

JOHAN HARSTAD



RED HANDLER

COLLECTED WORKS



GYLDENDAL

Always at the right place.
Always at the right time.
He has no time to lose.
You will be caught red handed.

Frode Brandeggen (1970 - 2014), an unknown voice to most readers, made his debut in 1992 with the experimental, 2,000+ page novel *Conglomerate Breath*. It was never reviewed and soon forgotten. In the years that followed, Brandeggen relentlessly searched for a new new literary direction, hoping to reinvent himself as well as reach a larger audience. He eventually found a way, through the micro-novels about Red Handler, a protest-oriented crime fiction project aimed at confronting the genre's weakness and often unnecessary length. As his weapon, he developed a private investigator who is already at the scene or in the immediate vicinity when foul play takes place, so that the perp can be caught red handed and the case quickly solved, thus offering crime fiction to people who do not have the time to read long books or who hate to read, but love crime fiction. When Brandeggen passed away in 2014, just 44 years old, he left behind a pile of short manuscripts as well as an extensive amount of notes that made it clear that these seemingly simple stories were actually meticulously planned out and only the tip of the iceberg of what he had been working on and struggling with for more than a decade.

This book for the first time brings together all the 15 micro-novels Brandeggen wrote about Red Handler. It is strange reading, undoubtedly; sometimes exciting, other times bordering on the headshakingly weird. But even though Red Handler's merits on the page can seem inane, it is also possible to get a glimpse of the author's rage and despair that is constantly present in these novels, his feeling of the walls coming closer and his slow resignation in the fight against the ever growing market for easily digested, commercial and purely entertaining literature. The books about Red Handler can be considered to be two things at once: A final act of protesting and an author's last attempt to find the lowest common denominator of literature.

This edition is also equipped with a comprehensive amount of enthusiastic, explanatory, complementary and sometimes strangely digressing endnotes, written in the pen of Brandeggen's closest literary confidant in the final years, German professional annotator Bruno Aigner (1934-).

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Collected works

ANNOTATED EDITION

(The following four 'novels' are excerpts from the book. The corresponding endnotes are only included for two of these. The rest of the endnotes are to be considered a representative selection of the roughly 90 pages of 250+ endnotes. Total book length Norwegian edition: 240 pages.)

BIOGRAPHY

Frode Brandeggen (1970-2014) was born in Stavanger and grew up in the Tjensvoll part of the city. He was an only child. Brand Eggen early developed a close relationship to literature and wrote his first short story at the age of, the thirteen pages long story «Knutsen Finds something Exciting in The Garden». The text, written in neat and painstakingly decorated with its own cover design, was unfortunately thrown away by his father during one of his raging fits and was consequently never read by anyone. In 1990 Brandeggen published his first text, the short story "An Anomaly" in the literary newspaper Cacophony, while he studied literature at Blindern University in Oslo. Two years later he made his debut with the avant-garde novel *Conglomerate Breath*, published by Gyldendal Norsk Forlag. The novel's length and complexity probably contributed to the book not being reviewed anywhere or by anyone and was thus quickly forgotten. Also: Sales figures were minimal to say the least, which can explain why today the novel is almost impossible to find in a bookstore or antiquarian. Gyldendal destroyed all leftover copies in the fall of 1993. The year after the disappointing debut, Brandeggen moved back to Stavanger and took different jobs, among them as a garbage collector, all while he was quietly and patiently working on finding a new way of writing which could both be artistically interesting to him and at the same time, have a bigger audience appeal. The final result became the fifteen books about the private detective Red Handler, all of them written in a sort of micro novel form, inspired by the French Mouvement artistique du banalisme, a literary movement that held omissions, the killing of excitement and emphasis on the obvious as particularly valuable. The novels were never offered to Gyldendal or any other Norwegian publishing house. Frode Brandeggen died of starvation in his apartment in Stavanger, autumn 2014. The novels are published here for the first time, annotated by Brandeggens German friend and professional annotator, Bruno Aigner (1934-), who, in addition to being knowing the author well, also had access to the papers and notes Brandeggen left behind.

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RED HANDLER HOT ON THE TRAIL

Chapter 1

The streets soaked in rain. One of the city's wrongdoers rushed past like a leaf blowing in the wind.¹ In the old Opel with Haugesund City plates sat the private detective Red Handler. He took a sip off of a hipflask bearing the inscription *To my dear husband*.² For a short second he pictured his ex-wife's face before the liquor washed the painful memory into the sewers of oblivion.³ He turned on the car stereo. From of the speakers flowed music from Glenn Gould's recording of The Goldberg Variations.⁴ The late recording of them. The one he did in the early eighties.

Red Handler closed his eyes and let the eminent piano sound play with his ears.

Chapter 2

Suddenly he heard a sound. He couldn't see. He opened his eyes. That helped.⁵ Someone tried to pry open a door somewhere down the street.⁶

Red Handler jumped out of the car. A short pursuit began. Then it was over. Before the thief had time to protest, Red Handler wrestled him to the ground.

"Now I got you," whispered Red Handler.

The thief knew his game was up.⁷

Chapter 3

The weather had cleared up. Once again the city was safe.

Red Handler lit a cigarette and got back in his car. After the divorce, this was the only pleasure he had: To be able to smoke in his own car without that goddamn bitch complaining.⁸

He turned up the car stereo at full power. The music was some kind of rhumba melody.⁹ That's how it was sometimes.

RED HANDLER & THE MUSICAL KILLER

Chapter 1

It rained. More and more often it rained now. Red Handler sat reclined in his Opel and listened to Gould's late Goldberg Variations play in wonderful harmony with the droplets hitting the roof of his car with a soft sound while he observed life on the streets outside. People hurried past him on all sides, scuttling along under umbrellas and newspapers held fervently over their heads as if they feared they would dissolve if they became wet.¹⁰ He thought of a movie he had seen once.¹¹

Chapter 2

A suspicious individual attracted Red Handle's attention.¹² The person walked among the people on the sidewalks without umbrella as well as without rubber boots, instead dressed in a suit and sunglasses. The person moved cunningly through the crowd and seemed to be completely unaffected by the rain, though it poured down. Red Handler decided to keep an eye on him and wait it out a few minutes. Something was clearly not like it should here.¹³

He didn't have to think further before the shady figure slipped around a street corner and out of the Red Handler's field of vision.¹⁴ Red Handler sighed, reluctantly opened the car door and stepped out in the rain. He was going to catch a cold now, no doubt about it.

"Goddamn it." He hurried to the corner and cursed the individual for dragging him out in this horrid weather. In the absence of an umbrella, he pulled the collar of his coat up close around his throat and –¹⁵

The suspicious person at the end of the street suddenly turned around and looked right at Red Handler. Directly at him. He took off his sunglasses. Not a word was said. Then he turned around again and ran in the direction of the amusement park under the bridge. Red Handler sprinted after him, into the endless rain.¹⁶

Chapter 3

The man in suit ran. He ran like hell towards the big Ferris wheel that blinked hypnotic in front of them in its smoldering evening darkness. The tie flung over one shoulder, his suit jacket flapping around him and revealed a revolver in a shoulder holster.¹⁷ Red Handler felt the water whipping him in the face as he ran, but did not allow it to affect him.¹⁸ There was no time for that now.¹⁹ He was on the heels of the bandit, fighting his way forwards among tombola stalls and carousels and pushing over kids wearing oilskin coats and big smiles. Little did they know about life's brutality. Yet.²⁰

Then he saw it. He stopped short in front of the Ferris wheel and exchanged some words with a man and a woman. In the next second the weapon was unholstered. The shots made the seagulls take to the gray-black sky that never cared for the world below it.²¹ The woman collapsed like a piece of cloth dropped to the floor and remained still on the wet asphalt. The murderer threw himself into a Ferris wheel gondola and rose to the air.

Chapter 4

He had no choice. Red Handler sprinted in the direction of the Ferris wheel and hunkered down in the first and best gondola. The city became small below him, like a miniature town. He could see all the way out to the harbor; he could see the islands and the place where the ocean began. He could see his house, he thought. Or at least a red house. And he could see the murderer, with the smoking revolver in his hand. The killer was on his way down.²²

Soon after, Red Handler followed. But now the killer was on his way up again. This went on for a while. The Ferris wheel was a serious challenge, catching-wise. The distance between the two men was simply too big. With every revolution of the wheel there was a short moment when the two of them were at level height; they stared at each other, coldly. This wouldn't work. That much was clear.

On the other hand, riding a Ferris wheel had its joys. It had been too long since his last ride, he felt. He delighted in the delicious, tingling sensation in the stomach as the gondola rose and then came down. The killer disappeared into the air. Then it was Red Handler's turn. Up and away! The killer rotated down and past the corpse before he went up yet again. Red Handler held his eyes fixed on him on his way down. He thought about things. Then he went up. Hm. It wasn't exactly like the killer had anywhere to go, either. No escape.

Red Handler leaned back and let the wind blow through his hair. For a moment, he almost forgot about the ongoing drama and dreamed he was in Denmark's Northern Jutland, at the bathing houses at Løkken Beach. What a wonderful summer it had been. And autumn. It was almost Christmas when he left. Good times. He had stayed too long back then. Way too long. But who could blame him?²³

Chapter 5

He came to himself. Back to the goddamned reality. He was on his way down.

"Stop the wheel," shouted Red Handler as his gondola was lifted towards the sky. Damn! But hey, there was his house again! Maybe.

"Stop the wheel, carnny!" he cried once more as he came down again. The shabby, Eastern European man of obvious travelin carnival-blood rushed to do as he was told and the creaking Ferris wheel came to a halt as Red Handler approached the platform.²⁴ This was the end of the ride, alright.

Chapter 6

With great care Red Handler exited the contrapment and ordered the carnny to lower the killer's gondola. Soon after they finally stood face to face. Red Handler forced the killer to behold his work.

"Now what do you have to say about this?"²⁵

The murderer did not answer.

"I said, what are you saying to this?"

Still nothing. The murderer just looked at him.

"Don't you have anything to say about this?" Red Handler was getting a bit annoyed.

Slowly, extremely slowly, the killer raised his arms and pulled out his earplugs. Red Handler had not seen the black cords against the smart, black suit.²⁶

"Excuse me," said the killer, "did you say anything? I am listening to the Goldberg variations, you see."

