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Kerma. Is the government right ?

The cultural program of Uusi Jutu is a discussion about the power of critics and the power that has been taken away from them.



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April 9, 2025

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Kerma is Uuden Jutu's cultural program, where the cultural editorial team discusses a current topic of their choice each week.

This week, Kerma is discussing the power of critics. Art criticism has been in crisis for at least a decade, at least according to the press, but it still stirs up emotions. When the fast-food memegirl* posted a meme asking, "What if art criticism were to happen so that someone who is excited about that work would explain to me why I should be too, and not so that someone who hasn't figured it out would explain why it's crap," both defenders and opponents of art criticism rushed to the scene to share their views.

Do art critics have power or have they been disempowered?

According to editorial manager **Sonja Saarikoski**, publicly defining the work of others always contains an element of power, denying which is sheer ignorance.

Journalist **Oskari Onninen** wonders why there is always discussion about nasty critics, even though the degradation of the text genre is primarily the fault of boring critics.

Journalist **Vaula Helin** believes that the power wielded by critics is a more multidimensional issue than the success or oblivion of an individual work.

We publish the recommendations presented at the end of the program in a more extensive written form each week than the audio version.

Sonja Saarikoski: Anti-recommendation: Grimm's fairy tales and woke Snow White

Since we are in the critic period, my recommendation this time is a so-called cautionary tale. We know how easily classics and references to them become circular arguments for the quality of works. Now I will try to argue why that is not worth it. I use children as a cue horse, because children arouse emotions almost as much as art criticism.

We are living in the aftermath of the 19th century. The latest example of this is the controversial woke Snow White*. It is based on a fairy tale, the most famous version of which was published by the Brothers Grimm in 1857.

For some strange reason, I read the first volume of Grimm's fairy tales, *The Sleeping Beauty* (Finnish: **Raija Jänicke** and **Oili Suominen**). I don't really remember why I

had reserved it from the library, but after borrowing it for over a year, someone else did, so I ended up reading the book before returning it.

I have of course heard Grimm's fairy tales as a child and have seen *Little Red Riding Hood* seven times at the National Theatre, but I had not paid attention to their, shall I say, strange features at the time. Ignorance is a bit of the same type as is often the case in opera: it makes you want to surrender to the world of music (as a child: fairy tales) and forget how thoroughly stupid the events on stage often are. (Librettes, those "Adult fairy tales" are a good point of comparison for the analysis, also in the sense that versions of the guessing games for suitors, familiar from *Turandot*, and the forbidden room in *The Little Prince*, appear frequently in Grimm's fairy tales. As does the fact that the woman always gives in.)

The Grimm Brothers' fairy tales are moralistic, misogynistic, predestinationist, and even eugenic. For example, in the fairy tales *One-Eyed*, *Two-Eyed*, and *Three-Eyed*, only The "normal-looking girl" or Two-Eyes is a moral agent.

Equally numbing is the narrative flatness of fairy tales. In a 2019 article **in The Guardian*, author **Melissa Ashley** writes that many of the archetypes of fairy tale heroines were actually made famous by French storytellers, or so-called *conteuses*.*

According to Ashley, the Brothers Grimm wanted to tell fairy tales "folkishly", but in reality this folkishness meant masculinity and patriarchy. He writes that, for example, the Conteuses' version of *Sleeping Beauty* is considerably more complex than the Grimm Brothers' version. It is not hard to believe this when you read the Grimms' stilted tale: *There the girl lay so beautifully that the prince could not take his eyes off her, but bent down to kiss her.*

I hope no more children are exposed to this. Also "Woke versions" of Snow White can be omitted in the future.

Oskari Onninen: Hipster Life: User Manual: Novels

When I was in high school, it was a big deal for me to finish reading the Frenchman **Georges Perec's** wonderfully experimental and rich *Life User Manual* and be able to add Perec's name to the Irc-Galleria community list.

At the turn of the year, I returned to Perec ex tempore when I impulse-purchased Perec's first book, *Tavarat*, in a recent translation by **Leena Rantanen**, from a second-hand bookshop.

Goods is a small, dialogue-free novel about a couple who crave a bourgeois lifestyle in 1960s Paris. An emptiness shines through Jérôme and Sylvie's consumer choices in a way that still stings 60 years later. At one point, they hate reading a magazine that simultaneously defines everything that constitutes status for them.

