
The Miracle in Tensta (Theoria)
A new film by Magnus Bærtås
11.6–28.9 2014

basecamp

Tensta Konsthall

Magnus Bårtås's new film, *The Miracle in Tensta (Theoria)* is a wayward depiction of how the Virgin Mary appeared in Tensta in the summer of 2012, based on testimonies on the Internet. With the help of Tensta residents, the testimonies have been visualized and shot in the same room in the gallery where the film is shown. As part of *The New Model*.

Theoria is the Greek word for talking about something witnessed. If, during ancient times, someone experienced an extraordinary event, like the Olympics or a religious ritual, a theoria was performed when they returned home. Theoria consisted of a journey, a witnessing, and of the social situation when the person shared her experiences. In ancient times philosophers talked in terms of "ritualized visuality" that received a political significance where the person lived.

The theoria that is dealt with in the work is based on the events that took place in Tensta in August 2012. On August 22, people in Tensta witnessed that they had seen the Virgin Mary appearing in the sky. *Dagens Nyheter's* UFO expert Clas Svahn wrote about the event, and the following evening thousands of people gathered in the Syrian Orthodox church (Santa Maria Church) in Tensta. Again the miracle was witnessed, both in the condensation in the windows and in the trees outside the church.

The Miracle in Tensta (Theoria) is a part of the research-based project *The New Model: An Enquiry*, initiated by Maria Lind and Lars Bang Larsen in 2011 to investigate the heritage from *Modellen: En modell för ett kvalitativt samhälle (The Model: A model for a qualitative society)* in a number of projects, seminars, workshops and exhibitions. The participants in *The New Model*, Magnus Bårtås, Ane Hjort Guttu, Dave Hullfish Bailey and Hito Steyerl, have been invited to produce new works for the project.

The Model: A model for a qualitative society was an initiative by the artist and architect Palle Nielsen, Gunilla Lundahl and others and was manifested through an adventure playground for children that was installed at Moderna Museet in 1968. It was a part of *Aktion Samtal (Action Talk)*, a series of urban engagement projects that took place in Stockholm at the same time.

The Miracle in Tensta (Theoria)

16 min

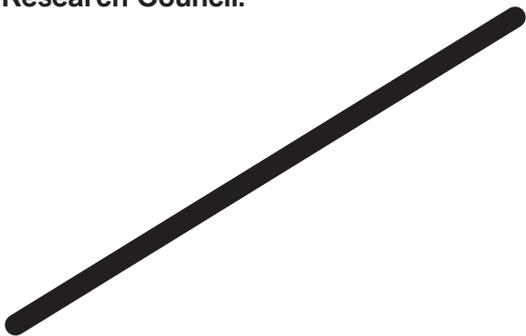
Magnus Bårtås (script, direction, cutting) in collaboration with Marius Dybwad Brandrud (camera) and Claes Lundberg (sound).

Actors/readers: Fahyma Alnablsi, Julia Cechal, Lawen Dehghani, Jonas Grundman, José Tusach, Tanja Tuurala and Peter Åström. Clas Swahn as himself.

Magnus Bårtås is an artist and writer. In his work he often uses constructed narratives related to individuals and places. By employing literary modes and methods his works privilege the meaning of the local, the situated and the neglected detail. Fundamental to the works are meetings, conversations and storytelling—activities that are closely linked to the biographical genre, but also to the oral dissemination of artworks. His dissertation in artistic research *You Told Me—work stories and video essays (2010)* is an observation and analysis of certain functions and meanings of narration and narratives in contemporary art. *You Told Me* is also about the making of video essays—about listening and talking to images, and making transferences between the working instances of narrative video.

Since 2008 Magnus Bårtås is professor of fine art at Konstfack in Stockholm. He has participated in *Modernautställningen*, Moderna Museet 2006 and 2010, Stockholm; the 4th Bucharest Biennial 2010; the 9:th Gwangju Biennial and *Swedish Conceptual Art*, Kalmar Konstmuseum 2010; among other group exhibitions. Gävle Konstcentrum made a solo presentation of his work in 2010. His video essay *Madame & Little Boy* won the first prize at Oberhausen International Film Festival 2010 and has since been screened at a number of film festivals. Together with Fredrik Ekman he has published three essayistic books, for example *All Monsters Must Die (2011)*.

The film has been partly financed with funds from the research project *Microhistories*, which is operated at Konstfack and financed by the Swedish Research Council.