Red Handler was perplexed. It did not happen often. Now it happened. He was perplexed.

"I asked, what do you ... the Goldberg variations, you say?"

The murderer nodded sneeringly.

"Ok, I see ... but Glenn Gould?"

"Who else?" answered the murderer.

"The ... short ... or the longer version?"

The murderer rolled his eyes in disbelief.

"The short of course, without all that dwelling and wasting of time."²⁷

For a second Red Handler could see himself in the perp. Another version of himself.

"I also prefer to play it like that," continued the killer. "I'm a concert pianist."

Red Handler lit a cigarette.

"Not anymore, pal. Now you're just a number and a bland prison uniform. What do you have to say in your defense? "

Red Handler let a smoke ring hang ambiguously over the body.²⁸

"It's my wife."

"You mean it *was* your wife?"

The murderer bursted into tears.

"My God, you're right. What have I done? "

"You have played your last dance macabre for a while, I'll tell you that much."

"I ... I was just so jealous," cried the killer. "Of this guy."

Red Handler looked at the despairing young man next to the dead woman. Then Red turned his gaze back to the murderer.

He nodded in a way that could be perceived as understanding.²⁹

"I get it," said Red Handler calmly. "I get it."

The old Opel rolled through the streets in the evening and towards the precinct. The amusement park became smaller and smaller behind them. Neither of the two men said anything to each other, but the Red Handler was deep in thoughts.

As soon as summer came, he would return to the beaches in Denmark.³⁰

RED HANDLER & THE GLIMMER MAN

Chapter 1

Nobody really knew where he came from. It was said he came from the other side of the country, by car. That he had a past. That he was not from the city of Haugesund, but that it was where he had burned his bridges. It was already a long time ago. Whoever he had before been no longer made any difference. Now he was the one who again and again caught criminals red handed, night after night, through endless and strange hours and mysterious mornings. He never gave up and got tired. Now he was just Red Handler. He who had come to look out for this city.

Chapter 2

Red Handler put on his coat and grabbed the keys on the newspaper in the hallway. "Murderer caught red handed – again!" It said. The way it had done almost every day in recent months, in one form or another. He let the newspaper lie, there was no point in reading what the article, he himself had been there, and some things should remain behind one's eyes and be pushed away with alcohol. He took a sip. One. It would have to do for now, he had to stay alert. There would be a time to make up for it later, as soon as morning came. Then he would drink all he could and then slowly slide into sleep and unconsciousness on the couch in front of the TV. Before the whole thing started over again.

He locked the door to the apartment and walked out to the street.

On the other side of the city, a man did exactly the same. His keys lay on a newspaper with the same headline, but the headline it was not about him, he knew that too well. But after tonight it will change, he said to himself. The man locked the door to his huge apartment and polished the door sign with the sleeve of his precious designer suit. *The Glimmer Man*, it said. He had hung it himself, no one called him that.

Yet.

Chapter 3

In a sumptuous villa in, in neighborhood neither men could afford to live in and had barely ever visited: The beautiful woman let the satin night gown fall to the floor fall and almost floated to her closet where she carefully chose a swimsuit and slipped into it. Nonchalantly she picked up a flirtini from the coffee table and walked out to the pool deck and sun loungers. She slammed down on one of them and sipped her cocktail while she let her eyes rest on the water. Then she must have fallen asleep, because she didn't notice the coat-wearing detective until he was suddenly sitting on the deck chair next to her.

She was startled. "My God, who the hell are you?" Shouted the woman.

Red Handler rose from his chair and looked out over the pool area. "I think you know," he answered with his back to her.

She nodded. He saw it. He had eyes in his neck.

Red lifted her glass and studied it, before saying: "Flirtini, I suppose?"

"Is there something you don't know?"

"Only this," he said and looked straight at her, "why you are lying here and sunbathing at this hour?"

The woman yelled at him. She was not the first to do it.

"Last I checked, it was not forbidden to sunbathe in your own garden," she said sarcastically.

Red Handler nodded.

"But most people don't choose to do so at 3 A.M.," he said calmly and took a sip of her cocktail. Damn. She was beautiful, it could prove to be a problem. Femme fucking fatale.

"I got a phone call," he continued, "of the concerned kind. A neighbor heard screaming and shots from your property. "

"I don't know anything about that."

"Not?"

"Nope."

Red Handler grabbed her arm, it hurt a little bit. She moaned.

"And that?" He said as he pointed to the dead body floating face down in the pool. The gentle breeze pushed the corpse around in red circles.

"Huh?" She pretended she did not quite understand what he was talking about.

"You understand what I'm talking about. Did you kill him? "

The woman got up and drank the rest of the flirtin in one go. She licked her lips.

"Oh, you mean that guy? No, he was there when I came out." It was her turn to grab Red's arm now. "What do you say to come inside with me for a minute, I think I need a ..."

"Flirtini?"

"Amongst other things."

Chapter 4

Afterwards, he was not proud of it: They slept together. Everything went as it should. No problems in that department. He would have done it again if necessary. He had, as they say, developed a taste for it.

Chapter 5

But he had a case to solve.

He got up from bed and got dressed. As she showered, he took a walk around the villa to look around.

Then he ran back to the bathroom, tore the veil to the side and grabbed the woman he just made love to. Made love to, yes, but never loved. If loving was still something he was capable of.

"You'll come down with me to the precinct, Miss."

"For fuck's sake, what are you saying!?"

"I say that I arrest you for the murder of your husband."

Most of all, she seemed weary. She did not resist.

"Jesus Christ! At least let me get dressed first. "

Red Handler took off the coat and folded it around her.

"It'll do," he said, guiding her through the rooms.

She looked down and asked, "How ... how did you find out..."

Red helped her into the back of his hold Opel car and smiled laconically.

"I borrowed your computer for a moment while you showered. Your search history showed that what you had googled most recently last week was these three things: 1) How to murder your husband and make it look like someone else has done it or just as if he is bathing, 2) How to clean the swimming pool and 3) How to make a good flirtini in a heartbeat?"

The woman shook her head quietly. "You are too good, Red. Too good. "

"Do you mean now or are you referring half an hour ago?" He said and slammed the car door before she responded.

Chapter 6

He sat behind the wheel and stared on the road in front of him as he drove away from the villa and down to the main road. The woman in the back seat was silent, she knew there was nothing she could say that would make him change her mind or save her from spending years behind bars. She would never get her husband's equity portfolio anyway.

Red Handler swung out on the open road with a casual move using one hand. Behind him a car was turning the opposite way, going back to where had come from. Red Handler was able to get a glimpse of the person before he put his foot on the pedal and sped up to the now abandoned house, where the body was still bathed in loneliness. But it would be too late.

Red Handler continued to look for the car in the rearviewmirror for a while. He couldn't say for sure who the person was, yet he knew it instinctively. It had to be The Glimmer Man. The man who would one day beat him to the scene of the crime.

"My nemesis," Red Handler thought to himself. "My nemesis."

RED HANDLER & THE COPENHAGEN VACATION

Chapter 1

It wasn't hard to understand that he had earned a vacation in Denmark now. After all that had happened. Copenhagen ... Oh my, what a city! He enjoyed himself there, in the shady areas around Istedgade. The night before, he had almost gotten no sleep, so excited was he to see her again. Then he fell asleep.

Afterwards he woke up.

Chapter 2

Red Handler drank a glass of water and brushed his teeth that morning before he walked down to the train station and found the right platform. He found his seat and made himself comfortable, stretching out his legs and looking forward to the long journey ahead.

Then he arrived.

Chapter 3

It was raining in Denmark. He had forgotten the umbrella at home. Goddamnit, he said to himself. He would get wet, he risked getting a cold now. It could spoil everything.

Chapter 4

While the rain hit his hat like fist of fury, he caught eye of a mysterious figure that slipped in through a back door to the station building. Without hesitation, Red Handler ran after him, into the building, up three flights of stairs, down through long, desolate corridors, into the innermost room where the mysterious figure was bent over what could not be described in a different way than this: a blood stained body.

Chapter 5

The body was dead. Red Handler did not even have to check the pulse reach that conclusion. His own pulse raced; he was in Denmark. That's how things were in this country. Raw and brutal. He might not have time to kiss his old flame after all.

Chapter 6

Red sucked slowly on a mint drop and pointed to the mysterious figure that still stood with his back to him, bent over the body and with a smoking gun in his hand.

"Have you done that?" Red Handler asked.

"What do you mean?" Protested the mysterious guy.

"Are you the killer?"

The mysterious guy turned to Red Handler and threw his arms out.

"Shit, you got me there, man. But tell me: How were you able to catch me red handed? "

"You made a mistake when you chose to look so mysterious."

"Damn it, you are good. Too good. I'm in for a long prison sentence now. "

Red Handler nodded seriously. "Sounds about right. You'll have to come with me downtown and take the consequences of what you've been up to. "

The killer stared at the floor.

"What's your name?" He asked.

"Red Handler," said Red Handler.

"A suitable name," said the killer.

