

Sarah Morris

Your Words Become Mine

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Hans Ulrich Obrist: ... the most recent film (*Your Words Become Mine* 2018), brings us ... to Herzog & de Meuron, and the Alexander Kluge story, which was initially meant to be Werner Herzog. Can you tell us about first the epiphany and then the genesis?

Sarah Morris: The epiphany is that he (Alexander Kluge) is like a sprite; he has this sort of sprite-like quality that is very intriguing and very magical. We're talking about this German public intellectual who's in the film. His name is Alexander Kluge: he's a lawyer, he's a poet, he's an artist, he's a filmmaker, he's a sprite, he's just a lovely character. I wrote a script that we cobbled together – Tala helped me – we made a script based off of a book that actually another assistant of mine had given me that I always loved, called *Finite and Infinite Games* by a guy named James [P.] Carse, which is about game theory and human behaviour, which I'm obviously really interested in. So we wrote the script, cobbled together, and I asked him to read it. He said, "Well I'm not an actor." That's the one thing he is not: an actor. And I said, "Well I don't want you to act anything. I want you to read this script to me, I'll be there." I'm telling him this in a New York taxi; I've never met him before except for when you introduced me. We get there and I say, "And of course you can go off-piste, you can talk back to the script, you can ask me questions." Basically it's in three categories: it's the script, it's the questions, and it's the dialogue. You can't tell the difference between the three. That's really interesting and I love that about that film, and also that experience of having a dialogue with somebody from the past. He was also Adorno and Horkheimer's lawyer at the Frankfurt School, he did reparations for the Frankfurt School, he worked for Fritz Lang ... This guy is sort of the Forrest Gump of Germany, and basically of the 20th century, he's just a fantastic character.

So I thank you very much for introducing me to him because you always introduce a lot of people – sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't – but that work one was really a direct ...

Hans Ulrich Obrist: It clearly worked ...

Sarah Morris: Yes and also I had breakfast with you in New York and we were talking, and I was like, "I was in a dialogue with Werner Herzog" because I had to have a German voice, because I was filming it in the new Elbphilharmonie in Hamburg, which was like a 800 million euro project by them. It's a bit like a wasp's nest or a void; Hamburg doesn't really have a Philharmonic of note yet. It's like a future wish or an anticipated moment, and I wanted to make a performance in that space, a fictional performance, or let's say not a performance, like a warning, a poem for the future, and that's why I ended up with Kluge as opposed to Herzog. Herzog would have been too calming...

Hans Ulrich Obrist: I wanted to bring it back to painting because ... you mentioned *Society Is Abstract, Culture Is Concrete*, The amazing new work of...

Sarah Morris: "Sound Graph"

Hans Ulrich Obrist: Yes, the richness of "Sound Graph," and there is also a big painting, which is another "Sound Graph", and these are connected to this Kluge moment. Can you tell us about the invention of these new paintings... It's the first time I've seen them...

Sarah Morris: ... "Sound Graphs." Well I was thinking so much about this: I really do think art is actually a conversation, it is a dialogue, it's constantly moving; that's why we're in it. It is about images but it's also about a conversation, it's about speech...actually a flow; it's not just you, it's not just me, it's somewhere in between. Kluge says this really beautifully in the *Finite and Infinite Games* film. I'm also aware that we're being recorded all the time. Literally right now, in this room, the speech memo, the voice recognition patterning, N.S.A., the Snowden thing, I just started to think about making industrial poems using speech, but using them as the compositions for the paintings. So I started looking at different programme software to use for my own speech and also for Kluge's speech.

Hans Ulrich Obrist: It's interesting also because it's very much aligned with your entire work, this idea of industrial poems, because you said from the very get-go – I think it was in our first conversation – you told me that you wanted to erase the hand. We spoke a lot about this with our friend Philippe Parreno... Of course he is interested in automation, he's interested in the automatic processes and this idea that you set up systems, which then evolve and indexes ... Can you maybe talk a little bit about that, because it seems to be part of the umbilical cord that binds together the entire practice?

Sarah Morris: It is, and it's a difficult one to articulate but I think it's basically all around us. This automated network of decision makings, recordings, movements, patterns, whether it's voice recognition – I mean look how many devices we have on the table – but this is the future, this is how aesthetics are actually being shaped and I just think that it is the most subjective thing. I think if you divide art history into the subjective and the objective, I am more interested in this seeming objectivity, but of course, when I look at the work, obviously I don't feel like it's been done before, so it's obviously an expression, somehow, of me. But I definitely feel like this idea of setting up a system and letting it run, like a rhizome, like a structure that you begin, that reproduces itself, like you're not even in control anymore. I like this ... That's the fun part of making art, is actually the loss of control.

Hans Ulrich Obrist in conversation with Sarah Morris on the occasion of the exhibition, *Odysseus Factor*, at the UCCA in Beijing 2018 (Excerpt of the audio script)