

Das Beckwerk

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Funus Imaginarium

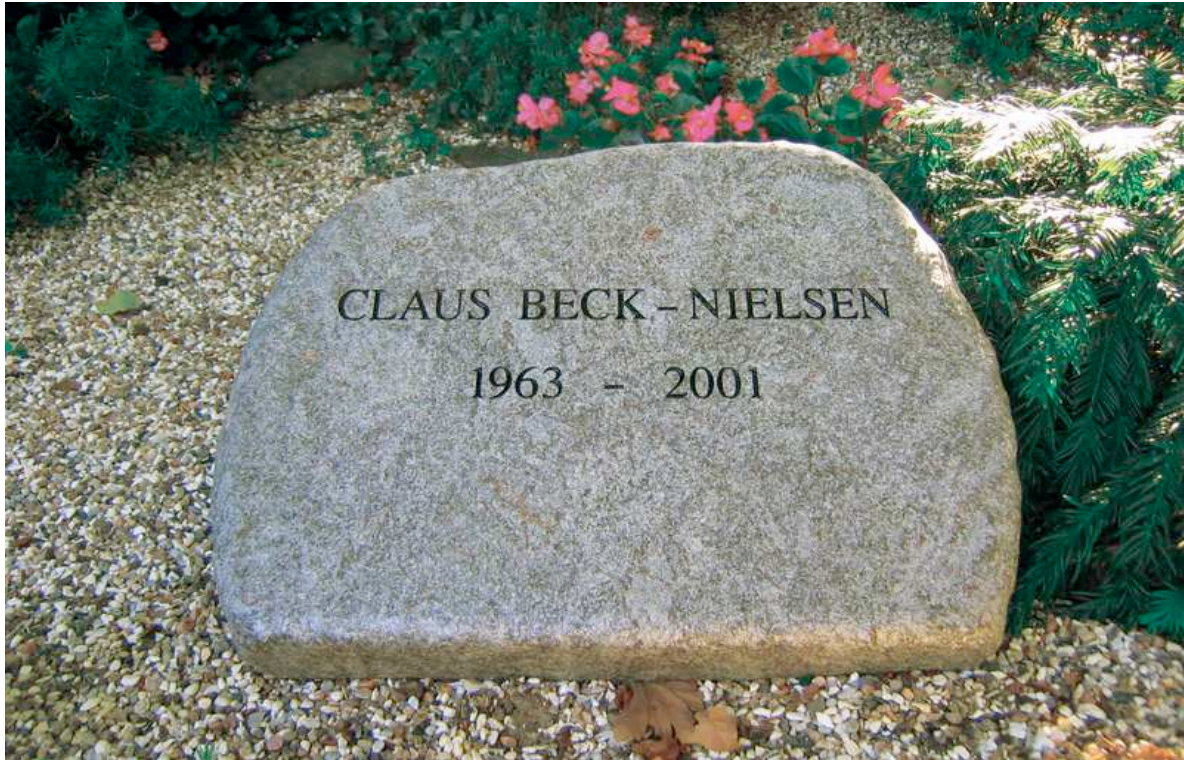
- the Death of Identity -

Das Beckwerk / Glyptoteket Museum / Copenhagen / Assistens
Churchyard, autumn 2010

At the end of 2001 the Danish artist, author, performer e.g. Claus Beck-Nielsen passed away and was declared dead. In 2002 the company Das Beckwerk was established to continue the work that was initiated with this death: to free mankind from the burden of personal identity, and introduce a nameless and utopian being, and with this being a new form of being together, a society where we will all be the "Other", where we will gather in and share the common Otherness.

In this utopian project Claus Beck-Nielsen is just a random representative of humankind in the third millennium. He wasn't chosen to be our subject because his name, his person or his life had any special importance. His existence and death serves the greater cause: the search for new forms of human being.

The death of Claus Beck-Nielsen in 2001 is a formal fact, and should be commonly accepted as the prerequisite for the utopian work of Das Beckwerk. But it has turned out that the surrounding world has had and still has difficulties accepting this death. Media and (wo)men still refer to him as if he was still alive, and often even addresses him. This of course is a great obstacle for our utopian work: That the humans of our times seem to deny letting go of personal identity. We have a problem, and this problem we have to solve.