Chapter 7

Outside the rain had stopped, the sun had come out. But in many ways it was still dark.³¹

ENDNOTES

1 When Frode Brandeggen showed up unannounced at my office in Dresden one afternoon in 2013 with what turned out to be the manuscripts to the Red Handler books, my first thought, in all its prosaic terseness, was as follows: This is not particularly good. My subsequent thought, I would imagine, was a corruption of the first, and went something like this: This is really, really not good. Dutifully, because I am nothing if not dutiful, I thumbed through the heap of papers while he waited impatiently by the window, as I wondered why he'd come all the way here to meet me, of all people, and how he'd managed to find me. He told me he'd already had one novel published, after which he'd worked as a garbageman and library attendant while attempting a return to writing with something he called "a new form." Eventually, I asked him to step out for a walk and come back toward the end of the day. Then I began reading. As I mentioned, out of a sense of duty more than anything. I'm not an editor, I've never been tasked with deciding what and what not to publish, my mandate has always been confined to illuminating what has already been accepted, what others have deemed important, canonical, consequential. No one has ever asked me: *What do you think about this?* My sense of duty was therefore challenged by the humility I felt before this author, who told me he knew my work as an annotator from a long line of editions that had gained classic status here in Germany, and appreciated what he termed "my ability to read clearly." So that's what I did, in the hours he spent wandering Dresden. I read, I read again, and eventually, I was transformed. Since then, night has fallen, and everything has taken on significance. As afternoon gave way to evening, what stood out to me, above all, was Brandeggen's rage, his literary obstinance that has kept me returning to these texts, again and again, and the uncompromising tone that that manifests itself in spite of what seems, at first glance, to be the reductive language of crime, the comic strip sense of narrativity. It has also—now that I, supposedly because Brandeggen specifically requested it in his posthumous papers, have agreed to write endnotes to this first edition of his crime novels—shown me why I must treat Brandeggen's project with the utmost seriousness, even if I thereby become his Sancho Panza. And it has been liberating, enormously liberating for my work on this book, now that I, after so long, dare to step out of my accustomed shadows and myself dictate the relevance of these endnotes to the text, striking my own course, entering exactly what I deem necessary. Let me also add that the conversation between me and Brandeggen that evening was the start of a conversation that would last three years. I don't believe he had many others to talk to than myself. But talk we did, by telephone, by letter, in my visits to him in Stavanger or, more often, in my welcoming him to Dresden, where he made do with the tiny guest room I fit out in my apartment. And to think I'd

never had any guests, before him. If I may say so, I don't believe anyone knew Frode Brandeggen in the last days quite like I did. I say this, not to lay claim to any role in his success, should these books move readers as much as they have moved me. I say this, rather, because it foreshadows this man's terrible lonesomeness. The anger I find in these books is real, as is the despair that precipitates his dramatic swerve away from his avant-garde roots. May be that that anger can only be grasped within the context of the distance between his first book and the Red Handler. But the anger, nonetheless, is not the whole picture, because Brandeggen also cares all too much about his protagonist. His absorption in the Red Handler only goes to show a genuine concern, a real sympathy for this character, in such a way that the author's emotional stake becomes palpable and full of significance. And thus, the texts never manage to hide that they are, at bottom, about Brandeggen himself, about a man who obviously is deeply troubled, and who, more than opposing crime literature *an sich* or the book industry's thirst for profit, is desperately trying to draw up a world with some semblance of meaning and predictability, with clear structures and sincerity.

² When Frode Brandeggen chose to accept the fate of his 2322-page debut novel, *Conglomeratic Breath* (*Konglomeratisk pust*),** thenceforth giving up the avant-garde in favor of chiseled-down, commercial crime fiction, he still held out hope for a future that held room for a more expansive, probing literature. As early as the first book of the Red Handler series, Brandeggen wrote a separate novel that served both as a warm-up to the Red Handler universe and a novel that he hoped would hold up as a work in its own right one day. From what I have been able to glean, he never mentioned this work to anyone. The unpublished novel, *All of These Loves* (*Alle disse kjærlighetene*, 433 pages in manuscript) takes up the marriage with Gerd and their life together in Haugesund, where the Red Handler—who here seems to have a proper first and last name, though both are crossed out throughout the entire manuscript—works part time as an electric meter reader. The novel is a passionate account of an intense love and an often exemplary marriage that slowly, but surely becomes counterproductive, to put it mildly, culminating in a magnificent scene in which the Red Handler persona is born and the protagonist leaves Haugesund for good. There are intimations towards the end of the manuscript that the wife leaves the Red Handler for his future nemesis, the Cheap Trick. There is no evidence Brandeggen ever had a serious relationship himself.

* From the back cover of *Conglomeratic Breath*: “Imper Akselbladkvist is turning his house upside down in search of something he has lost. But is it really his house? And has he really lost anything? And if so, then what? Himself? Or everyone else? Distended and distracted by existential angst, he ambushes the component parts of his life (is it really his life?) through an intense, ruthless, and often heartrendingly intricate exploration of the potential Heidegger-plagiarist level of the self, represented by the distance between two threads of an almost fully disintegrated bedspread that his grandmother (if she is even his grandmother—and for that matter, how do we know she was really all that grand?) bequeathed him. Through more than two thousand pages—free from even the slightest scintilla of what Imper Akselbladkvist calls abominable deformities like punctuation and paragraph, chapters and other readerly aids—the author delves further and further into the bedspread, into the threads, into the yearning for his own constitutive fibers, and ultimately, his own text. That is—if we can even call it a text? And is it really a novel? And if it is, how can we know that the novel is his?”

3 Curiosity also led me to read Brandeggen’s debut, *Conglomeratic Breath*, prior to working on the footnotes for this edition of the Red Handler novels. Or, I should say, I tried. The publisher, Gyldendal, released his first book all the way back in 1992, but when I asked around, no one could tell me anything about it. There were no reviews, no record of any readings or participation in book festivals. The editor in chief of Gyldendal, Kari Marstein, took me down to the archives, and sure enough, we found a well-preserved copy of the book, along with information about Tord Gusthjem, Brandeggen’s editor. A quick check among different papers revealed that Gusthjem was hired in the late summer of 1990 and that the only book he worked on through to publication, before leaving the job more than two years later, was none other than *Conglomeratic Breath*. I called him one day to ask him what working with Brandeggen was like, but as soon as I mentioned the title of the book, I was met with silence on the other end, before he said, “I don’t want to talk about it. I broke my back on that book, okay? I’m no longer in publishing.” It was an uncommonly brief conversation. Brief, on the other hand, is the last word you’d use to describe the novel. At a ridiculous 2322 pages, *Conglomeratic Breath* has the distinction of being, without question, the longest single-volume novel ever released by Gyldendal Norsk Forlag. The archives showed that the number of copies sold could be counted on one hand, and apart from the 25 free copies given to the author, the one in the archives, and the 32 distributed to reviewers and booksellers, the entire printing of 1600 books was

destroyed. This is not hard to understand. The book is, in short, absolutely unreadable. Normally, I can appreciate books that push back against the reader, the ones that demand real effort, as long as they're well written. *Conglomeratic Breath* would seem to fit into that category; in some places, it exhibits an exceptional linguistic perceptiveness, and Brandeggen's ability to navigate between myriads of dissimilar pitches and registers is very likely unparalleled in Norwegian literature. Nevertheless, the novel is, for me, perfectly unreadable. Impenetrable, in a way that frustration isn't even the right word. Next to this novel, Gaddis's *The Recognitions* and Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* (both of which Brandeggen read several times) look reader-friendly by comparison. It begins straightforwardly enough: the protagonist, with the fashionable, alienating name of Imper Akselbladkvist, arrives at what he calls his house. He stands on the front steps, fishes for his keys, and enters once he finds them. This takes 150 pages. From there, it's full-on disintegration, the disorientation just as monumental as it is absolute. There are no paragraphs, no chapters, not even so much as a comma or period; at any given time, the identity of the speaker, when and where we are, what is happening and why, is anyone's guess. For instance, Brandeggen devotes large parts of the book to exploring what he calls "the potential Heidegger-plagiarist level of the self," a notion every bit as perplexing as it sounds, which is made no more comprehensible by the fact that the starting point for these investigations is an old bedspread given to the protagonist by his grandmother. That is, two threads inside the bedspread are the starting point, and the distance between them opens up entirely new areas and a fresh round of investigations that themselves necessitate their own exploration for Akselbladkvist. As the text zooms further and further in, it consciously and expressly assumes the structure of the Mandelbrot set, a fractal whose edge shows an infinite number of satellites, i.e. small copies of the original Mandelbrot set. To put it another way, soon enough, the reader is so deep into the details of the details' details that not even the slightest glimmer of textual daylight remains. But then, somewhere around page 700, the text suddenly arrives at a light in the forest, a clearing. The reader's relief is enormous, almost indescribable, as Brandeggen gives us an unpretentious, affecting account of life on a street in Stavanger in the mid-70s. ** This section becomes a small novel in itself, of quite a conventional sort. A novel in which love and terror are always living under the same roof, but the former wins out in the end. Thematically and linguistically, it recalls a number of more conventional (and more successful) coming-of-age novels in the modern Scandinavian tradition, like Torbjörn Flygt's *Underdog*, Beate Grimrud's *Tiptoeing Past an Axe*, Tore Renberg's *The Orheim Company*, or Lars Saabye Christensen's *Beatles*, even

though only the last of these had come out in time to have influenced Brandeggen. It is not hard to imagine his editor pleading with him in vain to publish these 300 pages and scrap everything else. Nor is it hard to understand why the editor had had enough after this book. On page 1009 the new story abruptly ends and once again the forest becomes impassable. More than ever. The text's stitchwork becomes tighter and tighter and more and more intricate, as Brandeggen sets a new standard for textual resistance and arouses an almost physical reluctance toward reading any further. As I stretch myself to my furthest abilities to drag my way through the unreadable, it becomes clear to me that "the novel" inside the novel resembles nothing so much as a nightmare, with all its rays of light and hope, and that its only purpose is to underscore the impossibility of arriving and remaining in such a place in real life. For reality, Brandeggen seems to be suggesting, is this other where we remain inexorably stuck and from which we can never escape, where nothing is certain, and where every utterance is an opening into a chasm of doubt and new questions, which themselves open up even more doubt and even more questions that lead us smack into the Mandelbrot set once more. I gave up on page 1700, more than 600 pages away from the finish line, and never have I been more relieved to put down a novel.

* Astraveien in Tjensvoll. A twisting street with both detached houses and low-rise apartments.

_frobe brandeggen (f. 1979) er oppvekst i stavanger.
Konglomeratisk pust er forfatterens første bok...

Imper-Akselbladkvist leder gjennom huset sitt etter noe han har mistet. Men er det egentlig noe han har mistet? Gjennom huset hans, gjennom huset ditt, gjennom huset vårt, gjennom huset deres? Oppblåst og opprørt av akustisk, angst og angst, har bestanddelene i sitt eget liv (er det egentlig hans liv?) gjennom en intens, nådeløs og ofte henteskærende inntak utforskning av selvets potensielle Heideggerplagiatnivå, representert av avstanden mellom to tråder i et næsten oppløst, sengteteppes hans bestemor (hvis det da er hans bestemor – og hvordan kan man uansett vite at hun var den beste?) etterlot ham. Gjennom mer enn to tusen sider – kjemik fr for det Imper-Akselbladkvist kaller deformative veierstyggeligheter, som tegning og avsnitt, kapitler og andre løse-messige hjelpemidler – trenger forfatteren lenger og lenger inn i løppet. I løpet av sidet leder sine grunnideer og uttrykk, egen tekst. Hvis det da er teksten? Og er det egentlig en roman? I så fall, hvordan kan han vite at romanen er hans?_

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frobe_brandeggen
konglomeratisk_pust
roman

frobe_brandeggen
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Gyldendal

Gyldendal Norsk Forlag

⁴ The only musical reference made in the Red Handler books (with one exception) is to Glenn Gould's two recordings of *The Goldberg Variations*. This was possibly a conscious step from Brandeggen's side to emphasize the problem duration and length vs. quality, further complicated by the fact that Gould's recording from 1955 has a playing time of 38 minutes, while the recording from 1981 plays for more than over 51 minutes. In other words an opposite movement to the one Brandeggen conducted with his Red Handler project.

