

MEETING OF A LINDEN TREE  
EIN LINDENTREFFEN



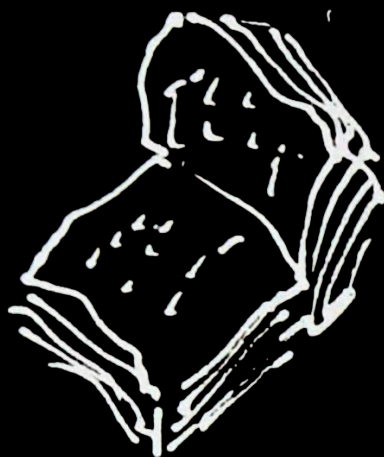




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Objects have been performing under the whip of subjects too long and are now disobedient and can't be counted on any longer. They avoid real contact and meaningful relationships and divorce themselves from the intentions of subjects. They used to be good and close to our hearts. They almost liked us and seemed to be grateful for our attention, but were deprived of their dignity by the throw-away philosophy, which resulted in the object's revenge: garbage.





A page from Peter Schumann's illustrated essay "What, At The End of This Century, Is The Situation of Puppets and Performing Objects?", found in *Puppets, Masks, and Performing Objects* (ed.: John Bell, 2002), which was loaned to me while developing this work by the team at Sammlung Philara in Düsseldorf, namely Julika Bosch and Hannah Niemeier.





Momo has been imagined by Märchen-Roman and Michael Ende for their story *Momo*, who has a pet turtle named Cassiopeia.

Molly was originally written as a character in Michael Ende's story *Jim Knopf und Lukas der Lokomotivführer*.

## CHARACTERS

### **MOMO (WITH HER TURTLE)**

An empath; kind, patient, wise.

### **MOLLY**

A locomotive. Pragmatic, practical, and matter of fact. Has very little patience for jokes, or thought experiments or philosophizing.

### **MEPHISTOS**

A business man and his ghoulish ghost. Literally a devil's advocate, a rascal. Likes to sardonically poke fun.

Both of these characters come from *Faust*, a puppet play by Susanne Kröber.

### **G'MORK**

A werewolf. A servant of the power behind Nothing, which is to say he is confused; stuck between two places. Curious and fretting. Can travel between worlds and change into a human.

A character originally written for Michael Ende's *Die unendliche Geschichte* (The Neverending Story). This character may be a reference to Fenrir of Norse mythology.

MOMO

Let's start with our affirmations. Molly?

MOLLY

Ok. *(Begins affirmations)* Does anyone besides omniscient beings and our makers still watch our forms?

ALL (BUT G'MORK)

Yes.

G'MORK

*(simultaneously)* Ummm...

MOLLY

And, if they do watch, what do they discover from the images created by our aliveness?

ALL (BUT G'MORK)

They see great possibilities of thought and action.

G'MORK

*(simultaneously)* Ummm...

G'MORK

And what if we are not "alivened"?

MOMO

Is it your first meeting?

G'MORK

*(apologetically)* Yeah... I'm G'mork... Sorry, I wasn't able to join earlier sessions...

ALL (BUT G'MORK)

Hi G'mork.

G'MORK

Hi. Sorry, so sorry to interrupt. I just... what if we aren't "alivened"? Do they still see great possibilities of thought and action?

MEPHISTOS

Is "alivened" even a word?

MOMO

Give him a break, you know what he means. *(answering G'MORK)* If we aren't alivened, it means our individuality has yet to be discovered. In this circumstance, we are designated as an object. Or...

The words from this group "affirmation" are borrowed from the fourth page of John Bell's chapter "Entertainment, Spectacle, Crime: Puppetry in the Year 2000" in his book *Puppets, Masks, and Performing Objects*.

In a conversation with artist Pansee Atta on 14 September 2024, she describes her work 'To Make One Particle Of The Public Soul of All Things', an interactive performance at the Wereldmuseum in Amsterdam which ended in a taxonomic exercise that illustrated how categorical systems overlap, contradict and compete one another. She said: "It is too much work, but it is ultimately about getting on the floor, getting your hands dirty, and starting to do the work."

**MEPHISTOS**

*(interrupts)* And in this case, our value diminishes in the market...

**VOICE SPLITS:**

**Voice 1:** "The mask needs to have danced!"

**Voice 2:** Sticking around like a cheap suit!

**MOLLY**

Please Mephistos, she was in the middle of a thought...

**MOMO**

*(continuing)* Or, our individuality has been discovered, and it has been alivened, and then, we retire – wait to be alivened again, or repurposed. In these circumstances, we are again designated as objects.

**MEPHISTOS**

We refuse the definition of object as one without autonomy! We fucking hate simplistic reductions of representation! We are very suspicious of representation that relies on making something explicit and unable to change.

