



## Labyrinth

Peeter Laurits

A significant biographical fact that those prepared to get a taste of my work should perhaps know is that in 1997 I moved from Tallinn to the forests of Võrumaa, namely Kütiorg (Hunter's valley). I am a thoroughly urban person, having grown up in Tallinn, and later living in Riga, St Petersburg and New York. Nevertheless, on St John's Day in 1996 I found myself on the balcony in Kütiorg, reading Nietzsche's 'Ecce Homo', realising that cities as such has nothing more to offer me. All I could see was the primeval valley to which I had been connected since the early 1980s through my painting teacher Valdur Ohakas. I felt I belonged here. Next year I bought his former summer studio, and left town.

I did not insulate or adjust the summer buildings for year-round living. This would have required changing the whole architectural solution and milieu. I decided to change the environment as little as possible, and was content with the modest circumstances, trying to accept them without causing any damage to the environment. Together with my wife and ever present friends, we live a life where the Bronze Age and post-industrialist ways of life are fused into one. We bring water from the spring in pails, in the summer we cook over an open fire, in the winter we heat the universe with stoves and the workroom with our breath. We work on fast computers and move around in petrol-driven carriages boasting hundreds of horsepower. Occasionally we are hurled from place to place on aeroplanes. We are always working on art projects and brainstorming sessions related to the surrounding environment. We come from different fields, and many of our works emerge as a symbiosis of literature, art, music and science. We define ourselves as a crossroads of nature and culture. Perhaps it is something similar to the communes of the 1960s and 1970s, although our activity is more concentrated, and our outlet wider.

We are surrounded by 5 hectares of land that belongs to us, but none of us acknowledges the market fundamentalist principle that says pieces of land can be someone's property. What we experience here is a responsibility to the land rather than a right to it. The responsibility cannot be measured by cadastral boundaries, it must extend to the whole surrounding area.

In the tradition of Australian aborigines, dreams about the creation myths of the local area are passed down along the maternal line. This is a very strong connection that generates perpetual ownership relations – people become the property of territory. Land does not belong to people, instead the people belong to the land. I am hard put to understand the meaning of private ownership of land, allegedly the cornerstone of our economic and judicial space, when the practical administration of land can only happen in cooperation between the beings who inhabit the land and the forces of nature. A self-picture without reflection turns existence into non-existence.

We are here on the fairies' salary. Hasso Krull is preparing his PhD on the cosmology of oral heritage, Leelo Laurits is editing a handbook on insects, the Djembe drum camp is underway, and numerous other oscillations are in the air.

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I am currently working on the project called 'Labyrinthos'. At the invitation of the Pavlov Media Lab I am spending the autumn in Groningen as a resident artist. My residency will be a special one, as I will be staying in my Valley and mainly be present through the internet. My working process, the environment in Kütiorg and the activities of my friends will be filmed and broadcast online over the internet to Groningen. For 3 weeks, this will be projected on a huge wall in the city centre. In this way there will be a direct link between the urban environment of Groningen and the forests of Estonia. The rough purity of the Estonian forests will challenge the overly cultivated Dutch citizens, to whom landscape is a work of art, not a piece of nature. The project will be an encounter with a lost world of lore and an overwhelming presence of Nature.



'Labyrinthos' describes something permanently present outside the sanctioned and authoritarian structures of our mind. This something reveals itself in the language of myths, dreams and pauses. I have mined and tried to trace memories from times immemorial, before land cultivating and cattle breeding were invented. Mysteries dating back to these times are centred for tuning and harmonizing with nature. Later, instead, we tried to advance and re-tailor them. Now nature is an exile of our environments and myths of natural initiation are exiles of our minds. Ruins of nature are civilization. Ruins of civilization are nature.

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I feel like a crossroad between these two sets of ruins.

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Our nature lies in ruins because of the rapid growth of towns, volcanic energetics and intensive agriculture. We have set off a geological era that Vladimir Vernadski calls psychozoic, where people's ideas and technologies have the same impact on the environment as atmospheric and biological factors. So far we have influenced our zoic in a perilous manner.

Our civilisation is ill and in ruins because of the progress-focused and inanely consumer-crazy monotheism, smothering world views that consider the temporal and cosmological dimension. Despite our aggressive confidence we are pitifully vulnerable. Just try to imagine a week-long power cut in a big city or a shower of global airplane crashes should a sufficiently powerful source of electromagnetic radiation, e.g. a stratospheric nuclear explosion, jam all our computers.

*"when a Chuktchi goes to the tundra he has everything necessary for survival with him. when a Native American climbs a tree he knows how to get down again. It happens only in societies based on white culture where man cannot cope with his environment in case it starts striking back. like a silly child, honestly."*

Andreas W  
Boreal plateau

...