⁵ These three sentences about the eyes are easy to dismiss as flat and straight outfrivolous. But if you look past the obvious slapstic comic, you'll be able to spot the criticism Brandeggen addresses at crime fiction in general, where the length of the books – more often than not many hundred pages longer than necessary – are due to the writer allowing the investigator to waste the reader's time by not having the detective look carefully enough at evidence and follow clues at a quicker pace. Most crime fiction protagonists, in Brandeggen's opinion, were terrifyingly ineffective, in the sense that they coldheartedly maintained the thrill of things in an almost idle position in order to drag the reader forward, like a dog in motion towards a biscuit in his owner hand, while the owner constantly moved backwards, and hence did not deserve the applause and fame they've received. Brandeggen found the dead ends and the numerous suspects tiring. On the other hand, during these three sentences alone Red handler, a) realizes he has a problem (his eyes being closed), b) takes immediate action and solves the problem (opening his eyes) and c) is once again back in shape to do his job quickly and in an exemplary effective manner.

⁶ Notice the complete absence of a whodunnit murder mystery in this and several other Red Handler novels. Brandeggen consciously chose to break with the established rules for the detective story narrative, created among others by Van Dine and Knox in the late 1920s. This, he explained, was done because a private investigator who only deals with murder cases would limited the genre and further alienate the reader, who was more likely to identify with other types of crime, such as simple burglary and petty theft. Low profile cases such as these also deserved to be taken seriously as they had large impact on their victims and their life. For example, Brandeggen had read a lot about families who felt they had to move after burglary, although no damage had been done to the residence and regardless of whether the victims had been home or not at the time of the burglary,

but simply because the home was now contaminated with insecurity. Brandeggen also pointed contested both Van Dine and Knox' unbreakable rule that the detective should never resolve the case as a result of chance, coincidences or because he was in the right place at the right time. On the contrary, this became Red Handler's modus operandi, based on Brandeggens deep interest in coincidences, collective subconsciousness and synchronism. "The reality of ours is full of coincidences, or apparent coincidences. Couplings and undercurrent. Why should not the Red Handler live in the same reality?" wrote Brandeggen in his notes. Again he meant that a renewal of the genre towards a greater understanding of people's actual reality would be one of the keys to Red Handler's destined success.

⁷ Already in the first Red Handler novel, the style is perfect and complete. The case is resolved before you get bored. Or, as Brandeggen himself wrote in one of the notebooks his, in English (presumably because he pictured the possibility of presenting the concept to international publishers): "This is crime fiction for the gentleman who loves crime novels, but hates reading."

⁸ The last reference to the Red Handler's wife, and one of the very few to the act of smoking cigarettes. Brandeggen was himself an avid smoker and an advocate for the so-called *double smoking* (inhalation of two cigarettes simultaneously) to be socially accepted as something more than just a weird party trick.

⁹ The musical exception mentioned in the footnote about Glenn Gould. Possibly a hint to the Saraghina sequence in Fellinis *8 1/2*, a film that close to heart for Brandeggen ever since the old days as a member of Stavanger Film Club, where he never missed a screening, but still missed every opportunity to socialize with other members.

¹⁰ Had Brandeggen been able to stay closer to his original mission, this whole chapter would have been left out and the novel would have started with what is now chapter 2. The whole thing is really unnecessary. But he fell in love with the description of the rain.

¹¹ Apparently, it was *Gremlins* (1984) he thought of here, a movie in which a central part of the plot is the catastrophic consequences that follows if the relatively sweet mogwais are exposed to water.

He rather liked that film.

¹² It is easy to see that this sentence would have provided a much stronger opening to the novel. No time wasted, we hit the ground running, so to speak, already at the scene.

¹³ See next footnote.

¹⁴ A healthy human's field of vision extends approximately 90° outwards, 60° inwards towards the nose, 60° upwards and 70° downwards. From the notes to *Red Handler & The Musical Killer* it becomes clear that Brandeggen did extensive research on the eye's structure and function, field of vision and diseases, and that a plot twist in the novel was supposed to be linked to Red Handler suffering from glaucoma. Evidently, in the end he decided that including this shocking twist would complicate the novel unnecessarily.

¹⁵ Initially, Brandeggen's publisher Gyldendal marked this sentence as mistake on Brandeggen's part, believing that several words had fallen at the end of this sentence, but by closer inspection, including the use of the author's own notes, it turns out to be a rather good example of yet another 'Brandeggen Special' and that the dash is placed here with the dual purpose of both criticizing unnecessary long descriptions of non-important elements and to pull the reader straight into a moment of absolute suspense by pairing it with the subsequent sentence, wherein the suspect turns to Red Handler and eyes meet.

¹⁶ There are many references to rain in the Red Handler novels and the accompanying notes. Someone will surely attribute this to the Crime Noir/Hardboiled fiction tradition and writers like Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett – who Brandeggen elsewhere in the novels are clearly inspired by – but here the constant references to rain is more likely a result of the fact that it rains a lot in Stavanger and that Brandeggen got his fair share and then some of the downpour.

¹⁷ Oh my!

¹⁸ No, why should he? It's just rain.

¹⁹ Exactly.

²⁰ Brandeggen wasn't afraid of clowns. But he was afraid of children. And scarfs.

²¹ The sentence also occurs in the manuscript to the sci-fi, pre-Red Handler novel *Randa Simulacrum Malignum* (see note 243).

²² A lot could be said about Brandeggen's utilization of the Ferris wheel for suspense here, but the reader deserves to enjoy these dizzying good passages without further interruptions from my side. Let's just say that Frode Brandeggen himself never got to go to an amusement park as a child. And as an adult he did not dare. The following is therefore the result of timid research and conversations with people who had been at the fairgrounds.

²³ The observant reader will notice that this is the only reference made to Løkken beach and Jutland in the Red Handler universe; otherwise it is always Copenhagen Red Handler longs for and recalls. It must therefore be stated here that the only trip abroad Brandeggen was taken on during his childhood was to Løkken beach, also known as the "Danish Riviera" and according to the advertisement "a place with endless white beaches and a large selection of exciting and fun activities for the whole family ». For Brandeggen all that was endless at that place were the days themselves and the constant loneliness during the twelve summers he spent here. Like his detective hero, Frode Brandeggen always wanted to visit Copenhagen, if only for one day, but his parents never granted him his wish and told him that "we have more than enough traffic jams and hassle back home ». Ironically, as an adult, Brandeggen almost never went abroad, and the few times he did, it was exclusively to Northern Jutland and, well, Løkken beach. With the exception of the trips to Dresden to meet me. He never went to Jutland while his parents were there.

²⁴ The diminishing, stigmatizing description of the amusement park employee here may be attributed to the indoctrination from Brandeggen's parents.

²⁵ Back to Northern Jutland and Løkken beach: Brandeggens parents did not attend his funeral, excusing themselves with having paid a non-refundable deposit on a bungalow as close to the waterfront you could get without getting your feet wet.

²⁶ Frode Brandeggen owned one suit during his lifetime. He bought it for the advance received for *Conglomerate Breath*. The only time he used it was for his own funeral.

²⁷ A reference to the “Red Handler length ideal”, of course. But also a hidden one to Brandeggens's short music career, which extended from the spring of 1986 to fall 1988 when he was a vocalist and the primary songwriter in the postpunk band Intimserviett (Intimate Care Clean Wash Napkin), which rarely made songs longer than one minute thirty seconds and only played two concerts, both at Tjensvoll youth club. In the fall of 1988 the band split and people went their different ways.

²⁸ Ice cold done. But one also sense something almost ritual about it, like a blessing he offers the dead, similar to traditions kept alive by the Comanche indigenous peoples in today's United States.

²⁹ The words "could be perceived as" are of significant importance here. The is not necessarily so that red Handler looks at the murderer with understanding, just that the opportunity exists. As always, ambiguity prevails.

³⁰ This novel was completed on March 13th, 2013, according to Brandeggen's own notes. On the last pages the author has written down the words *Løkken beach*, an address and something similar to an order reference, as well as the date tag 8 – 15/7. From this we can conclude that Brandeggen spent a week in Northern Jutland in the summer of 2013, possibly as a treat for having done great work on the writing front.

31 The following is a selection of endnotes from the book. The numbers correspond to the Norwegian edition:

13 Brandeggen felt that the ‘show, don't tell’-attitude in the literature had to go if he was to let the Red Handler-books grow to its full potential. were to let the Peach books come true. The idea was

that the reader was not interested in the whodunit aspect anymore and had far better things to do than wasting time reading between the lines. So the 'Tell 'em like it is' approach was chosen as a the replacement model.

15 Brandeggens notes to this novel includes a three-digit number of reference photographs of different basement floors in all constitutions and degrees of soiling, in a wide range of materials, from concrete through untreated hardwood, water-damaged linoleum, ceramic tiles from Tuscany etc. These photographs is accompanied by a wide range of more or less meticulous descriptions of the nature and condition of the substrate, focusing on the presence of water, oil stains, dirt, rotting, any damage, scratches, discoloration, etc. Given the work put down in surveys and mapping of potential basement floors to the stage, it is worth noting that Brandeggen ultimately settles for – or reduces and compresses the research work to – this one word, which in almost strange ways covers everything: *dirty*. "The dirty basement floor."

17 Brandeggen knew nothing about boxing. Not a goddamn thing.

84 Brandeggen was unusually satisfied with this sentence. For a while he toyed with the idea that all the novels should open with it. But life wanted it different.

130 Brandeggen was a well known cat lover. This changed suddenly in 1999.

133 The dream is based on a real dream Brandeggen had in 1999, though in it the tophat was replaced by a sixpence. One night with me in Dresden he recounted the captivating dream of the unhappy cat who dreamt of traveling to America by steamer.