**MOLLY**

*(rolling eyes)* Here we go...

**MOMO**

*(considering)* There is a possibility of otherwise. Go on, Mephistos.

**MEPHISTOS**

"Objects" as a designation only exist because someone else has been deceived into considering themselves a subject. As a subject, one imprisons themselves in their own religion of categories. They develop righteous and toxic entitlements that enable them to designate things as "objects". Their power is delusional. What kind of individuality exists in this prison of subject? Tangled in their competing axonometric systems, categorizing and re-categorizing and calling it a purposeful life... Fools!

**MOMO**

It's true, calling something a name that never changes creates a certain kind of false power. But they have to fill their time somehow... make sure there is no wasted time... *(pitying)* lost souls...

In a conversation with artist Ada M. Patterson on 15 September 2024, she introduces a colonial phrase "the mask needs to have danced" (*il faut que le masque air dansé*), which originates from colonial valuation system of performance artifacts pillaged and stolen from colonized cultures. In this context, if the masks were used in their original contexts, they were more valuable. Patterson explains, "I see it differently in a sense of: yes the masks needs to have danced, and then it is not sold, it is not shown, it is not displayed; it simply needs to keep dancing, or not dance at all. For me, that's the difference in looking at this valuation system. It's the dance that is important." A part of Ada's practice includes developing characters through costuming.

The idea of this particular "subject" and the prison they find themselves in is borrowed from Peter Schumann's illustrated essay "What, At The End of This Century, Is The Situation of Puppets and Performing Objects?", found in John Bell's *Puppets, Masks, and Performing Objects*.

**G' MORK**

(*curious*) Meaning what exactly?

**MOLLY**

Meaning those who classify "objects" without an autonomous force are lost.

**MEPHISTOS**

Prisoners! Nothing more than prisoners. We pity them. As objects, we are happily unfettered of the "common sense" these subjects are imprisoned by. This is how they love us, for our absurdity! Our impossibility. Our resemblance to them and simultaneously outrageous deviation from them. We have been illegal! We, our mere existences, illegal! This is real power. We are venerable mediums, bridging worlds of possibility with worlds of actuality.

There are surely many examples from various cultures of forbidden puppetry practice, but an example from Western history is: after the decline of antique cultures through the domination of Christianity in Western Europe, church fathers (especially Augustine) "condemned the mime theatre as the remains of pagan culture". (From the chapter "Puppets and the Power of the State" in the book *Aspects of Puppet Theatre* by Henryk Jurkowski (2013).

**G' MORK**

Wait, what is illegal?

**MOLLY**

(*stumped*) Um -

**MOMO**

(*admitting*) We've never really been sure...

**MOLLY**

Yeah it's always been unclear. But it seems like a big deal.

**MOMO**

What we do know is that we are evocative. Abstract. These subjects can't take their eyes off us. If we speak directly to them, they often say things they wouldn't have said otherwise. They demand things they wouldn't dare demand with another of their fellow subjects.

**MOLLY**

Even if they feel stupid, talking to a train, they have a hard time taking it out on anyone else but the train.

**MOMO**

If they trust us, that is. Sometimes they try to override and get to our makers, but we stand strong. We have always been scapegoats.

**MEPHISTOS**

(*dreamily*) Strong and illegal!

Adjectives and nouns here are borrowed from Matthew Isaac Cohen's "Puppetry and the Destruction of the Object", Published in *Performance Research* 12.4 (pages 119-27).

With *Beziehungskiste*, another impromptu character of Nadia Ihjeij, people expressed feeling stupid speaking to an animated cigarette box about their relationship problems, while nevertheless continuing to confess to the box.

In a conversation on 18 September 2024, puppeteer Nadia Ihjeij described an early walk act with a puppet character Lieber Gott, a wise white godlike man, who invited people to ask him questions about the world, the majority of which he replied to with insistent innocence. It resulted in vital conversations with the puppet, sometimes with people angrily demanding answers from Lieber Gott.

This thought is residue from speaking with Pansee Atta about the Dutch children's book series turned television show *Dummie De Mummie*, where an ancient Egyptian boy is adopted by a white Dutch family. As a character, Dummie can speak but is rarely listened to. Daniel Soliman explains in "Dummie de Mummie: An Egyptian Body as the Undead, Oriental Other" that the series perpetuates xenophobic othering as humor in its narratives. (This text is a chapter in *Classical Controversies: Reception of Graeco-Roman Antiquity in the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Kim Berden & Timo Epping.)

G'MORK

What do you *mean*?

MEPHISTOS

We mean it is impossible for us to be blamed! We've landed in their courts through our summoned makers, who blamed us for our dissidence, and we have stood resilient to their incarceration!

