

Trondheim

We found ourselves in Trondheim last summer.

Not in the spiritual or psychological sense, of course. We are not the sort of people who would see things in such terms. Personally I am quite unsure if any of us have a “self” to find. Deep inside us, after all, there is only what we have put there ourselves.

We arrived by train. A sleeper from further North. I thought it looked delightful; I’d already been in the country a week so I thought I knew the “look” of the place – painted wooden buildings, incredible clarity of light. The eye-watering price of a beer. We’d booked to stay in a hostel just outside the city centre among suburbs in the hills that surround the city.

Walking up the steep streets to check in, I was feeling in that ever-so-slightly unhinged state that comes from being up very early with not enough sleep. Not unpleasant but definitely in need of attention - of coffee and breakfast and maybe a bit more sleep at some point. It lent the experience of being in the city a dream-like quality.

For me there is something about certain cities that induces a feeling of reality being stretched or folded around the place in some way. Sometimes it feels a bit like a kind of *Déjà vu* (or perhaps the *jamais... or presque...* variants). They are like the places I dream about that I know to be a certain place despite the fact that they look different. I distinctly remember that feeling the first time I went to Boston: it seemed in every way to resemble a typical English city centre except everyone seemed to be American. Trondheim didn’t look familiar in that way – rather it just looked like somewhere I’d dreamed of going at some time in the past.

As I thought about this I remembered how, some years ago, I’d seen an advert for a job at the Art School in Trondheim; The Kunstakademiet. I thought at the time how that might be an interesting job to apply for and that I might, just about, be in with a chance. During that first dreamy day I wondered what it might have been like to have moved there. Would I have lived in one of the brightly-painted wooden houses up the hill above the old bridge – perhaps the one with the 2-metre square window cut into the top floor looking out over the city? Would I have been friends with the director of the Kunsthall, would I have met my fashionable acquaintances for a beer in one of the cafes on Nedre Baklandet. Maybe I’d have been part of the activist community in Svartloemon, living in a self-build house by the neighbourhood allotments. Maybe I’d have had a cabin in the woods by a lake, that most Scandinavian of aspirations (along with a clean, ordered and light world).

Later we drifted, somewhat aimlessly, around the city centre. We looked in at galleries, shops and museums and I thought “what if we walked round the corner and saw myself?”

That is, the self who would have been here if I’d had a different future – the one where I came to live in Trondheim? What if the boundary between alternative universes was somehow thinner – just a notional line on the pavement instead of a wall, an advisory sign, *please stay in lane, vær så snill å holde deg i kjørefeltet*? Would they be my doppelganger? What would happen if we met? Folklore seemed to suggest bad things; a spike of Bad Luck or even one’s death - the cancelling out of one or another of the paired doppelgangers. But which one has the Bad Luck – him or me? Which one is is me for that matter? Will I become my doppelganger, that other me, as the possibilities are collapsed into a single history by our meeting?

I see him and - our eyes locked in surprise – I step out into the road to cross over to him. I am mown down by an out-of-control truck, dying instantly; Professor Lewandowski, recently retired from the Kunstakademiet, blinks. No, that elderly tourist who glanced at him from across the street after the truck drove by so unnervingly fast bears little or no resemblance to him. The weird feeling was just that – just a weird feeling, gone as quickly as it arrived. Who knows how many times this happens to us? How many

times we stray over The Line that isn't a line and in the background the World adjusts itself so we barely notice the difference. Maybe what happened was just me claiming the "insurance against the extinction of the self".

Simon Lewandowski stays in London and gets a job that he likes a lot, makes some new friends. He travels extensively.

Jeg ser ham og - våre øyne låst i overraskelse - jeg går ut på veien for å gå over til ham. Jeg blir slått ned av en lastebil som ikke har kontroll, og dør øyeblikkelig; Professor Lewandowski, nylig pensjonert fra Kunstakademiet, blunker. Nei, den eldre turisten som så på ham fra andre siden av gaten etter at lastebilen kjørte forbi så nervøs fort, ligner lite eller ingen på ham. Den rare følelsen var nettopp det – bare en merkelig følelse, borte like raskt som den kom. Hvem vet hvor mange ganger dette skjer oss? Hvor mange ganger vi forviller oss over The Line som ikke er en linje og i bakgrunnen justerer verden seg selv slik at vi knapt merker forskjellen. Kanskje det som skjedde bare var meg som hevdet "forsikringen mot selvets utryddelse".

Simon Lewandowski elsket jobben sin ved Kunstakademiet, han fikk mange nye venner. Han reiste mye, men ikke så ofte tilbake til London.ⁱ

Maybe living in Trondheim would have been better, but I guess we can only live one life at a time. In that sense I found, if not my Self, then one of a number of possible selves.

ⁱ I see him and as our eyes lock in surprise, as I step out into the road to cross over to him I am mown down by an out-of-control truck, dying instantly; Simon Lewandowski, visiting from London, blinks. No, that elderly man who glanced at him from across the street after the truck drove by so unnervingly fast bears little or no resemblance to him. The weird feeling was just that – just a weird feeling, gone as quickly as it arrived. Who knows how many times this happens to us? How many times we stray over the Line that isn't a line and in the background the World adjusts itself so we barely notice the difference. Maybe what happened was just me claiming the "insurance against the extinction of the self".
Simon Lewandowski loved his job at the Kunstakademiet, he made many new friends. He travelled extensively, though not so frequently back to London.