Wednesday 14.6, 14:00
Magnus Bærtås will introduce *The Miracle in Tensta (Theoria)*

Thursday 24.7, 17:00
Magnus Bærtås will introduce *The Miracle in Tensta (Theoria)*

Wednesday 20.8, 17:00
Magnus Bærtås will introduce *The Miracle in Tensta (Theoria)*

Wednesday 20.8, 18:30
The New Model – A conversation between Gunilla Lundahl and Magnus Bærtås

How can we create a society of quality? That was one of the questions behind the groundbreaking project *The Model: A Model for a Qualitative Society* at the Modern Museum in 1968. Along with Gunilla Lundahl and many others, the artist Palle Nielsen created an adventure playground for children in the exhibition space where different creative expressions were tested and the city's development was debated. Through seminars, workshops and exhibitions, the Model is now examined in the project *The New Model*, initiated by Lars Bang Larsen and Maria Lind 2011, and with participating artists Magnus Bærtås, Ane Hjort Guttu, Dave Hullfish Bailey and Hito Steyerl. During the evening's conversation the artist Magnus Bærtås and Gunilla Lundahl, responsible for the exhibitions *The Model* and *Ararat* at the Modern Museum, discuss how the questions of the *The Model* are landing in our present, as well as Bærtås's current work *The Miracle in Tensta (Theoria)*. What does a qualitative society look like today, in the light of a very different reality than the one in 1968?

Wednesday 10.9, 17:00
Magnus Bærtås will introduce *The Miracle in Tensta (Theoria)*

Wednesday 10.9, 18:30
Microhistories – Seminar with Magnus Bærtås

The Miracle in Tensta (Theoria) has developed under the research project *Microhistories*. This project brings together theorists and artists to see how a common field may arise between a science of history and artistic practice, primarily in film. During the evening *Microhistories* is introduced with contributions by Suzana Milevska (Skopje), Michelle Teran (Berlin/Bergen) and Lena Séraphin (Helsinki).

A conversation between Magnus Bårtås and Mirja Majeovski

Mirja Majeovski

What was it that initially drew your attention to the miracle, that is, the appearance of the Virgin Mary in Tensta in the summer of 2012?

Magnus Bårtås

It was a combination of things. Foremost I wanted to work with a local story. And I was interested in the idea of naming, as in Palle Nielsen's exhibition *The Model: A Model for a Qualitative Society* at the Modern Museum in 1968. It was interesting that Nielsen called the exhibition a playground, stating, "this is not an exhibition; this is a playground." Also I was interested in the meaning of *theoria*. In ancient Greek when somebody who had experienced something remarkable journeyed home and told others what he or she had witnessed, this act was referred to as *theoria*. The theorist could contemplate the stars – the act of astronomical *theoria*, in which one apprehends "visible gods" in the heavens – or it could be an account of religious activities. In both cases *theoria* was connected to a form of "ritualized visuality". I thought that the debate that followed the event in Tensta raised some very interesting questions connected to both naming and the ancient idea of *theoria*.

MM

It is fascinating to think about witnessing, and the ancient Greek use of the word *theoria*, in the art context where works are often shared in the form of stories i.e. to regard the act of talking about an artwork as an eyewitness account.

MB

Exactly. I think the art world is still very much into the idea of word-of-mouth, in a sense that it is so much about someone seeing something and telling that to someone else. For example I might have seen something in a catalogue or heard about something in a talk, presentation, or a lecture. Also

many works I just imagine. Perhaps the meeting of people, discussions, and stories about art are as equally important as the physical place where art is exhibited. But all of it goes of course back to seeing. Because in this chain of reference there is the idea that someone actually saw the work, and I think this is important, that what is talked about somehow exists in the real world.

MM

A lot of witnessing and sharing is now taking place online. What might be the pros and cons of that, in comparison to being physically present?

MB

What I found particularly interesting with this debate around the miracle in Tensta is that it went to these very basic questions about witnessing and perception. It was almost like reading John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* with all the questions about the gaze and how socially informed we are about the gaze. Berger also speaks about how technology broke the contract with witnessing. Before the age of mechanical reproduction, the human eye could only be in one place at a time. With the invention of the camera, everything changed; we began to see things that were not in front of us, and appearances could travel across the world. I think that this collective ecstatic witnessing that took place in Tensta was in its essence almost pre-modern and that there existed a certain tension when this activity was discussed on the Internet.

MM

How did you go about constructing the characters in the video?

MB

Everything that the characters say is taken from the Internet. After the event I went through different online discussion forums, compiled the material and extracted seven personalities from it. The characters include a skeptical person who is being satirical about the event and a person

who attempts to rationalize everything by referring to scientific ideas about visuality and perception. Then there is the witness who is speaking from first hand experience, one that was not there but is supporting the witness, and one who speaks about clairvoyance and clairsentience from a philosophical point of view. There is also one that is very angry about everything and one with a neutral voice recounting facts and figures, almost like a news reporter.

MM

Why do the characters whisper?

MB

First off there is a transformation of something written into something oral. The text was written for the abstract Internet world—it was not meant to be spoken in a social situation in a physical group. What whispering does is that it introduces a very different voice, intonation, and approach to the text. Everyone has a reading voice, but when you stage whisper you have to somehow reinvent your voice.

