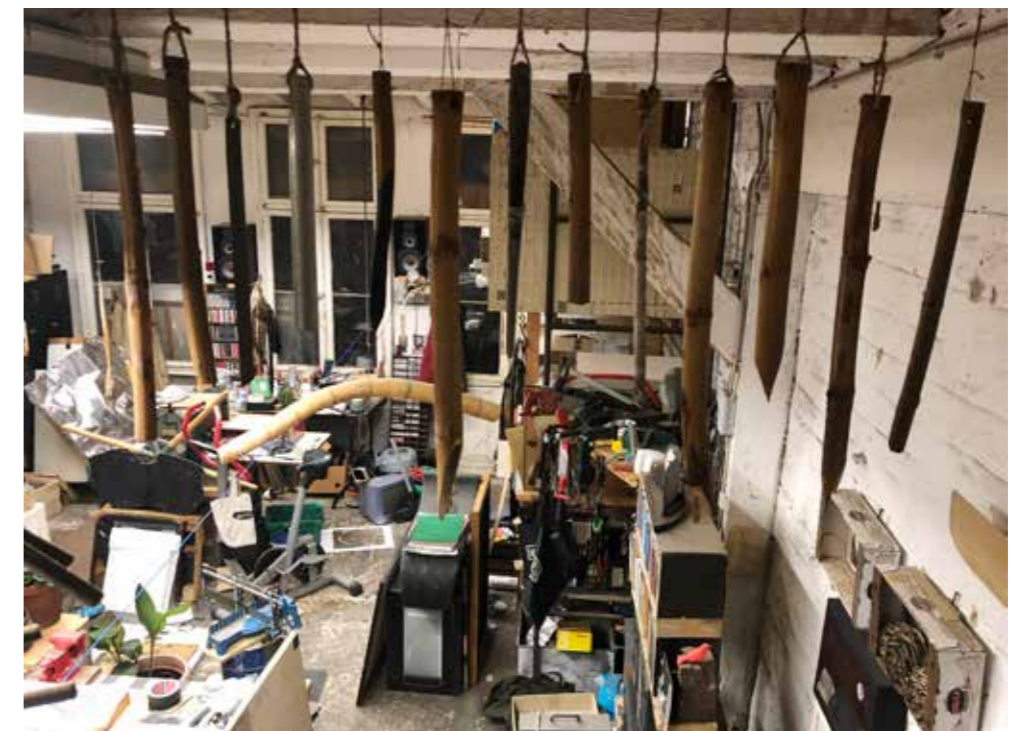
It's all about beauty and that of course is a question of interpretation [and the guts too].

Being on the road so much, the time-space between the tours is not long enough for preparing big canvases and starting oil-paintings.

You use what's on the table – paper, cardboard, an empty cigar box, pens, felts and brushes, ink in a glass or a Chinese ink stone.

You use what there is and that's what we musicians call improvising and that's what the works in this book are about [and my life too]: **IMPROVISATION**

Wuppertal, October 2020









## NOTES AND QUOTES

*"Halls where the stones are eternally polished by water and the crystals are congealed into orchids with no life: a universe of the interior. Thus the world did not seem to be only the sky over savanna and sea but the caves and vaults that hid even more secret rooms."*

(Anders Sparrman exploring nature in Nederlandse Kaapkolonie 1775, through Per Wästberg in "Anders Sparrmans resa", 2008)

When entering Peter Brötzmann's pictorial world you are surrounded by landscape. Of course there are also other themes – women, dogs, found objects – but it is obvious that the landscape is his main subject appearing in different moods and roles. Such views are common in Brötzmann's work but this fact does not mean that the pictures automatically repeat themselves. As a matter of fact, in comparison with music, if you look at them as solos it is just the opposite – essential variations. No improvised solos are alike even if the same melody, theme, chord or whatever appear in each one of them. They can never be repetitions. The player has the core inside his head and heart, that is where he keeps the beloved theme or motif that he enjoys so much that he wants to vary it over and over again. It is like seeing your loved one as often as possible just to discover new things every moment. This seems to be the case with Brötzmann's landscapes.