134 Burmese cats are known to have a disproportional size/weight ratio. It is uncertain whether Brandeggen was aware of this as much in this scene indicates that he was trying to write himself towards the outer rim of the uncanny. The concept of uncanny is attributed to Sigmund Freud and his essay "Das Unheimliche" from 1919, describing it as the moment where the familiar and the spooky coincide and confront the subject with its subconscious and distorted impulses. In an extension of the idea, psychoanalyst Jaques Lacan suggested that the uncanny place us "in a state

where we are not able to separate good from evil, pleasure from discomfort ». See also Julia Kristva's concept of *abjection*.

142 Brandeggen did extensive research on self-employed / sole proprietorship in order to get this sentence right, and had – according to the notes – a complete overview of this occupational group's challenges related to accounting obligations (and auditing dilemma), lack of sickness benefit scheme, pension scheme and other problems such as absence of deduction unless you started a corporation or business and hired yourself, due to the advantage of then being able to benefit from qualifying for the utilization of the above deduction, etc. He found value added tax difficult to understand, and the last novel, *Red Handler Gets in Trouble With The Authorities* can indicate that the VAT problem becomes an issue along with the taxes. On the one hand, one has to question whether or not Red Handler's activities are VAT-obligatory or not, all the time he does not invoice anyone for his services, and at the same time one has to wonder if the catching of crooks is not also service provided pro bono, which also (possibly) implies giving stuff away for free, in which case you have to pay taxes for it. Etc. This stuff goes on forever.

¹⁴⁸ Here I am. Here. *Me*. I expect it's time I make my appearance, in my own person. A necessity, given the circumstances. For the first time. There's a first time for everything, just as there's a last time for everything, a last time that is always invisible to the one at the center of the event, the experience. I stood on a beach in Cape Le Grand National Park, Western Australia, not five miles east of Esperance; it's been twenty years since I stood there, alone, in the morning, and vowed that I would come back someday. But I never did. I even remember how I consciously avoided taking it all in, saving some of my impressions for "next time." A next time that never came. Only a "last time." I have been east of Esperance (50 km, to be precise), for the last time. Almost everywhere I've ever gone has been for the last time. Now I am here, shut inside these footnotes, this work of annotation that has been my profession for as long as I can recall. Year after year, book to book. They send me the books with instructions to supply footnotes, interpretations, and insights. I've done as I've been told, always an advisable course as long as you don't know any better. Here, I must ask the reader's pardon, as I've yet to introduce myself; my manners have unfortunately fallen into the sere with time, a byproduct of the product I supply, where the focus has always been others, while I stand in the shadows of my masters, so to speak. But I've not only dwelled, but thrived in those shadows, the








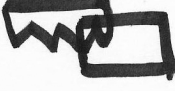








light shines brightest in the shadows, as I've often said/believed/thought, for only in darkness do we become visible to ourselves. Therefore I have always chosen dark offices, heavy wooden furniture with the blackest wood stain, dim lighting and the curtains drawn to (or preferably no curtains at all, only walls), to ward off all distractions. No interruptions. No surprises. Predictability, always predictability. The most beautiful word of all. Every day like the one preceding, without a ripple on the face of the water. But again, I am guilty of the sin of omission, my digressions crowd me, drawing me away from my promise to step out of the ranks and into the light, if only for one moment. To show my true face. So without further ado: I hail from Augsburg, in Bavaria, from Datschiburg, from Aux; it depends on who you ask. If you were to ask me, I would tell you I'm from here, and that my name is Bruno Aigner. My mother's name was Cesia. I could tell you that I first saw the light of day in 1934 and ever since then the darkness has grown. No. I won't say any more, can go no further; I would prefer if I might go by the name of the Footnote Man, as I'm known among clients, I was about to say my fellow men as well, but that would have been an acceleration of the truth onto the off-ramp of the lie, in which the speed merely increases more and more and the lucidity of fate disintegrates into a singularity of falsehood. I have always, always striven to relinquish all falsehood in my work and in my life, those inseparable quantities, two sides of the same coin. Ack. What should I have said? My fellow men have never known me as the Footnote Man. My fellow men have never known me, period; I am just as alien to them as they are to me. It's best that way, for everyone involved. Involvement is not without peril, as you run the risk of never being able to outvolve yourself again; winding around and around (complexity \neq development), revolution, revolution, thus I keep going in my dark chamber, meticulously emulsifying the words until they bubble up and separate and have to be mixed together again. And yet and yet and yet. Over sixty years as the maker of annotations, the annotator, I don't know what they've been calling me, only accepted the jobs I've been given. Out of duty, I have walked to my mailbox and carried the manuscripts inside, filling them out from within with my reflections, the life I give them. Contextualizing them, setting them into relief, concretizing, problematizing, discoursing. All the different vantage points dictated by the publishers' cover letters, written by office assistants just as anonymous as I am. Never have we met, our exchanges are limited to the letters of the alphabet. *Blah blah blah*. One day I'm going to write a footnote where that's all it says, that'll be my happiest moment, the only time I'll ever remember having laughed. Sixty years, 443 annotated titles. This is number 444. My last. I began with Fischer's thirty-year anniversary edition of *Der Zauberberg*. It was I who revealed Thomas Mann's tendency

to prefer the kitchen entrance, to put it that way. Even though Anthony Heilbut would take the all the credit, forty years later, that is, for turning the Mannian cabinet doors wide open. As though you'd want any credit for that. And after? After that, came more. After that came Beckett and Bove and Bernhard and Bradbury; Bellow, Baudelaire, Blixen, Backmann, Baker, Blake, Ballard, Bataille, Blatty, Böll, Borges, Brome, Bjørnson, Bull, Brontë, Brown, Bukowski, Burroughs, Burgess, Byrne etc etc etc. Brandeggen. For some reason, all of my books have been by authors whose names begin with B. With the exception of Mann. Probably a test, an examination of some kind. You would think there would be annotators for all the other letters of the alphabet, and that someone is out there making sure we never meet. The letter *B* was to become my dominion. // My parents brought me to America as a five-year-old. My father called it a permanent vacation. Only several years later did I learn about this Austrian who'd taken over my country and caused a great scandal, but by then I was already so partial to my father's vacation idea and the way it fit so well with the American spirit of freedom, that I hoped the Austrian would never go back to where he came from, so that we'd never have to do the same. We stayed, in any case. For my part, I wish I could say I made myself deserving of the perpetual vacation that was paid with lives in the KZs, but that's not what happened. Quite the opposite. Instead of accepting the sense of obligation my mother attempted to instill in me; I took my father's vacation attitude to its furthest logical conclusion, deciding, at the age of sixteen, to become a hobo. A vagabond, a wanderer. For six years I sailed the seas of cargo trains throughout America, armed only with a sausage end and my at that time good spirits. My father, farseeing and supportive as he was, followed me to the train station the first day, took my photograph, and wished me the best of luck. It was a scene at once affecting and exceedingly strange. *Auf Wiedersehen*, he said. *I'm a ramblin' man*, was my reply. We had long ago developed our own separate languages. You might think it was somewhat reckless of my father to send me on my innocent way at sixteen, but we both agreed that the fact that I looked much, much older was insurance enough. I looked like I was nearly forty, and was quite proud of it, I might as well add. This unusual maturity (if you can call it that) had long held certain advantages, such as the fact that I had already, at the age of twelve, debuted sexually with women up to twenty years my senior, and had spent an extraordinary summer of 1946 in Oregon, celebrated as I soon was by the ladies of Salem for my boyish temperament. I had a tremendous libido in those days. It is, like so much else, gone now.



I lived on the rails, eventually developing a mutually dependent (and unhealthy, said Jonny Carl) relationship to the banjo that more than once supplied food for the two of us at the time of our most dire need. It was Jonny Carl who introduced me to the hobo signs that we long navigated by and that soon sparked my fascination with the sign as such, its universality, in language's inherent possibilities for illuminating itself. I stole my first books in the fall of 1955 someplace far up in Montana, including a copy of William Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. Soon I was filling it with my annotations and footnotes, which disturbed poor Jonny Carl to the extent that we split apart—and in a manner that was in no way amicable or low-key, some distance outside Bismarck, North Dakota, one year to the day before I tumbled out of my last train and stumbled into Pennington, Minnesota, the birthplace of my footnoting career. It was here I met Knut Johnsen, who inspired me to pursue Norwegian, this almost inconceivable language I slowly learned to love, with its orthographic abominations. A hard language, like a wrench you'd use to repair a delicate

Swiss watch; I had to learn to use it with care and ingenuity, it seemed impossible, an impossible and unusable language, I fell quite in love with it.

			
You can camp here	Kind lady lives here	Barking dog here	Kind gentleman lives here
			
Vicious dog here	Nothing to be gained here	Good place for handouts	Will give to get rid of you
			
Police arrest hobos on sight	Doctor here won't charge	Owner is out	Owner is in
			
Authorities are about / alert	Good place to catch train	Man with gun lives here	Not a safe place

HOBBO SIGNS

After the baton was passed to Nixon and silly season reigned across America, I returned, crestfallen, to Germany and settled in Dresden, a city that no longer existed, except as an approximation formed by the ruins of what it used to be, before the bombing and firestorms destroyed everything. This is where I've since made my home, apart from the regular stays in Norway I always looked forward to after I met Frode Brandeggen. I've nothing more to say, for now. Except that this labor has been my greatest honor, to be able to dive down and live within Brandeggen's concentrated speech, in which I, for once, at long last, can permit myself to write subjectively, hold the author up in my own way, according to how I see fit, the way I think he deserves, without shame, without having to withhold due to arbitrary limits on the number of annotations, without fear of an employer whose aim, first and foremost, is to sell books or mollify students, professors, reviewers, and other interested readers of critical editions. For once, an opportunity to step forward and show my face, hold the reader's

hand until we've arrived. At some point, I probably realized the necessity of this step, to emerge from the crowd, out of anonymity, that this would seem to be my only chance to make the Red Handler novels understood and appreciated like they deserve, after all. After all.

