

TRIVIAL  
EVERYDAY  
THINGS

JØRGEN LETH

*Poems*

Selected and translated  
from the Danish by  
MARTIN AITKEN

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FIRST ENGLISH EDITION

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The poems published here originally appeared in Danish in the collections *Sportsdigte* (Sports Poems) (1967), *Lykken i Ingenmandsland* (Happiness in No-man's Land) (1967), *Glatte hårdtpumpede puder* (Smooth Inflated Cushions) (1969), *Det går forbi mig* (It Passes Me By) (1975), *Hvordan de ser ud* (How They Look) (1987), *Billedet forestiller* (What the Picture Shows) (2000), and *Det gør ikke noget* (It Doesn't Matter) (2006), all published by Gyldendal of Copenhagen.

*New Scene*, *Pas de deux 1-3*, and *Swamp of Fiction* appeared as fragments in Danish journal *Banana Split* #25 (2005), having previously appeared as parts of more expansive pieces in the collection *Billedet forestiller* (What the Picture Shows) (2000).

*Manuscript* appears in Jørgen Leth's recent book *Tilfældets gaver: Tekster om at lave film* (Gifts of Chance: Texts on Filmmaking), published by Gyldendal in 2009.

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## **NOTHING CHANGED**

Nothing has changed.  
It is still the same.  
I have nothing to say.  
It means nothing.  
Here is the sun and the ocean.  
Some things are happening here.  
The ocean is not devoid of ships.  
The sun has houses and an ocean in which to reflect.  
Something is happening here, sounds are heard.  
People are moving, some are standing still.  
The sound of many violins streams from open doors.  
Over there the sound of people on the ocean.  
Everything is here that should be here.  
Nothing has changed.  
You are not here.  
You are somewhere else.  
It is still the same.  
Music is suspended in a cloud of dust and sun.  
You are not here.  
I am watching the ocean.  
The ocean is reflecting the sun.  
You are somewhere else.  
I allow the sun to warm me.  
The sun is the same where you are.  
I have nothing to say.  
It means nothing.  
Here are things to do.  
I can go into the shade.  
I can let the ocean be.  
Here is the sun, and here is the ocean.  
It means nothing.  
It is still the same.

## **A SHORT POEM**

Right now I want  
to be able to write a short poem

I've paper in the typewriter  
I sniff my arm

I sniff my arm again  
I think about what I want

I've finished  
I've written a short poem

## **THERE IS NOTHING ELSE**

There is nothing else but what there is  
and what kind of a thing is that to say, so  
instead I will say that today I  
have exchanged caresses with my loved one  
and have taken part in two meals  
with my children and have propelled my body  
backwards and forwards within these rooms, and that  
today I have sat motionless for a long time  
and watched people moving and speaking  
in image after image, and that I have  
now situated myself alone amidst the calm  
to let the life from the television flow  
through my brain and out into emptiness  
onto this sheet of paper.

## LOSING ITSELF IN A QUEST FOR SIGNS

losing itself in a quest for signs

camera may leave a scene before discharging  
its “meaning”, before reaching its climax  
or become preoccupied, dwelling on something  
“inconsequential”

how does the food taste in this place?  
the coffee?  
the emptiness?

equipment: typewriter, radio, ballpen, paper: all this  
is me. all this is tangible. true

sadness: the view from this window, the world is wide open  
the possibilities endless. completely open

i relish the melancholy  
i see my hand and my foot

time is tangible and may be measured on a clock

banalities close-up body, look down at its feet  
or knees. tilt down a few times, repetition  
the writing hand writing a fateful  
sentence

his pocket is full of notes, scraps of paper, calling cards,  
tickets. now and then he takes them out,  
reads them

linger somewhere camera describing the place, a few  
square metres, a door, a section of floor, backwards

and forwards. depicting “exhaustively”

hotel room

camera remains after he has left the room

explores on its own or simply remains

camera a life of its own

its own breathing, its own taste.

its own idiosyncratic way of selecting and  
discarding

a day's shoot can revolve around a detail

like his right hand

a cup of coffee

the women's backsides

the trees

camera slowly approaching nothing

destroying the image

becoming nothing

feet

coffee

whatever

woman

knees, neck, throat, face, feet, hands

mythology

a tube of sunscreen

coffee

sitting down on a chair

spreading butter on bread

drinking a glass of water

obsession: details

the daily mess that prevents us from seeing clear signs  
a constant quest for signs, signals

mythology

money across the table, money changing hands

the upended postcard fishing boats putting out  
early in the morning  
sunsets

camera striving to categorize and comprehend  
e.g. money  
dreamy, suggestive, instinctive

repetition: return to something  
yet to be properly understood

try to establish a system  
out of collated, singly indistinct signs

can a single action be split into seconds?

camera two angles on the same object  
slightly offset in respect of each other

“the cinema films death at work  
the person you are filming is in the process of  
getting older, therefore, you are filming a minute  
of death at work.”

man and woman asleep in hotel room, sculpture

series, serial ideas

something the film wants to relate, examine, piece together

this human being and its life

by means of a tracking shot measure the distance  
from first word to last word in a sentence

blurred scenes in the dark, the demonic depths of  
tropical night

to transform this life into sheets of written paper  
or metres of exposed film

a collection of material  
searching for a language in this material  
cohesion

clear unambiguous settings  
a tropical beach  
scrub  
white house  
swimming pool (hockney)  
market

persons, objects positioned in the dark  
camera with bright lamp approaching  
retreating

scene  
he sits at a table counting dirty notes  
he rises  
i have an acute feeling of decay  
disintegration  
i am going to get a newspaper

scene  
i think about my son a lot  
i love him, i love him

scene

the face    a house

at varying distances, in varying light

scene

i fidget with my hair

i have nothing to say

## COLOPHON

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