By varying a theme you discover new details and get closer to feelings that are hidden within it. As a matter of fact, you need the variation to really see what you see or imagine. You do this out of affection. Brötzmann uses broad slow movements (at least they seem to be), hand and brush being sensitive to his impressions. I get the feeling that he wants to point out something to himself or to keep in mind what he just discovered when gazing over a landscape. Isn't this a glimpse of the origin of arts? To create is bringing into light; to find and to formulate is the same as discovering. When doing this you change something living in front of your eyes into a world of things – art – but the magic is how it over and over again can meet the viewer as living reality. In this way painting and drawing is indeed an existential way of looking at "yourself". Understanding yourself is a way to connect to others. And – all real life is a kind of meeting.

The movements and compositions of Brötzmann's world seem to hesitate. If I say they are monotonous I must immediately add that they are far from monotonous because there is always something hidden somewhere. I would not go so far as saying this is a reflection of yourself that you have not yet discovered – anyhow it has to do with exploring something new every time and yourself are always involved every time this happens. And what do I mean with monotonous? Maybe the only way to take your time to have a chance to discover something unexpected. If the opening of a piece of music or a work of art reveals the end it is a failure. Sometimes though the secrets of a view are obvious and then breathtaking, like a landscape where a bridge appears with a kind of vaults that remind you of constructions

a couple of thousand years ago. Time is indeed a colour in Brötzmann's brush strokes. Then I am talking about circular time – not linear.

The dark nuances in his work of art can be connected with melancholia – I do not mean the modern way of feeling down but a way of going into yourself to understand and see the world. Let me get back to the pictures as kinds of solos, motifs that your senses must change over and over again and make it new in order to see it now, in this very moment. This is of course a tension of personal feelings and moods. He always balances between Melancholia and Lust, choosing both and none. The mixture or in-between has nothing to do with binary thinking and ditto ideas of today that dominate politics and sometimes even art and music. He knows that this is a fruitless way of making art and to be true to yourself. Thus expression as well as impression can change in one painting due to when and how long you look at it, how you manage to get around your preconceived opinions about this and that.

The French poet René Char wrote: *"Pas et plus étaient disjoint – no and no more were disjoint"*.

Just look, take your time, contemplate. His landscapes often turn into other forms of life, or remind me of bodies, a rock grows slowly out of red brushstrokes into a thick reddish reflection of something unknown turning into a kind of human form; as if the painting takes a deep breath and by chance you happen to see it.

Transformation is one theme. Brötzmann often uses small fragments or reduced forms in order to see when, for example, a simple line can be seen as a cup or a house. It is a matter of taking away what is unnecessary in the picture and letting this core of forms be as forceful or poetic as possible. The strength of a motif is created when decorative elements are removed. And there are some motifs where you can see this – how he defines a cup or a house turning them into signs which in their turn start to vibrate in their own right. Really not looking like a cup or a house but anyhow giving us the idea of such items. Brötzmann's work tells me that personal truth is essential. This makes him rebuild and reconstruct what he sees or imagines. Therefore, many of his works are projects of reparation. If the world and the ideas about it decay, he can take what he imagines apart and start building and reconstructing it – i.e. repairing it in his way to understand, see, from the bottom of his own experiences. This is obviously the case with the cup or the house. But I like to go further and look at more complex matters.

The paintings made on polaroid film are obviously dealing with such matters. The film is unexposed and he replaces the "photo" with shimmering colours. Thus throwing suspicion on the photo itself as a kind of reflected reality – or truth. You have to let other associations

## MELANCHOLIA AND LUST

enter your mind in front of these paintings and wait not only for associations to landscapes etc but furthermore a new way of experiencing what your senses give you. Of course this is an example of how the other side of Brötzmann's Melancholia can be spelled Lust. And to find this you must look deeply into yourself. You must dare. And suddenly other works come into sight. Namely what he calls porno. It seems to be about sex and of course it is. But I think it is more than that. Facing those drawings the obvious is obvious. Or is it? I associate with the Swedish artist Carl Fredrik Reuterswärd's drawings in the early 90s after suffering a stroke. Recovering and with nothing special to do he drew over and over again. And many scenes could be seen as porn – even hardcore porn. I asked him, what this is? Something he remembered or had experienced? His answer was, he did not really know, for "reality" and hardcore experience was not the idea with these little sketches. "Reality" was not the idea - it had more to do with deeper feelings – the lust that did arise from the Melancholia caused by his actual situation. One important trait was, of course, also humour, sometimes even drawing sex as a nice thing but also as a farce. To be direct: these little drawings are aphorisms about life. And some-

times the people seem to fall apart and sometimes the lines form realistic scenes. We are used to looking at drawings like this, how about seeing them? Following each and every line – I think they lead you into absurd forms and also quite amusing ways of solving anatomy. Not only the lust is in focus but how

to express it and give it form. Brötzmann invites you to experience this with the help of a dog (or wolf?) that pops up here and there, licking, smelling, feeling. I think he wants to be like this animal – and tells us to step into his works like the one; trying to experience art and music without your own worn out self.