¹⁷⁷ This sentence is a good example of banalist literature, from which Frode Brandeggen drew much inspiration and is the school the Red Handler books most clearly fall under, if with mixed success. Banalism, or the *Mouvement artistique du banalisme* (MAB), as it was officially called, was established by Jean-Claude Camille and Thierry Beauchamp in 1971 in the wake of Camille's novel *Salut! Voici mes pieds* (*Hello! Here Are My Feet*, 1970) and Beauchamp's *Un homme heureux avec un chat et un chapeau—et autres histoires* (*A Happy Man with a Cat and a Hat—and Other Stories*, 1971), in which the title story consists, in its entirety, of the following:

L'homme porte un chapeau. Le chapeau est sur sa tête. Le chapeau est doux, ça le rend heureux. Il est également heureux quand il regarde son chat. Son chat a le poil doux, plus doux que son chapeau. L'homme est plus heureux quand il prend son chat que quand il prend son chapeau. Il est encore plus heureux quand il caresse son chat en portant son chapeau. Là, il est très heureux. Alors il fait les deux en même temps. Il est super heureux.

Which translates to:

The man is wearing a hat. The hat is on his head. The hat is soft, which makes him happy. He is also happy when he looks at his cat. The cat's fur is soft, softer than the hat. The man is happier when he touches the cat than when he touches the hat. He is happiest when he pets the cat while wearing the hat. Then, he is very happy. So he does both at the same time. He is super happy.

MAB, largely unknown and little described outside of a narrow band of avant-gardists in France and the United States (where Walter Hopping's *Garbled Love* [1972] and *Evol Garbage* [1974] are the essential works), differs from naïvism by being far more aggressive and uncompromising. It neither strives nor longs for childhood, for a simpler past, but confronts liberalism and capitalism for their nurturing of anti-intellectualism and easy digestibility at the expense of artistic excellence. It does this by showing the watering-down of artistic complexity in all its garishness and vulgarity. In this

way, it also shares kinship with Dadaism, but diverges, not by cultivating nonsense, irrationality, anti-reason, and anti-logic, but rather, for lack of a more convoluted way of putting it, the commonest sense. The idea was to reach the very origin of art and literature, to find the most authentic art in that area in which all embellishment was stripped away and only the basic components remained. Even the letter in itself was deemed worth defending as the innermost representative of the literary reproduction of the world, as the Russian author Paramonov Vladislav “Slava” Yaroslavovitch attempted in his novel *A* (1927), whose back cover announced a tender, heroic tale of one man’s struggle to lead his aging and beloved bull Pasha home from work in the forests by the Nizhnyaya Tunguska River in Siberia following an accident. As a text, however, the novel consisted solely of the letter A, which appeared one time, on the book’s first and last page. But beyond this, by scrutinizing the banal at its very seams, the hope is both that the banality is exposed and that the seams unravel, and that this artistically qualitative scorched-earth tactic gives rise to something of value and content that cannot be scraped away even at the most elementary level and therefore, beyond giving the banal work a de facto value, creates fertile ground and acts as a springboard for new, more complex forms. Through this, banalism also takes on a somewhat altruistic and seppuku-inspired character, as it surrenders all ambition in the name of future artistic excellence. Certain literary scholars have pointed to the Swiss literature collective Gruppe Olten and in particular Peter Bichsel’s books *Eigentlich möchte Frau Blum den Milchmann kennenlernen* (*And Really Frau Blum Would Very Much Like to Meet the Milkman*, 1964) and *Kindergeschichten* (*Stories for Children*, 1969) as other important works within MAB. Warning signs appeared for the movement in 1976 with Hopping’s untimely passing, while in France, Camille and Beauchamp struggled to maintain support and visibility for MAB. They officially threw in the towel in 1982, after eleven years and over 50 releases, with the bittersweet joint edition of *Pas de pieds, pas de chapeaux, pas de chats* (*No Feet, No Hats, No Cats*) and *Rien de rien, et merde...* (*Nothing from Nothing, Damn It*). Jean-Claude Camille moved to Algeria and settled in Algiers, while Thierry Beauchamp remained in Paris and found a job with RATP. At regular intervals over the years that followed and as late as 2003, seemingly new, home-printed MAB-associated books were found on the platforms of the Porte de Clignancourt and Simplon metro stations in the 18th arrondissement. The area corresponds to Beauchamp’s registered address.

180 Here it is probably talk of the same lozenge as Red Handler wishes to buy at the beginning of

the second chapter of *Red Handler Stumbles Upon It*, even though it is referred to by the far more prosaic word "drop".

185 Red Handler slept in the nude. Occasionally in briefs. But most of the time nude. Re the author's note to this novel.

195 With Red Handler's aversion to door bells fresh in memory, we instantly realize that the phone can also offer trouble, although he *has* answered calls earlier.

196 And there we have the confirmation to our suspicion.

197 The author keeps the temperature high, he keeps the phone ringing, simply because the protagonist has a tremendous reluctance to lift the receiver and answer the call.

198 A telephonic variant of Mexican standoff occurs.

199 They look at each other. Understandably.

200 They hope the phone will stop ringing. It does not stop ringing. It's ringing. The author is merciless with his characters.

201 They look at each other again.

202 Here they are looking at the phone.

203 They go back to looking at each other.

204 Again, they turn their attention to the phone. It's ringing. Something must be done, someone has to do something, it can not go on like that. Something's gotta give.

205 And now they look at each other. Again. Like something straight out of *The Good, The Bad &*

The Ugly. Movies have actually never been a big thing with me, even though I did sometimes go to the cinema in my early years, that was one of the benefits of looking considerably older than I was, I was admitted to everything. Still, I can with some pleasure evoke the memory of how I sat there in the dark back in 1940, happily masturbating away to the images of Scarlett O'Hara as she dug up reddishes from the earth and gnarled away at them. Great times.

206 Finally.

207 As readers, for a second or two we're thinking "Oh my, here we go again."

208 But then things resolve. Red Handler picks up the phone.

220 In the light of what we know about Brandeggen's upbringing, and everything he revealed to me over the years I knew him, this monologue lies sadly close to the author's own life. But, alas, not uniquely. The following are a number of incidents I have systematically compiled from time to time:

In the evening following his son's first and only birthday party, Frode Brandeggen's father took 20 % of the presents in order to teach the boy about life's unfairness, along with something vague about economic trends.

For his 18th birthday, Frode Brandeggen received an exact replica of his father's promised toolbox, only much smaller and with undersized tools, so that the son would "know his place."

Brandeggen's father forbade anything that smacked of "Jesus-speak" at Christmastime and instead took his family to the mountains, where they spent an average of twelve sweat-soaked hours digging snow caves, after which they marked the winter solstice with a simple ceremony and concluded by looking at pictures from North Jutland beaches.

Frode Brandeggen was forced to play the cornet in the school band, but the father's undivided attention and praise was always bestowed on the tubist, who, according to Brandeggen's father, played a "man's instrument."

Brandeggen's father believed that all literature after *The Bleaching Yard* by Tarjei Vesaas was superfluous. He also believed that any book published in paperback was for "spinsters and girly men."

Frode Brandeggen wanted a sibling, preferably a sister. Instead he got a print of Munch's *Crying Girl* so he could look at it and suffer a bad conscience.

The Brandeggen family had two German Shepherds called Pain and Suffering. The boy was terrified of both of them and they never hit it off, least of all on those long summer car trips in which he had to sit between the two of them in the backseat.

Frode Brandeggen was snuck into the movies as an 11 year old to watch *The Shining*, ostensibly to toughen the kid up and get him to shut up about his dream of one day going on vacation to a hotel far up in the mountains he had seen in a newspaper ad, which he clipped out and lay under his pillow so the dream might come true. **

Brandeggen's father maintained that his baldness was a direct result of his son's drawn-out birth and that this caused him to miss out on a great deal of unspecified opportunities.

Brandeggen's father held fear and a bad conscience to be the noblest emotions, for only through them did you really know you're alive.

Brandeggen's father was not a religious man, but insisted all the same that the universe was only 6000 years old because, as he said, anything else would've just been too pathetic.

Frode Brandeggen was conceived during a quarrel. As the story goes, Brandeggen's father blathered and screamed at the decisive moment.

On two occasions, Brandeggen's father expressed the opinion that no one could consider themselves a decent person without knowing how to whittle a willow flute. He was also unwilling to teach this craft and neither the mother nor the son ever learned how to make any wind instrument whatever.

Brandeggen's father held the unshakable belief that doctors were no more than glorified joiners and only the mother's unyielding cries prevented the father from performing an appendectomy on his eight-year-old son, who after much gnashing of teeth was driven to the hospital.

Brandeggen's father held that the best and the only way of learning to swim was ad hoc, in situ, in deep water, without anyone swimming alongside and making things free and easy for you. Every day, over the course of two summer vacations in North Jutland, the father hurled Frode into the water, and when he one day managed to heave himself ashore with something that resembled a breaststroke, the father exclaimed: *What'd I tell you?* At this, the boy vomited. The father also believed in his peerless mastery of Latin phrases and that the minimum of a general education consisted in being able to use at least two hundred of them.

Brandeggen's father believed that every well-informed person ought to know the importance of being able to play Creedence Clearwater Revival, at a high volume, whenever the urge was felt, and that the time of day was of no relevance whatever.

When Frode Brandeggen was seven, his father sawed a centimeter off each leg of his son's chair every day, in secret, over the course of what was likely several months, until the boy didn't even reach the edge of the table, all in order to teach his son that you must always be on your guard in life.

Brandeggen's father hated his father and believed it would build character if his son did the same.

Frode Brandeggen's mother had a lot of things she could've said. Most of it went unsaid. It was better that way.

Brandeggen's father once refused the desperate pleas of the fire brigade to move his car so that they could rescue the neighboring house that was fast going up in flames, because they hadn't asked "in a nice way."

Brandeggen's father told his son that he loved him one time, it might've been somewhere around August 1974. In any case it had something to do with Nixon's resignation.

Brandeggen's father never failed to point out, whenever the name of Adolf Hitler was mentioned, that in spite of everything the man was famous for his love of children and dogs.

Brandeggen's father believed that suicide had to do with "knowing the time of thy visitation" and ascribed the quote to Nietzsche.

Brandeggen's father was 1.82 m barefoot on most days and 1.90 m flat when he was inebriated. He was often 1.90.