MM

The video has been shot in the same room where it is now displayed. Which kind of role does this reference loop play for you?

MB

The loop is meant to depict the idea that at this moment the room is not an exhibition—it is a “theoria.” This transformation is rather to be sensed than seen. Though theoria as such does not exist of course, as it is not a place but a social situation.

MM

What do you think about showing your video essays in an exhibition setting as opposed to a film festival; about people walking in and out, interrupting the narrative line?

MB

Actually I show more in film festivals nowadays than in exhibitions. An exhibition space is physical in a sense that you are in it as a body. It is about

locating yourself and being in control. In cinema space you are just two eyes without a body. Narratives have never, I think, been in terms with the exhibition space. I mean all the historical works of video art are loop based, so the viewer can come and go. Narratives inside the exhibition space, and not in the cinema, have still quite a short history.

MM

Many of your previous video essays have been built around biographies, life stories of the main characters. I’m thinking here in particular about *Biography* and the *Who is...?* series. In *The Miracle in Tensta (Theoria)* you are taking a collectively witnessed event as the starting point and constructing a web of individual viewpoints around it. How did this shift in perspective influence your working and thinking around the video?

MB

That is true. I’ve been mostly working out of a biography or one life story. It is different of course, but many formal questions are the same, like: who is telling the story, what is the meaning of the one telling the story, what kind of voice is used to tell the story, and is the narrator the same as the author, or is there a split between the author and the text? For anyone working with biographies and life stories there exists the issue of subjectivity. In this work, *The Miracle in Tensta (Theoria)*, I tried to take a detour around the problem of subjectivity by using found material; I could almost say these are not my words. This is a trick to distance myself from subjectivity but of course I will never claim that I am not subjective because the act of editing – how you compose the material is extremely subjective. Every decision made while editing is both aesthetical and ethical.

Mirja Majeovski is a curator and writer based in Berlin and Stavanger.

Started in 2011 at Tensta konsthall, over a period of two years *The New Model* investigated the heritage of *The Model: A Model for a Qualitative Society* through a number of projects, seminars, workshops and exhibitions.

Participants included Lars Bang Larsen, Magnus Bårtås, Ane Hjort Guttu, Dave Hullfish Bailey and Hito Steyerl.

Past:

8.10 2011 Presentations by Lars Bang Larsen, Magnus Bårtås, Dave Hullfish Bailey and Hito Steyerl. At Blå huset in Tensta.

By transforming Moderna Museet into an adventure playground, Nielsen wanted to give children a chance to “be themselves” and express their own reality. The children would be able to play in an environment that was free and separate from the adult world in general and from the urban milieu in particular, and that was also adapted to their own energetic activities.

In contrast, nowadays, more or less every aspect of our lives is capitalized and culture is dominated by entertainment. Our lives in 2011 do not share much in common with the social and cultural upheavals of 1968. Today, not even play is an unspoiled, intact freedom; it is in part a function of the creative industries. How can we re-articulate and renew the questions Nielsen posed with his Model? How can we create a qualitative society out of a totally other reality?

11.3 2012 *The Model and the City: A Seminar on Palle Nielsen’s project The Model (Moderna Museet 1968) and Tensta.* With Palle Nielsen, Gunilla Lundahl, Erik Stenberg.

In 1968, the artist and architect Palle Nielsen initiated *The Model: A Model for a Qualitative Society*, a children’s playground that was installed at the Moderna Museet. The event was part of *Aktion Samtal* (Action Talk), a series of urban procedures that took place in

Stockholm at the same time. Although the model was a spectacular manifestation at one of Sweden’s most prestigious museums, it has taken a long time for the project to find its way into the history books. The reason for this has undoubtedly been the project’s dual nature as a mixture of artistic research and activism, and the manifestations of collective authorship that built on Palle Nielsen’s activist network.

With some of the key players from the *The Model* and *Action Talk*, the seminar at Tensta Konsthall explored the project from an art and cultural historical perspective as it was understood then, as well as its historical context. An important aspect is the project’s relationship to postwar urban development, especially the new suburb’s emergence. In addition, the seminar was about how contemporary experience and theory can formulate historical events that are still important and relevant for us today.

14.2–26.5 2013 The exhibition *The Society Without Qualities* with works by Søren Andreasen, Archi Zoom, Thomas Bayrle, Samuel R. Delany, Ane Hjort Guttu, Dave Hull Fish Bailey, Jakob Jakobsen and Anders Remmer, Charlotte and Sture Johannesson, Jakob Kolding, Learning Site, Sharon Lockhart, Joanna Lombard, Palle Nielsen, Xabier Salaberria. Curated by Lars Bang Larsen.

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