Shortly after reading *Tavarat*, I started to come across *Perfection*, the fourth novel by Italian writer **Vincenzo Latronico**, everywhere. Latronico, who worked as an art critic and translator, was unable* to write creatively during the pandemic, so he decided to transfer *Tavarat*, almost sentence by sentence, to expat Berlin in the 2010s.*

Latronico's novel update shows how, instead of the 1960s heaven of goods, 2010s capitalism guides the construction of status through images and experiences. As the book goes through vinyl records, cheap flights, cast iron pans, houseplants, exhibition openings, Airbnbs, graphic designers, sex parties, all that, you know, the Gen Y veterans of the hipster years are forced to look their life choices in the eye. Everything that was initially recognizable turns into bad mood and anxiety.

In Europe, the book has been published by the British publishing house Fitzcarraldo, known for its blue covers, and the cover* of the American version, of course, features a photo by Berlin photographer **Wolfgang Tillmans**. *Perfection's* place is therefore on *Perfection's* stage-like bookshelves, which makes for a great meta-joke.

On Tuesday, *Perfection* was shortlisted for* the international Booker Prize. In addition, for the first time, a work that has already been translated into Finnish is nominated for the prize: **Solvej Balle's** *Volume Calculation I*, published by Kosmos.

Another one was close – and it would have been an unprecedented success in translation. *Eurotrash*, by the widely reviled and awarded Swiss **Christian Kracht**, which revels in maternal, Nazi and other traumas, was unfortunately left on the longlist. It was published in Finnish by Lurra Editions three years ago – and did not receive a single review in the press as a reward for its cultural work. In connection with another episode, it might have been a cause for outrage.

Vaula Helin: A movement that destabilizes the system

British psychoanalyst and literary scholar **Josh Cohen** believes that our understanding of humanity is dominated by the primacy of work. According to Cohen, art offers a counterforce to this, as it is possible to refuse to do so by making and enjoying it. "the tyranny of doing".

In his book *Not Working*,* Cohen quotes sociologist *Theodor Adorno*, loosely translated as follows: *Art is not revolutionary because of what it says, but because it says very little. The profound effect of a Samuel Beckett play or a Pablo Picasso painting is that they alienate us from the empty forms of language and communication that modern capitalist society forces upon us* .

Cohen and Adorno made me consider how the conceptual space defined by criticism guides the interpretation of a work of art. My case study is the contemporary dance piece *Dreamer, which I saw last week*.*. In contemporary dance works, references to the conceptual content of the performance are often rather sparse. Even *the Dreamer* manual reminds us that the work "does not tell a story, but offers viewers the freedom to create their own meanings."

This dimension is a big part of the charm of contemporary dance for me. I wanted to see *Dreamer* before the reviews, but in the end I devoured **Henna Raatikainen's** excellent review in *Helsingin Sanomat* as a starter for the work.*.

In the audience, I became the dreamer foretold by the title of the work, as I briefly fell asleep halfway through the piece. Did internalizing the criticism change anything in the dynamic between me and the work? Perhaps I lazily settled down next to the work when someone had already chewed it for me.

As I left the theater, I felt an immediate need to conceptualize what I had seen, and I returned to Raatikainen's critique. In it, Raatikainen carefully analyzes the merits of the work. He writes that " *Dreamer* is a unique, incomprehensibly beautiful work of art, whose numerous merits cannot be described in words."

Yes, those fidgety, disappearing, and beloved words. I think you can try to enjoy contemporary dance without them. Or, like me, the tyranny of doing and the need to verbalize it will hit you a few days later.

I agree with Raatikainen that *Dreamer* is a complete work of art in its own right. Perhaps that is why the world of the work felt exclusionary and oxygen-deprived in

places. I also reflected a socially critical stance in the work: I saw an interpretation of the kinds of bends we bend to as individuals and communities, what we submit to - and what in all of this still seduces, compels us to watch and participate. But I also saw a movement that undermines the system. The transgressive power expressed by the dancers' skill immediately aroused the desire to join the crowd and start a revolution. That was the moment when I was fully awake in the audience again.

Helsinki Dance Company's DREAMER Studio in Pasila (Ratamestarinkatu 5) until May 15, 2025. Choreographers Annamari Keskinen and Ryan Mason. Dancers: Sofia Hilli, Jyrki Kasper, Aksinja Lommi, Pekka Louhio, Mikko Paloniemi, Justus Pienmunne, Inka Tiitinen, Anna Virkkunen, Elli Virtanen-Roth.



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