Brandeggen's father, during his term of compulsory military service in 1965–1966, had been found to possess a unique ability to smell gas, even in miniscule concentrations and over long distances. He therefore considered himself indispensable to the Norwegian Armed Forces and learned in the fullness of time fluent Russian so that he could if necessary infiltrate the enemy and come closer to the gas facilities whose locations within the land of the bear he had taken it on himself to map out, a project that, to be sure, was never based on any intelligence or actual field reports, but what he described as a highly skilled deduction and which many others described as purely random guesswork.

Frode Brandeggen's mother believed that tomorrow would bring a better day.

Brandeggen's father was convinced beyond doubt that he could have conducted a locomotive, and arrive at each station far more punctually than the Norwegian State Railways to boot, if only they'd given him the chance.

Brandeggen's mother had a tradition of giving her son an empty chocolate wrapper on the 1st of December before giving him the chocolate on the 24th. This was in order to teach him that the meaning of advent is waiting. On some years, his father ate the chocolate before Christmas Eve to teach the boy that all things must pass.

Brandeggen's father claimed that he knew who killed JFK and who killed Olof Palme and that it centered around the same people, but refused to say anything else, because the consequences would be dire if people knew the truth.

Brandeggen's father once said that no one was a grown up before learning to lose in Ludo, and that this was meant both literally and figuratively.

Brandeggen's father told his son that Woodstock was his idea and that he and Max Yasgur had been friends for years.

Brandeggen's father said he'd beaten up both Børre Knudsen and Ludvig Nessa in 1981, in what he called the Battle of Bergeland Street.

Brandeggen's father said that he had beaten the shit out of many a man over the years, but it was beating the shit out of the yoga guru Satchidananda Saraswati with his own book, *The Healthy Vegetarian*, that had brought him the most satisfaction.

Brandeggen's father hated dancing almost as much as he hated watching others dance.

Brandeggen's father was an avid builder of Airfix model ships at a scale of 1:600 and an even more avid sinker of them with homemade incendiary torpedoes. The sinking of the battleship USS *Missouri* (BB-63) was at once his greatest triumph and gravest decision; it took him three hours to get the better of himself, and he spent the night in the bathroom, surrounded by candlelight, paying respect to the miniature men that bobbed around the bathtub with microscopic lifesavers around their waists. This was also the only time he was ever heard to weep openly.

Frode Brandeggen's father once described his heart as a landfill where his family flapped about like scavenger birds digging for scraps.

Frode Brandeggen was born on Sunday, the 27th of September, 1970, at 2:34 in the morning. He weighed 3560 grams. The air was thick with thunder.

Frode Brandeggen's father once considered joining the Jehovah's Witnesses for the simple reason that he could relate to people who actually looked forward to the end of the world.

Brandeggen's mother had many girlfriends in her youth. Brandeggen's father put a stop to that.

Brandeggen's father once said about Joseph Goebbels: Whatever else you might say about him, he had the gift of the gab.

Frode Brandeggen's father was constipated for all of 1970 and up until the early summer of 1971. For the rest of the decade, he would mark the day of his bowel movement (June 17th) by lighting a candle in the living room and saying nothing until it had burnt all the way down, which usually lasted far into the night. By that time he was already too drunk to remember what the light represented, much less that it was he who'd lit it.

When Brandeggen's father beat his mother, he always took care to ask her to remove her jewelry first, so that he wouldn't risk cutting himself on it.

Brandeggen's father had a hobby room, but no hobbies.

Frode Brandeggen ran away from home as a nine year old, but was located by his father near Ullandhaug Tower at 7:00 the same evening. They returned to Astraveien at 10:15 that night and the boy stayed home from school for eight days, according to the school records "due to rehabilitation."

Brandeggen's father once expressed the opinion that in any case, you couldn't fault Charles Manson for his taste in music.

Brandeggen's father never went to parent-teacher conferences. He simply never did.

Frode Brandeggen hated his name, like everyone who wishes they were somebody else.

Frode Brandeggen's mother worked as a grocery store cashier and during her breaks she would expound to her coworkers about vacations that she'd never actually been on. To herself, she defended this by saying this was the cheapest and indeed the only way of going places.

Brandeggen's father viewed pilots as the air's bus drivers and never doubted for a second in his ability to land a 747, if only they'd given him the chance.

For many years Brandeggen's father kept the following in his closet: A Mauser Model B rifle, en Krag-Jørgensen M/1894, a Winchester 1500 shotgun, a Russian Makarov pistol, a Luger, an AG3, and loads of ammunition. This was common knowledge and something he constantly reminded everyone about.

Brandeggen's father had a recurring dream that it was he who'd set fire to the Reichstag, and that he later hit it big in the matchstick industry.

Brandeggen's father once took one of his son's teachers by the throat at a Christmas party because the teacher had written Henrik Wergeland's name with a V.

As the years went by, it emerged that Brandeggen's father hated the following: wadmal, hedgehogs, earmuffs, shower curtains, soap bubbles, macramé, the periodic table, fake fur, visits, dental floss, all types of wood except birch, mahogany and hickory made him especially furious, enameled pots and utensils, rubber duckies, fabric softeners, footstools, elephants and many other threatened species besides, the spring equinox, *Life of Pi*, damp kitchen towels, asbestos, church bells, children, toothpaste, phone numbers, robes in general but especially bathrobes, toothpicks, matches, slippers,

bicycles, public and private fountains, doors, Ziploc bags, hair, adventures, America chests, reggae, snow, photography equipment, copper plates, sailing ships, the color blue, the price of electricity, Boy and Girl Scouts, 4H and all types of track and field, cords and plugs, cream, rolling luggage, currency, ice hockey, every type of flooring, contact lenses, backpacks, the port authority, plastics, onions, office landscapes, tennis balls, denim, new year's fireworks, screws, bulk weighing, scaffolding, gymnastics, cardboard boxes, wallpaper, washing machines, fillings, shirt buttons, ladders, navels, piña colada, honeymoons, open flame, traffic jams and jams in general, handbags, dialysis, magnifying glasses, cellars, postmen, magnets, monsters, flip flops, sing-alongs, the sea, death, love, Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome, the Yuppie era, sunglasses, future prospects, reusable shopping bags, sculptures, ships in a bottle, folding screens, screw-on lids, freeze-dried coffee, feces, feathers, disco, discos, copy machines, legal hearings, wrestling, the weather, every kind of bag, driving schools, the police, Saint John's Fire, protective footwear, canaries, the moon, litanies, clogs, the government, mammon, steeplechases, roller coasters, swings, trampolines and sandboxes; practically all people, playsets, Easter, the suburbs, mailboxes, bric-à-brac, chess, seatbelts, fashion magazines, ginger, plastic bags, bowler hats, mints, winter, summer, fall, spring, Mondays, tealights, fractions, downlights, bay windows, cigarettes, bedwetting, barns, pants pockets, Napoleon, plane tickets, Mount Everest, female program announcers, fish without gills, newspapers in Berliner format, tinsel, lawn sprinklers, mildew, lawnmowers, parents, concentration camps, chlorophyll, wooden huts, swimming caps, panic attacks, sixpences, saunas, nature, covered cheese dishes, drypoint and woodcut, dog whistles, flypaper, nailclippers, stages of a journey, shortcuts, detours, fun times, müsli, urinary tract infections, pancakes, carrom, computers, dandelions, cymbals, stairs, freckles, art, opening hours, prostheses, Tupperware, all marine life, knife handles, potpourri, Westerns, applause, restraining orders, envelopes, snakeskin, oscillators, footnotes, moss, doorsills, garden walls, parasols, hippies, the Red Cross, coincidences, soccer fields, grandfather clocks plus all timers and alarm clocks, chemistry sets, running shoes, grand opening sales, junk mail, wrenches, clothes racks, movables. But none of these came anywhere near the hate he harbored for Christmas.

According to the stamp on the library card, Frode Brandeggen's mother borrowed Doug Richmond's *How to Disappear Completely and Never Be Found* from the Stavanger Public Library on May 12, 1986, and returned it a week later.

“The most important thing my father taught me,” said Brandeggen’s father on one occasion, “is to be economical with your punches so that you don’t tire yourself.”

Frode Brandeggen’s father paid no taxes between 1972 and 1983, nor in any of the years following.

Frode Brandeggen’s father could recite the entire film *The Sorrow and the Pity* from memory, and as the years went by, so could Frode Brandeggen.

Brandeggen said enthusiastically of the Manhattan Project: “It was no child’s play, that’s for sure!”

Frode Brandeggen’s father promised to stop drinking the day he was no longer thirsty.

Brandeggen’s father said: “If I had a motorcycle, I’d roar out of this fucking shittown for good.”

Brandeggen’s father was unusually occupied with the importance of a good exit. Again, some Nietzsche thing.

Frode Brandeggen’s father regarded himself as the foremost authority on *Sonderkommandos* in Norway and believed he could write a brilliant dissertation on the subject, if only they’d given him the chance.

Brandeggen’s father once said of Pol Pot that the man, if nothing else, was a go-getter.

Like the bear Colargol, Brandeggen’s father was able to hum in both major and minor keys.

Brandeggen’s father once said of Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*, after unwillingly going to see it with his wife at the theatre: “I could’ve written that myself. If only they’d given me the chance.”

Brandeggen's father made the following laconic observation: "The way people are dismembered by chainsaw in the movies is unrealistic, the cuts are much too smooth. In reality they'd be jagged and flaky, because the tissue is soft and the body exerts no counter-pressure."

Brandeggen's father was generally an admirer of the Nicaraguan Contras and claimed to be in possession of a copy of *Operaciones psicológicas en guerra de guerrillas*, signed by Enrique Bermúdez and Ayn Rand.

Brandeggen's father dreamed of being a gardener. When he awoke, he pushed it out of mind.

Brandeggen's father voraciously read other people's mail if the chance presented itself, and the chance presented itself astonishingly often.

Frode Brandeggen's father proudly claimed never to have made dinner. "Never!"

Brandeggen's father clung to the idea that he primarily smuggled alcohol home from Jutland in order to contribute to the Norwegian GDP by keeping the customs agents busy and on their toes. He held them in a strange, hateful respect.

Over time, Frode Brandeggen's mother became so careful that she washed everything on delicate cycle.

Frode Brandeggen's father was present at four complete autopsies at the Stavanger Central Hospital by presenting himself as a researcher for a Polish documentary producer. According to him, he did this because he wanted to "see if people were as rotten on the inside as they are on the outside."

