

## **The Winter School**

### **A Fiction Towards Documenta X**

Last year. 1996. A winter scenario. Before the main event. A moment spared for thinking back to another time. 1971. A new structure could have been created, a kind of school. A place to set action into action. A projection into the near future. Changing everything. It's just that no-one can remember the details. Three people are looking for the original report. And they'll have to shift and flicker in order to reclaim that old forward-thinking.

**It's 1971. In a room, overlooking the lake, a series of reports are being written. But we only have access to fragments of this emerging structure. The voice of the report co-ordinator is indistinct and presently hard to identify. For the moment we will only be able to make out the first few lines. First a cough and then. "Discussion Island is a lost Celtic place, no longer missing. Clans maintained this shared site, each taking turns to farm it in yearly rotation. In the event of any dispute between them, people gathered on Discussion Island to thrash out and reorganise crisis. An example of a desire for negotiated solutions that is part of a suppressed history. In parallel to this we now have a report that exposes an interest in people and situations where the location for action and analysis is focused upon the centre. A reclamation of the near future through an understanding of the middle ground."**

It's 1996. If you want to find the centre of things then go to sleep. Not a coma sleep, but an active break towards reorganisation. In this story there are three people, all heading off in different directions. We will see their travels and feel the complexity of their negotiations. They are trying to think ahead. They are all trying to reclaim the idea of projection. Projection as a tool, the predictive meanderings that maintain us all within a state of thrall. Reclaiming the near future at a time when we might believe that there is no point. And the first person is dreaming, if that is what it should be called. Half asleep and half awake. We are dealing with an individual this time.

There are no longer any groups. Half asleep and half awake. Slipping thoughts. There is no bed here but everything is comfortable enough. We are a long way from any cities. A great distance from any other buildings. But there is no isolation this time. There are only fragments in the sleep state. And it is a half sleep and half wake that is only sustained by small possibilities and elements of negotiation. So the first person is only half with us. Thinking about a number of objects and images from the recent past. In order to move ahead, it might be necessary to reflect just before the slumber. A good time for addressing those things that have only just happened. It seems as if this is the first person's role. It is a good moment to start a winter school. Off season, out of sync.

**It's still 1971. And on the lake outside the report room a man is struggling with a boat. It's distracting. Turning from the window and away from those concerns, a little more of the report may now be read. "So we are exposed to a persistent use of the phrase "the middle ground". It is important to understand such a term in relation to the socio-economic structure of the society in general and necessary to trap it in a report that is caught within a fiction. The middle ground, a broad, expanding area where you find negotiation, strategy, bureaucracy, compromise, planning and projection. An area long recognised as that which is crucial to maintaining the deferment of solutions that lies at the heart of the liberal capitalist dynamic of promise and potential."**

It's 1996. Something must be started. Images and objects from the recent past. Pens, televisions and trousers? A series of questions leads to the problem of whether or not there is the real possibility of seeing any of these things clearly any longer. At least that's the problem for this first person. So let's slip away from the difficulties and the person that bears them and move around the outside of the place where the first person is caught between at least two states. We are circling the area of awaking. Now it is more like thinking aloud, but without the moving or speaking. Clear and precise. If only someone would arrive and explain that there is very little

time left. There has to be a winter school. That is clear at least. An antidote within a series of shared moments, a smile plays across the person's lips as their thoughts turn to incomplete stratagems, all of them developing around a beautiful, decorated fir tree.

We approach that first person again. But this time, we start from quite a distance and we move in fast. Picking up the pace. It's as if we hadn't noticed before, there is a panel over-head. Multiple and bright colours are working away. Caught in the middle ground. Half awake. Half not awake. While considering the implications of bureaucracy, compromise and negotiation. As we know by now, the first person is trying to be more precise and those thoughts are slipping once again. Try and pin down some moments where a winter school can work. Just before the main events. 1971, a year to remember. Now try that list again. A Brionvega television, a Bic Biro, velvet or corduroy? Try to collate a complete list of the things you would need in order to break through a progression of ideas. Times when the winter school could have gone into action but no-one had a timetable. Leave the first person for a while. Under a canopy, safe and sound, everything is happening.

**It's 1971. Away from the window a fire is now roaring. And the report co-ordinator places something vague into the flames. Holding a fixed gaze while the yellow flicker licks at an ambiguity. Just to see what will happen. A little test. A little boredom? Heat builds up and then a shout from the lake pulls the reporter back to attention. Read on. "This area is enormous and attempts to embrace us all. It is presented as the way things are but is clearly fought for. Put forward as the equilibrium into which structures naturally fall but clearly needs maintenance and continual action to keep it broad. The central zone is well recognised and in its earlier form was fought through the establishment of clear cut battle lines with which to attack the bourgeois sensibilities that were seen to prop it up. We all know this form of barricade development. And we also know it is useless as a straightforward tool."**

It's 1996 again. So shift away from number one and embrace mobility. Move through a series of streets. There are elements of the situation and environment that are recognisable. All of these elements need to be described. But some of the objects that we come across appear to function in parallel to our sense of the present. Yet there has to be some attempt to list it all down. A catching of all the parts and pieces. This task will have to be done before the winter school can really get under way.

The second person is in a bar. Pan around it for a minute or two. Dark crescents under every eye. They look up and away. This person came in about three minutes ago and made a winding interrupted trip to the bar. Stopping frequently to look and greet people. The second person is speaking to everyone they come across today. Talking up to the limit of distance and prepared to press on. And at every point there is some drawing back. A neat technique to defer the speaking process. All promise. They don't realise that the bar is not public, it's private. On the way through and out the other side, it soon becomes clear that the bar is a part of a house. Away on the other side is a work place, somewhere for the second person to get things done. Someone who thinks ahead at all times. For it is the moment to come up with a number of future scenarios. But hide them. Conceal them for a while, behind the familiarity of such engaging company.

**We're back in 1971. Something has to happen in the winter time. Is there more in the fragmented report? "This broad swathe of activity is generally seen as anything other than valuable territory for investigation. It is not mimicking the engagements of the middle ground that I am interested in, but the possibility of investigating the thrall within which the middle ground of strategised projection holds the potentially dynamised social and political structures that surround us. And along with any understanding of the middle ground must come a time based conception of the role social and economic projection has**

**played in guiding the development of our situation. A day to day addiction to trends and the forecasting.”**

It's 1996 for the last time and soon to be 97. The third person is in an airplane travelling across a developed, well marked landscape. This person is making a series of mental side-steps all of which look towards alternative options in relation to the landscape below. This person also investigates the possibility of expansion rather than merely development. All of these ideas are noted on a number of sick bags with a borrowed pen. Things are moving faster now. We cut between the first, second and third person increasingly quickly. They start to argue and contradict each other without ever meeting. They are faced with no option and they are coming together. Closer and closer. It is winter and they arrive in a city. They pass each other by at the station without recognition and head off in different directions towards the flat muted tones of the immediate countryside. The Winter School is no longer only an option, it is a necessity.

**1971. And in the house by the lake the sky is darkening. The days are short at this time of year. The report will be finished soon. Out of sync. But just in time.**

**Liam Gillick May 1997**

**Parts of this text will be developed for the book “Discussion Island: A What If? Scenario” to be published by the Kunstverein in Ludwigsburg later this year. Physical elements of “Discussion Island” will be presented at Documenta X.**