These little things invite you to contemplate. Take your time. It is worth picking up each detail and feeling and tasting it. This is what Brötzmann does in his assemblages or found objects; very haptic. You find something that means nothing to most people, worthless remnants. But if you put them together new worlds and objects will be born in front of your eyes. The combinations are always very sensual. Hard shining metal, old wood, softness meets hardness. When putting these discoveries together in boxes and combining them with colour, complicated scenes grow in front of your eyes. And not only that, you have textures, you can get haptic feelings in a gaze; hurting, soothing. These boxes also tell you about the heaviness of being locked in – physically or in an abstract way. Thus there is force combined with fragility. Some of these works are combinations of different materials – often wood and metal; reminding you of scenes from nature: the sight of a cloud, the sun rising etc. It is a way of letting you hold what you see. But they also form tales about the elements. You have the wind that the feathers long for, you have the light that the metal reflects, you have the air that is so obvious as a kind of emptiness around some of the smaller objects, a piece of wood balancing a metal cone or disc. Brötzmann looks for forms older than the tedious moment called now: I think the bridge with vaults in the landscape that I mentioned above is a kind of self-portrait, and its reflections can be seen in these small objects of combined matters. Saying: this is how it feels. Try it with your hands – softly, slowly. But fragments are not only there to be combined with one another to create new views.

## WE LOOK AND WE SEE

They are reminders, containers of something much bigger. Yes, I know that romantic artists and writers considered that the fragment had nothing to do with big or small scales. The Swedish poet and writer Axel Liffner once wrote: "*Lakes, many lakes, have a size / that oceans seldom achieve.*"

Brötzmann's many fragments, not only those composed with other fragments to make a whole, are like vessels of memories, small things with something bigger in them. What does a fragment do in your mind? Let us make an experiment. I give you a composition asking you if you know it? Beethoven's 5th Symphony. Most of you tell me they are very familiar with it. Or Machine Gun. Some say they know it as well. But when the music comes into your head it is not the full length of an ordinary performance. Maybe some seconds are enough for you to experience the whole work. So dense is the moment of memory. A fragment contains a whole symphony. Then look at Brötzmann's fragmentary compositions. You see something scribbled, you wonder what has been taken away – but you can also imagine not only emptiness and loss but also the haptic feeling of the material. All these qualities together tell you something – it is up to you to take all the time you need to find out what this fragment reflects.

This is also what I see in the porn drawings – a personal little theatre on the inside of your eyelids ready to open its curtains when you are totally relaxed. If I compare it with music it is like enjoying melodies that pop up inside your head – it has nothing to do with ideology, truth, morality or whatever. Only imagined or lived experiences, it is about your moment as a human being. And in the next moment you can even laugh at yourself. Last but not least, the works often evoke very personal reactions, like the assemblage/object 'The Dried Rat Dog', which was also a title of a record in 1994. Through the years it has become a favorite piece of mine. I never cared to explain to myself why. Maybe it is the helpless tender little dried body of the rat dog in the simple box. For me the title is nothing like fear or disgust. Just a creature having had the bad luck of ending in a cigar box. When Brötzmann visited the museum in Ystad where I was the director for a while, I had a dog, a Scanian Rat dog called Asta. I introduced her to Brötzmann who greeted her heartily: Hello Rat Dog! And for one eternal second my preference for the work and music was embodied in front of my eyes. See what art and music can do to you? It is still and even stronger a favorite.

The works linger in your memory, longing for your eyes touching them again and again. The last word goes to Anders Sparrman, whose opinion when surrounded by completely unknown, flowers, animals and landscape was: "*The nature of the accidental makes it necessary to make notes of it even if the pattern as a whole remains unexplored.*"

We look – and we see.

Malmö, September 2020