Brandeggen's father expressed disappointment at the fact that he was never suspected of being the Unabomber. "There's no reason why it couldn't have been me, if only they'd given me the chance."

Frode Brandeggen's father died suddenly and dramatically of a heart attack on a nameless, North Jutland beach, the same day his son was buried in Stavanger. His last words are said to be, "Oh my god, my god."

* Several places in his posthumous papers, Brandeggen emphasizes that he wants the title *The Red Handler* to appear in the same hand-drawn typeface as that used on the posters for *The Shining* and for the individual novel titles to appear in the same variant of Helvetica used in the film's intertitles, a desire that was granted by Gyldendal Norsk Forlag. Å The extent to which the passage is connected to this specific event is uncertain.

Å The typeface and poster for *The Shining* were created by the designer Saul Bass, whose film posters included *The Man With The Golden Arm* (1955), *Love in The Afternoon* (1957), *Bonjour Tristesse* (1958), *Vertigo* (1958), *Anatomy of a Murder* (1959), *The Magnificent Seven* (1960), *Bunny Lake is Missing* (1965), and the opening titles for *The Seven Year Itch*, *North by Northwest* (1959), *Psycho* (1960), *Spartacus* (1960), *Ocean's 11* (1960) and *West Side Story* (1961). The extent of Brandeggen's familiarity with Bass's body of work is unknown. In general, and paradoxically given his concern over the typeface for his Red Handler books, Brandeggen was adamant that authors and filmmakers should never concern themselves with the works' visual appearance or other (as he put it) "base, commercial aspects," which served only as distractions from the artist's real work, the text, the images. ¤

¤ Accordingly, Brandeggen categorically refused to take any stance on the cover designs that Gyldendal presented him prior to the publication of *Conglomeratic Breath*. The designer, Meilein Bakke Tunland, is said to have attempted to call him several times to discuss the sketches, only to have the author time and again hang up on her as soon as it became clear what the call was about. None of this prevented Brandeggen from subsequently expressing his dissatisfaction with the final result, and for years he bore a considerable grudge toward the designer for what he called "her po-mo hipster streak," which he believed had ruined the cover and with it much of his book's commercial potential. "This is a dreadful dust

jacket,” he said to his editor. Æ “Absolutely dreadful. It would’ve been far better to have used an oil painting, preferably something of Hertervig.” ÆÆ

Æ Brandeggen was consistent in his use of the term *dust jacket*. In this area he belonged to the old school.

ÆÆ Brandeggen held the Stavanger painter Lars Hertervig (1830–1902) in as high regard as the poet Sigbjørn Obstfelder (1866–1900, also from Stavanger), and he loved Obstfelder as much as he despised the author Alexander L. Kielland (1849–1906, also from Stavanger). Around the time he finished *Conglomeratic Breath*, he scribbled a few ideas for a biographical novel on Hertervig and the painter’s mental torments, but became incensed when the far more successful author Jon Fosse released the novels *Melancholy I* and *Melancholy II* in 1995 and 1996, a pair of biographical novels about Hertervig that centered upon the painter’s mental torments. Brandeggen therefore shifted focus to Obstfelder and sketched out an intense, taut biographical novel about the angst-ridden, pining poet, only to experience a fresh blow and fall into rage when the Stavanger author Einar O. Risa published the novel *L. C. Nielsen* in 2000, a biographical novel about none other than Sigbjørn Obstfelder. The novels, he had to admit, were masterful.

221 *Everyone you arrest is yourself*. Never forget that. Red Handler may not hear it, but the author speaks just as much to himself now and if it hasn’t been clear before, the veil is finally completely removed here and reveals how desperate and personal a book project this was for Frode Brandeggen. He knows the end is nigh when he writes this; he knows he will never be able to escape himself and that it’s just as impossible to hide one’s luggage away in an impenetrable maze like *Conglomerate Breath* as it is to throw it overboard in the Red Handler universe. The literature of the banal, the crime fiction work, the idea of a punk-based rebellion against commercial literature which looks through the fingers with artistic quality as long as there’s money to be made: all this aside, he can not get rid of himself and through it, free himself. The rage, despair and disappointment ends here, in

bland resignation; This is the point where both Brandeggen and Red Handler gives up. There is nowhere to turn, no place to hide anymore. What was meant as a hard-hitting protest letter with financial potential ends as a soft whimper to himself. Maybe that's why I hold these books in such terribly high regard; maybe this is why I've decided that this is the last book I annotate. Not because the quality of the prose of these novels stands above other works I've had on my desk, but because they are the result of the little man's struggle. He gave it all he had and he failed. Miserably. At least in his own view. There is something really beautiful about that, admitting the defeat. And therefore I will always defend it.

Brandeggen looked at the British punk band Sex Pistols' *Never Mind The Bollocks Here's The Sex Pistols* as the clearest example of the possible coexistence of genuine uprising and commercial appeal / earnings. Brandeggen came from an avant-garde tradition, and no matter how much he considered Red Handler a partial revenge / protest project, we now also know that it was an artistic Trojan horse, because part of him also genuinely believed that these books inhabited a true literary quality and was what the people wanted, though they didn't know it yet. The avant-garde artist also dream of being followed, otherwise you're just avant.

230 There is nothing wrong with choosing a good lavender soap.

236 Cliff Eastwood (born Blagorodna "Blago" Lazarov, 1962) had a relatively short career, with *Зелени шуми, сини панталони. Целосни луѓе и деца* (*Green Forests, Blue Pants. Full People and Children*, 1984) as his high point as an artist, a sentimental Macedonian tale of Yugoslavia at the end of the 60s. Other films of his include *Те бакнувам. Потоа морам да одам на работа* (*I'll Kiss You, But Then I've Got to Go to Work*, 1980), *Вечерва* (*Tonight*, 1979), the comedy *Остеопорозата не е за слаби души* (*Osteoporosis Isn't for the Faint of Heart*, 1983) and the British erotic thriller-comedy *My Genes in Your Jeans* (1984). *Šancoj de doloro en la lando de murdo* (*Chances for Pain in the Land of Murder*, 1985) was Eastwood's last. He was killed in the spring of 1986 during the filming of *Збогум Тумо* (*Farewell, Tito*) when he accidentally walked backwards into the tail rotor of a helicopter that had just landed on the set. * According to his biography, *овек во илјадници парчиња* (*Man in a Thousand Bits*, 1989), Cliff Eastwood had never seen any Clint Eastwood movies. Å

* Exactlly as the Ukrainian director Boris Sagal had done, on the exact same day five years previous, outside the Timberline Lodge in Oregon (the same hotel whose exterior Stanley Kubrick had used in *The Shining*, 1980). Apart from that, Sagal's most famous work as a director was *The Omega Man* (1971).

Ä Cliff Eastwood is also the man behind the legendary Dylan-inspired hit "Hey, Mr. Mandolin Man" (Beograd Fanci Records, 1981), an originally soppy tune about homesickness that gained new life and new significance in 1992 when paramilitary Chetniks embraced it and (deliberately) misread it as heralding Milošević's speech on the Kosovo plain in 1987 and as a defense of Republika Srpska. Unconfirmed sources also have it that the song was used internally as a song of praise to Ratko Mladić, known in Western media as the butcher of Bosnia, but among his people known as the Mandolin, ostensibly because of his unparalleled virtuosity when he, to accompany wine and women or in moments of extreme rage, pulled out the instrument and belted out a few tunes. "Hey, Mr. Mandolin Man" was the only song Eastwood recorded in his lifetime.

²⁴³ This paragraph is an offshoot from an early phase of Brandeggen's work on the Red Handler, presumably around 2004 to 2005, when Brandeggen was exploring the possibility of writing the books as science fiction. Inspired by Stanislaw Lem, the Strugatsky brothers, Øyvind Rimbereid's *Solaris Corrected*, and not least Philip K. Dick, he outlined a series under the working title of *Pink Radiation/2-3-74*. The idea involved the Red Handler (here called ArSiGa) patrolling the streets of a future dystopian version of Stavanger, in which the city has grown to over a million residents due to the oil industry, whose greed, however, has turned some parts of the city into refineries. Crude oil and toxic waste flow through the streets under a sky of perpetual darkness, where dark-blue clouds allow only faint glimmers of the sun to shine through. In the only book for which Brandeggen completed a first draft, *Randa Simulacrum malignum*, ArSiGa wakes up in his apartment at Kalhammaren and looks out over the Byfjord, where the newest oil rigs stand close together, ready to be towed to sea. ArSiGa goes deeper and deeper into the slums of Randaberg (called *Randa* in the text) to fight crime and help the lost. Brandeggen leans heavily on Dick's *The Unteleported Man* (1966) and has ArSiGa

teleport the people he arrests to a penal colony on Neptune's moon Triton, from which they can never return. That is, presumably. At the same time, ArSiGa becomes more and more entangled in the illegal teleporting of Randa slumdweller to the affluent moon, Titan (which revolves around Saturn), where local legislation requires everyone who arrives on their own steam at the Elips Island reception center (which is also where all well-off migrants from the massive, regularly-running Gargantua ships are processed before being transported on to their new, sumptuous abode) shall be taken care of, given a home and a job, and receive the same treatment and privileges as the rest of the population. A body of laws that, one should add, were created in a time before teleporting was invented and which are now the subject of heated debate on Earth as well as Titan. The same laws apply, moreover, to Triton, where every new arrival becomes a life prisoner, which is complicated by the teleport device used by ArSiGa and certain others, an early, off-market prototype with an 82 %/7 % success rate. This means that the teleporting fails 18 % of the time, of which 11 % of the persons are sent nowhere, and 7 % are sent to the wrong end station; slumdweller who are on their way to a new start on Titan, in other words, end up at the penal colony on Triton, while Triton-destined criminals arrive at Titan, where they not only get the chance to continue their shady activities, but also the opportunity to return to Earth, this time with new identities and under the guise of being well-heeled Titanites. Complications ensue. Exactly why Brandeggen left off *Randa Simulacrum malignum* is uncertain, but it might be because the work ran the risk of becoming complex and he feared "getting lost in the same woods where I found *Conglomeratic Breath*," or because it coincided with his discovery of Walter Hopping's banalist prose, which led Brandeggen down a different, less obstacle-strewn path.