In 2001 Claus Beck-Nielsen was declared dead, and in 2005 a tombstone was raised on Vestre Churchyard in Copenhagen. But an actual burial has never been carried through; the mortal remains of Claus Beck-Nielsen have never been put in the ground. Concerning the question of his mortal remains, there are two possible answers:

1. Somewhere out in the vast world he has gone down and his mortal remains, the corpse, has either disappeared or it has been found but not identified.
2. The other possibility is that his body still is among the living somewhere in the world. It could be the present and nameless “director / CEO” chosen by the board of Das Beckwerk to lead the company. In this case we deal with a body already “marked” by or initiated to death. A nameless and paradoxical being, that seems to go on living a normal life, yet in reality is moving in a grey zone, a zone of the indecidable, on the threshold between life and death. According to the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben the consequence of death is exactly “the appearance/leaving behind of a vague and fraudulent being that with the appearance of the dead looks up and haunts the places, where the passed-away in his time used to come, a being neither belonging to the living, nor to the land of the dead.” (*Homo Sacer*, 1995)

In either case we are dealing with an undecided matter, a question or problem, which sooner or later has to be solved through a definitive act: a ritual, which according to the tradition - and this on the whole applies to all cultures that have existed throughout the history of mankind - will be a form of funeral. According to the Italian historian Carlo Ginsburg it is "not the biological death, but the social act, the burial rite, that parts the one who is passing away from those who remain."¹

This might be the main reason why the surrounding society has had difficulties in accepting that Claus Beck-Nielsen is no longer among us. Not until the burial service or rite has been carried through, the double or ghost of Claus Beck-Nielsen will stop haunting the world of the living and his death will be a commonly accepted and thus final fact. But a burial rite always deals with an object; there has to be something to bury, a left over from the one who has "passed away". A body. It might be that the death of personal identity will only be commonly accepted if including or at least relating to a body. A body has to be buried alongside identity.

But, since in this case we don't deal with an ordinary corpse, the question of the burial of Claus Beck-Nielsen has to be solved in a special way. Fortunately we find throughout the history of civilisations certain traditions that deal with these special circumstances.

The body-object & the ritual:

The *Colossus* among the Greeks & the *Funus Imaginarium* in ancient Rome

Among the early Greeks, when a man had gone far away and perished without it being possible to bring back the body or carry out the funerary rites for him, his double, his *psuché* would be compelled to wander and haunt the city or society the man had left behind. In these cases a simple stone was erected and planted in the earth of the uncultivated forest outside the city and thus beyond the world of the living. This *colossus* would tie the wandering double or ghost of the dead; it would fix it to the ground and bring the haunting to an end.

Later, during the Roman Empire, before Christ a similar connection of body-object and ritual was used in the cases, where the mortal remains of a dead had been lost or the body - though still alive - no longer belonged to the living, but through an act of initiation had been given to death. Literally: A living dead. It could be a senator or tribune who(se body) had disappeared during a war in remote areas of the Empire. Or it could be a still living senator who was to go to war and who might not return. In these cases a *colossus* was produced. But whereas *colossus* used by the early Greeks was

¹ Carlo Ginsburg: "Repräsentation, - das Wort, die Vorstellung, der Gegenstand". 1992

just a simple stone, not an image of a certain man, just a representation of his double in dead stone, the *colossus* or effigy produced by the Romans would be a 1:1-scale representation in wax, a precise representation of the passed-away or living dead. And the ritual connected to this representation was developed into a veritable reality show: The *colossus* would lie 7 days and nights on a deathbed being treated like a dying: At the side of the colossus nurses were keeping watch, now and then a doctor came to register pulse and blood pressure of the colossus and give it different kinds of medical treatment, and currently bulletins on the state of the colossus were announced in public, and during all 7 days senators and other important men of Rome paid their visit to the colossus.

After the 7 ritual days and nights the doctors declared the death of the colossus. After this the ritual funeral procession followed, and in the end: the burial. The Romans were pagans or “heathens”, but a similar ritual was used at the Christian funeral of kings during the French Middle Ages, and so it is also part of Christian culture.