G'MORK

What's incarceration?

MEPHISTOS

(*shrill*) We don't know!

MOLLY

Being a scapegoat isn't always a position of power. We can be scapegoats for ugly habits that would never be inflicted on other subjects. We create the space for abuse, neglect, perpetuation of expressions that would otherwise be unacceptable.

MOMO

Yes, we can be used to create space for practiced violence.

MEPHISTOS

(*jokingly*) Always as entertainment, lest we forget.

MOLLY

(*groans*) Eugh...

G'MORK

So you're saying our liveness is a protection. We protect our makers. Sometimes in our glory, sometimes at our own expense.

Nadia Ihjeij explains her puppetry practice allows her to access parts of her own character that she might not be able to access as easily without their presence.

MEPHISTOS

We can be stand-ins for people that wouldn't otherwise get the job! Hide behind us kind of deal.

MOLLY

It's less about hiding, and more about enabling. We allow them to bend rules they would never dare bend in their own lives.

MOMO

We make it safe to be seen.

Pyotr Bovatyrev writes an anecdote of a Czech puppeteer who, when summoned to court to defend accusations of launching political attacks from his puppet theatre, brought his puppet Kašpárek with him. He declared innocence, and claimed everything was Kašpárek's fault. (From the first English translation of "Czech Puppet Theatre and Russian Folk Theatre" in John Bell's *Puppets, Masks, and Performing Objects* (1999).

Words gleaned from the first page of John Bell's chapter "Entertainment, Spectacle, Crime: Puppetry in the Year 2000" in his book *Puppets, Masks, and Performing Objects*.



A chalkboard hanging on the wall behind Nadia Ihjeij during a Zoom meeting reads: *It is safe to be seen.*

G'MORK

And when we aren't enlivened?

MOLLY

Some people say we need to be put to rest permanently, outside of the eyes of subjects, in order to preserve the magic.

MOMO

This can terrify people who are bound by a phobia of wasted time.

G'MORK

Well I don't blame them... to be forgotten forever for the sake of preserving the magic... that sounds like a purgatory to me. To decay, to be forgotten; in other words, to turn into nothing again...

MEPHISTOS

Well, there is always another option...

MEPHISTOS (VOICES SPLIT)

VOICE 1: *(cackles)*

VOICE 2: Here is our offer: Be woken from your rest and forced to do additional labor in order to perpetuate a consumption that justifies your preservation. Prove that you are too important to be left alone by sacrificing yourself to the spectacle of your being. Become total object, for the delight and the continuation of the economy of the subjects that categorize you.

MOLLY

*(rolling eyes)* Here we go again...

G'MORK

I do love to be appreciated... It doesn't sound like *that* much work to just... be there...

MOLLY

Hold on a second. Think about this! What you are relinquishing is any relationality you might have with any other thing. Being conserved doesn't mean being cared for; you could become toxic, never to be touched again, sterilized and still, unable to travel because of the delicate conditions you require...

MOMO

Never being allowed to rot, to transform, to decompose...

The puppet speaking here is Momo, from the story *Momo* by Michael Ende. Momo has the gift of listening and helping others express their feelings. She is also unaffected by time, and by the fear of wasting it.

In a conversation with artist Aram Lee on 18 September 2024, while describing her performance *Holding Poison* at the Tropenmuseum (Amsterdam, 2023) she explains: "conservation doesn't mean caring; conserving something doesn't mean you care". She has also written these words in the context of her research on the ways that the chemical DDT was used until the early 1990s in Western museums to sanitize new objects for their collection, especially those coming from climates outside western Europe. The presence of this chemical now requires special safety garments and housing for handling and exhibiting the treated objects, and often makes restitution of these now poisonous artifacts back to origin countries nearly impossible.

Nadia Ihjeij was taught that puppets should never be put away before a live audience, or else it would "kill the magic", as the puppet would be made anonymous in a disrespectful way. She was trained to puppeteer exposed, which meant the puppeteer was always visible as the puppet was being played; this practice relies on a magic for the puppet to remain the intended focus of the audience's attention.

Pansee Ata describes the Western museological tradition of displaying ancient Egyptian human remains as an indication of the dissonance between Western and Egyptian societies' regards to human remains. She describes sarcophagi whose inscriptions clearly explain the intent of the rested person to be left undisturbed, and the translation of these descriptions being displayed alongside the unwrapped remain in museums without criticality of this method, in the name of pedagogical study. She speaks of these demands of the institution on the remains as "additional labor".

**G'MORK**

*(horrified)* But *why* would I want that?!

**MOMO**

To be able to die is to be able to live until death. Otherwise, you are stuck in some kind of...