*"As for bygone eras it does not really matter how much people remember of ancient times or how whole or scattered is the heritage that has reached us – the power of the time of creation functions independently of all historical layers, so that the tiniest of fragments may provide you with a clue leading to the heart of the labyrinth. The oral heritage therefore contains a key that enables access to many traditions (including perhaps even the golden era tradition), and these traditions in turn bring us back to our own heritage."*

Hasso Krull  
The pleasure and language of creating. An essay on the cosmology of ancient people

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The history of the Bible starts where a stage in the history of the Upanishads is about to end, Kali Yuga – the epoch of decline and destruction. Many ancient traditions know the mythical golden age where people trusted one another and had no notion of judgement, says Hasso Krull, thinking of Ovid, Hesiod and Danielou. In the older Indian cosmology this period can even be calculated: Krita Yuga began in 58 042 B.C. and ended with the coming of Treta Yuga in 33 848 B.C. A concept of time quite different than the one employed at stock exchanges, wouldn't you say?

Dolphins are most fascinating creatures, graceful examples of intellect and culture without material civilisation. They do not sew themselves even the basic items – no Calypso costumes or windpipes. Instead, they have learned to exhale the entire breath and inhale a new one within a fraction of a second through the crown of their head (for greater convenience, they have shifted the trachea on to Sahasrara chakra). Isn't that magnificent yoga?

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Pagans and the people of Dionysus, Shiva and Shamans grasp this kind of culture instantly. In the Occidental manufacture, however, far swifter spinning machines are designed in order to weave the nets of Maaja. We are so engrossed in the endless increasing and expanding that everything else no longer seems to matter. The favourite disease of our civilisation is cancer – a disorder where one tissue forgets its function in the organism and thrives unstoppably. Instead of filtering, the liver cells start madly multiplying. The Tower of Babel sags under its own weight like an autumnal mushroom.

I might die of cancer as well. Or I might wither like a chanterelle mushroom in a droughty summer. Or freeze to death in a snowdrift.

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Belka and Strelka are more closely related to me than Tsiolkovski or Einstein.

In this picture Belka (or is it Strelka) glances over his shoulder, beyond time and space, where humankind is still an embryo, part of nature and the carving on amber. I am looking in the same direction. Strelka means a little arrow in Russian.

There are plenty of snowdrifts in the forest where I live. Death is not something dreadful at all. Nor is birth. Such a way of thinking causes distress and frustration in many. In me it evokes lightness. I like to come up against death face to face. The end of the world is not an end of nature, but the end of a civilisation – the laundry of the universe.

Kalpas and worlds are still plentiful, like wild strawberries stuck on a straw. Different worlds intertwine. The Gardens of Eden. They are innumerable, simultaneous, one on top of the other, growing through one another. Look at a mossy turf and marvel at what goes on in there and think about the large number of contexts where they belong. It is like falling into the celestial whirl. In 'Labyrinthos' I am trying to sneak away from the anthropomorphic world and get familiarised with the images of other forms of life concerning life and death.

The conflict of cultures could easily be the crossroads. The crossroads of culture and nature could be a cavity, a passage to a totally weird place. The Trickster plays a game with the Stupid White Man where people are dragged through a whale's skull. Drag them in one direction – and get bone splinters; drag them the other way – and flesh is back on the bones. Somewhere in between is something else. A hollow tied into a knot. This is where you can occasionally slip through, for a breath of fresh air.



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The Bible ghost brags of having mixed the languages.  
A mixer indeed!  
Ecce!  
Maybe it had a sunstroke.  
Maybe it guzzled booze mixed with myrrh.  
The tower pushed its way to heaven in its nightmare and in that of its servants.  
Who has business up there, knows more suitable means of travel:  
Winds, wings, drum.  
Building towers, mixing languages –  
This is an envious boast of a one-language person.  
Why should anyone have spluttered in the language of Adam?  
Thunder or frog or coyote?  
There is a myriad of languages and they pass through one another, in and out, as needed.  
Some languages have lairs.  
Some languages have sprouts.  
Some languages have a tongue.

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I call the fairy tale of the Babel Tower bragging because according to a Bible myth, there was initially one language of Adam, just the one and common to everybody, but as people became pretentious and wanted to make the tower too high, then God had mixed the languages as a PUNISHMENT, i.e. created plurality.

This is quite an arrogant and silly story. Plurality and diversity are the primary and inescapable feature and precondition of everything living. The claim that someone had imposed it as a punishment is utterly crazy. The Bible was written by people and the claims therein belong to people as well. At a certain moment some people (mostly urbanising nomads - Jews, Arians and Arabs) invented the utopia about a single primary principle, single truth, and set about rearranging their own and other people's lives accordingly. Amongst other things they created a new god for themselves – the evil and jealous ghost - who fitted their utopia and tried to live with his help, ignoring all laws of nature. So far, they have succeeded, so-so.