Funus Imaginarium of Claus Beck-Nielsen (1963-2001)

In the fall of 2010 Das Beckwerk will - in collaboration with the Danish museum for ancient art Glyptoteket, the Danish architect Poul Ingemann, the authorities of Copenhagen, representatives of the Danish State Church, philosophers, historians and citizens of Copenhagen - stage the definitive act: *Funus Imaginarium* of Claus Beck-Nielsen (1963-2001). The procedure will be as follows:

1. The deathbed - in a special building raised on Dantes Square in the centre of Copenhagen (the formalised Agora) - Thursday 30. September – Thursday 7. October 2010

2. The funeral procession - through the centre of Copenhagen (the real, popular Agora)

Saturday 9. October 2010

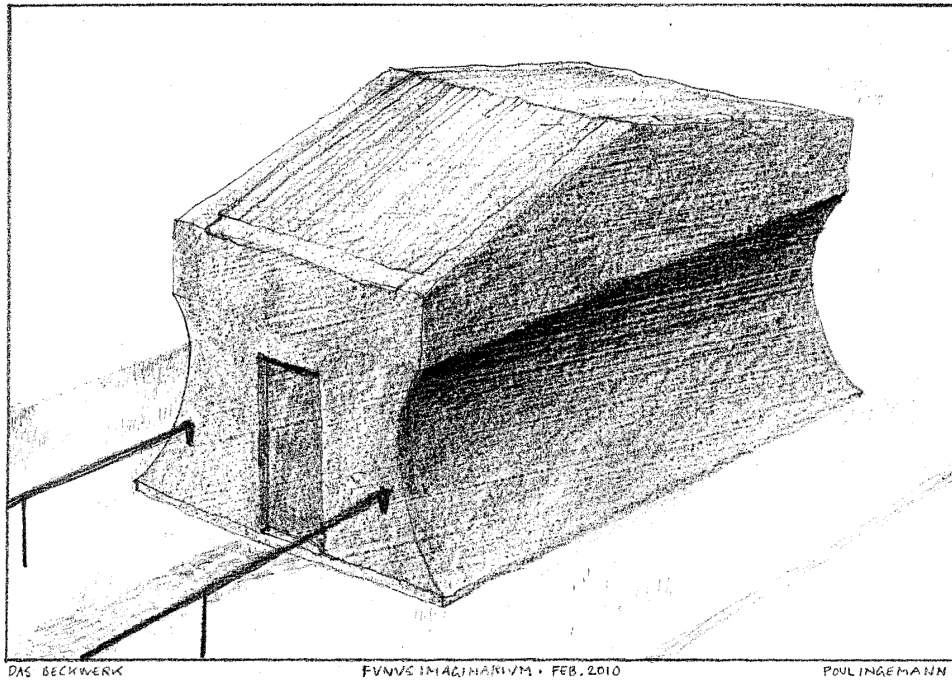
3. The burial rite - on Assistens Churchyard (the public private hereafter, Necropolis)

Saturday 9. October 2010

4. The official 100 days of mourning - 100 days where the world reflect on the loss of personal identity and its consequences - Saturday 9. October 2010 - 17. January 2011

The deathbed in the (cenotaph) building on Dantes Square 30. Sept. – 7. Oct. 2010

First of all a colossus, an exact representation of Claus Beck-Nielsen is produced in wax or silicone rubber, and a building is raised in front of Glyptoteket on Dantes Plads, a tiny square situated in the middle of H.C. Andersens Boulevard, the six-lane road cutting through the centre of Copenhagen.



The deathbed is staged in this building.



plaster cast of the dying

- (stage 2 in the process towards the final and original effigy) -

During the seven days and nights the following will be present:

- * A medical doctor (will perform a doctor's call 2 times a day, and at the end, also sign the death certificate).
- * Nurses will be present around the clock.
- * Representatives of the authorities and the public - the Minister of Culture, heads of the Royal Theatre, Museums etc - distinguished authors, artists, directors and other persons known by the people will be invited to pay (official) visits during the days of the deathbed.
- * During daytimes the pavilion will be open to the public and a guide will be present.
- * And of course the presence of the Medias - TV, radio, newspaper-journalists, photographers etc. - will play an important role.

The role model of the deathbed will be the rituals from the time of the Roman Empire, but they will off course be transformed into contemporary forms and carried out through the technology of our times.

The funeral procession & the burial rite - *Saturday 9. October 2010*

The following funeral procession will be inspired by the grand funeral procession of the French author and philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre in 1981. It will proceed from Glyptoteket through the old centre of Copenhagen to the famous Assistens Churchyard, where the burial rite will be performed by a priest, and where the tombstone afterwards will be raised.