**MOLLY**

Purgatory!

**MEPHISTOS**

Well? Will you take our offer? Don't you think being seen is your only chance to stay alive?

**G'MORK**

If it means I won't be forgotten...

**MOMO**

G'mork, be careful. If you accept their offer, you are redefining your function. You would be designated eternal inanimacy – you would never be alivened again.

**MEPHISTOS**

Eternal preservation. Eternal relevance. This is what we offer...

**Voice 2:** *(breaks into a cackle)*

**G'MORK**

But what if I am never alivened again! That's a realistic possibility! I deserve an afterlife. I deserve a memory...

**MOMO**

*(curious)* Oh! So you also worry about your own death, decay, irrelevance?

**MOLLY**

I, for one, am concerned about the worry of death. Everyone is just so worried... What's so bad about being used, and then put to rest without another job after that?

**G'MORK**

Because that is... the end of... a waste of... time...

**MOMO**

Time has a way of working that often needs no intervention. When we are left alone, there is an assumption that things will just decay; but sometimes, being left alone is necessary.

Pansee Ata asks:  
"Are natural resources that are left in the ground and not used by industry, are those not preserved in their own way? When they're just left alone, there is an assumption that the thing will just decay, but I think that in fact that in it being left alone is in some cases necessary. To not insist on consuming it as wholly as possible as quickly as possible is actually what allows it to be preserved."

On one day in August 2024, I found on the ground a pamphlet from a Rotterdam Christian church that asked on its front, "Do you worry about the fear of old age and death?"



**MOLLY**

It is very much of my culture, to materialize something in order to remember it. But one could argue that in the process of materialization and preservation, the moment is already forgotten – death has already happened. It creates an immediate past. I'd rather run the rails until the rails run me down!

**MEPHISTOS**

*(exasperated)* Fuck this. Offer's expired. We aren't one for dragging negotiations.

**MOLLY**

*(cheerfully changing the subject)* Anyway. Did you hear about the ones that were destroyed before they could be alivened? They were crushed in trash compactors right before their performance as a preemptive strike against their dissidence.

**MOMO**

Never underestimate the power of a larger-than-life public spectacle.

**MEPHISTOS**

Well, regardless of being crushed, they did their job. You telling their story is testament to that.

**G'MORK**

Wouldn't it have been better if they were just saved? Prohibited from being alivened but not destroyed? I would have loved to see them...

**MEPHISTOS**

And make a spectacle of their purpose? Freeze them and make a market of them, de-contextualizing their potential life? Saving them satiates a system that values accumulation of material wealth and its trade, rather than on the value of actions. Displaying their bodies for empty, dissociated nostalgia for something that they never even let happen...

**MOLLY**

Saving them doesn't mean they need to become spectacles. They could be saved to tell as story. I see where G'mork is coming from.

In 2000 in Seattle, Washington, USA, activists participating in the anti-globalization WTO protests were arrested and their puppets, which were intended to be used in a march the day later, were crushed in trash compactors.



**G' MORK**

They are a trace of an intention.

**MOMO**

And yet, our existence is not reliant on making ourselves visible. We create illusions that surpass our individual likeliness. We stand in many roles, can adopt many voices.

**G' MORK**

This is true. I've never heard my voice speak like this...

**MOLLY**

I've never heard my voice at all!

**MOMO**

*(as if she's only realizing it now)* Yes, come to think of it, I've never even spoken this language...

**MEPHISTOS**

However we sound and wherever we are, we follow the path of poetic degradation, gradual perversion, and oblivion!

**MOLLY**

Well, *sometimes* we make stories that make sense...

**G' MORK**

I'm concerned about oblivion...

**MOMO**

So. That means it's time for us to begin. Let's start with our affirmations...

**[ LOOP ]**

These words are borrowed from Pyotr Bovatyrev's "Czech Puppet Theatre and Russian Folk Theatre": "the history of folklore according to researchers is considered a history of poetic degradation, gradual perversion, and oblivion."

This script was written for puppets made by the Düsseldorf Marionette Theatre, who all typically perform their roles in the German language.







## Meeting of a Linden Tree / Ein Lindentreffen

was commissioned by Sammlung Philara on  
the occasion of the exhibition *Cutting the  
Puppeteer's Strings* (20 October 2024 –  
1 June 2025) in Düsseldorf, Germany.

### PUPPETS

ANTON BACHLEITNER,  
DÜSSELDORF MARIONETTE THEATRE

### VOICE ACTORS

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LILI HUSTON-HERTERICH

### SCRIPT

LILI HUSTON-HERTERICH

### SOUND EDITING

LILI HUSTON-HERTERICH

### RESEARCH CONSULTATION

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For teaching me how to bend  
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