Two central monotheistic motifs meet in the myth of the Tower of Babel. One is hierarchical monomania – the one and only direction – to heaven or whatever. This is symbolised by the tower.

The other motif is guilt. It is symbolised by the mixing of the languages. A significant component of Christianity is the denial of everything natural, carnal and secular, and it can be realised in practice only by cultivating an immense sense of guilt. Mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa. The whole history of Christianity revolves in the infinite wheel of repentance and redemption – it is not possible to exist in nature denying nature, after all, children must come from somewhere, etc. It was thus feigned that the entire diversity, carnality and joy are nothing but punishments for one or another sin.

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Nothing remarkable happened on 11 September 2001. The main attraction for all the news agencies was the simultaneous collapse of two rather high towers, but whether this was coincidence or a conspiracy of the Washington warlords, does not really alter the appearance of our planet.

The day of irreparable losses occurred a year or so later – when American troops looted the Baghdad museum and drove excavators into places of worship of the Sumerians, Assyrians, Accadians, Babylonians and who knows who else. That catastrophic date can be compared with the flood, or burning down the Library of Alexandria, or bubonic plague in medieval Europe or the global occupation, called the discovery of the post-Renaissance world, in the course of which whole nations, civilisations and races were wiped off the semiosphere. I am ashamed to be part of a nation who participates in this kind of pillage.

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I have shared the same Kütiorg sauna with beavers for seven years and I can confirm that these beasts have quite a bit in common with human creatures, and they often come out better. Beavers have an excellent command of the detail and general planning, the science of the strength of materials and design. When the reinforced concrete dam of the Kütiorg ski camp is regularly washed away downstream every two years, the beavers' dams stand firm or are repaired within a few days of the flooding.

In legislation the beavers far outsmart the humans as well. For example they have a legally binding and mutually beneficial contract with some bacteria that reside in their liver and decompose the wood into digestible matter. This contract is honoured without any interference from the police, supreme court and ministry of justice, and thus makes beavers the only mammal who can survive on pure cellulose. This maestro really knows no competition in nature as far as food is concerned, besides their one intestinal parasites.

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So. Then there are ants, even more mysterious creatures who even know the letter. By letter I mean the chemical code that the pismires leave in generally frequented locations or dispatch to the addressee with another ant. Moreover, the ants have their own cemeteries – cleaned-up clearings where the dead are placed in regular patterns.

The human animal's first break-out from animal kingdom is generally believed to be the ability to recognise one's own death, reflected in ritualised treatment of corpses. Graves and funeral pyres and all the related heritage and beliefs are supposed to be what distinguishes us, people, from the rest of animate nature. Not so.

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*“One origin does not necessarily impede the other, one story of creation does not obliterate another. This kind of logic of ‘inclusive disjunction’ is already recorded in the form of our ancient songs, in parallelism. During the singing of the song the singer’s community is the centre of the created world, which does not mean that any other community cannot be in the centre of the world while singing their songs. Here the terms ‘centre’ or ‘periphery’ do not signify the same as used imperialistically, by great powers. The distant Lapland is not periphery, but part of the created world, and we might not be able to command the reigning forces there. Similar forces could equally be found in the forest behind our house. A community shares in the might of creation, but it gives no mandate that any other community could not have. A nation in the centre of cosmos is ‘chosen’ only in the sense that it is ancient, that its singers have the power to bring back the primeval youth of the world. But there is no one and only ‘chosen’ nation, nor is there a language or culture that would be better than any other merely because of possessing some origin.”*

Hasso Krull

The pleasure and language of creating. An essay on the cosmology of ancient people

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*“On whom should we meditate as the self? Which of the two is He? Is He by which we see, hear, speak, smell, separate the sweet from the sour?”*

*Or is He that other, living in the mind or in the intellect as imagination, discrimination, knowledge, continuity, intuition, conviction, contemplation, will, emotion, memory, desire, resolution, being, living, loving, longing; all names for the one Intelligence?*

*He is Spirit, Creator, God; all Gods; earth, air, water, wind, fire, constituents of life, all greater and lesser combinations; seminal, egg-born, womb-born, sweat-born, soil-born; horses, cows, men, elephants, birds; everything that breathes, movable, immovable: all founded upon, all moved by the one Intelligence. Intelligence is Spirit.*

*Sage Wamadewa, with this knowledge, did all that he desired, left this world for Heaven, became immortal; became immortal.”*

Aitareya-Upanishad

Translated to English by Tiina Randviir

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