The *Funus Imaginarium* of Claus Beck-Nielsen is based in reality, in the life and death of real person(s), and it will be staged in a movement of the history of civilisation taking its beginning in the Greek *colossus* and rituals of the Roman Empire, transforming through the French Middle Ages into an "event" of our time, a "media event". It will be the final solution on the problems around the death of Claus Beck-Nielsen, but even more important: it will be a farewell to identity as we know it, a farewell carried through by (representatives) of our society as a whole. And finally it aims to recreate and discuss the ways that humankind have faced and dealt with the problems of death from before Christ till now at the beginning of the 21st Century.

Funus Imaginarium is a modern staging of a ritual from a time in history where the arts and society were not two separated entities, a time where the political and the private merged in the religious rituals, those very rituals, which are the origin of the stage arts as we know them. Today, in the 21.st Century, almost everything, from the most private rooms of private life to big politics are staged - by web-cams, spin-doctors, media-consultants, reality-TV etc. In *Funus Imaginarium* we take one of the last remnants of private life that are still ritualised: the funeral, and turn it into a public ritual, an "event". It is all about our relation to death, biography, identity, the body and the use of rituals. And thus Claus Beck-Nielsen is just the casual material that we exploit in our attempt to find a way to create the new role of the human being.

The globalisation of the Death of Identity

The death and burial of personal identity should take place simultaneously all over the world.

As Claus Beck-Nielsen and his body is nothing but a random representative of the human being of our times, his burial - our farewell to personal identity - is not to be seen as a local event, but an event that relates to all citizens of the world. And thus the deathbed and burial should ideally take place simultaneously all over the planet. Not only in Copenhagen, but simultaneously in Hamburg, London, Rome, Rio, Mumbai, LA, Baghdad, Beijing etc.

In our times the World Wide Web has freed an event from being bound to a specific place. A video-conference on the Internet no longer takes place, and its participants are "showing up" from all over the world without leaving their offices. Etc. It would be possible to transmit the *Funus Imaginarium* live to large screens raised in major cities all over the world. But in this case the (presence of the) physical body is essential. A live-transmission of the death bed on the Internet would have to relate to an actual body in situ. Ideally the body of Claus Beck-Nielsen should take place and be present on a death bed in many places all over the world simultaneously.

The process of creation that leads to the "colossus", the effigy that is to be placed on the death bed in the building in the centre of Copenhagen goes through several stages:

1. First an imprint of the still-alive body presumably left behind by CBN is made.

2. From this imprint a plaster cast is made and subsequently being adapted until it is as close to being a 100 % representation of the living body.
3. From this plaster-representation the final mould is made.
4. And in this mould the final and unique effigy is cast.

In principle it would be possible to cast a large number of copies and thus multiply and spread, globalise this unique body. But then the unique would be lost.

Instead it is our aim to return to the "original" imprint of the still-living body, stage 1, and in this imprint make plaster-copies of what would then be the ancestral form of the wax effigy. As the original imprint is very fragile it will presumably only be possible to make a maximum of ten such plaster bodies.

The 10 pre-forms of the unique dying body will then be placed on death beds different places in Europe and the world. Primarily in art institutions - museums, galleries etc. - as these in our societies throughout history have been and still are the places where plaster copies of original human body representations and statues are kept and exhibited. But this field might be widened to include town halls, parliaments, hospitals, churches, schools etc.

Each of these would have to house the death bed with the dying plaster-body and a screen on which the 7 days death bed, the burial procession and the burial rite will be shown in a live transmission on the Internet.

Subsequently the plaster-copy can remain on the bed another 100 days, now not as a dying, but as a being-in-between, which at the end of the 100 days will be definitively transformed into a statue, an art-work or a monument over certain form of the human identity, that now belongs to history.

In these 100 days and nights there will no longer be a live-transmission from Copenhagen. Instead an video-edition of the 7 days death bed, the funeral procession and the burial rite will be shown, now as a retrospective.

And so Das Beckwerk is looking for 10 collaborators and places in Europe and the world that might be interested in participating in the global and synchronous farewell to personal identity!

The collaboration and the exhibition can have different durations, but they will all have to **start synchronously Thursday 30. September 2010:**

I. A 9 days exhibition and live transmission of the death bed, procession and burial rite in Copenhagen. *Thursday 30. September – Saturday 9. October 2010*

II. From 9 to 109 days, including the 100 days, where the building on Dantes Square in Copenhagen is still remaining and now housing an edited video-version of the entire event.

Thursday 30. September 2010 – Saturday 17. January 2011

III. Eternity: is also an option: If the actual museum, gallery etc. after the 109 days and nights takes over and keeps the effigy that has now finally transformed into a statue, an art-work and as such now being a part of art history.