Franz Petter Schmidt *Prinds Christian Augusts Minde*

Text: Jessica Hemmings *Desire Lines*
Photos: Fin Serck-Hanssen

Bodies were once used to measure cloth. From the tip of the nose to the outstretched hand measured the length of a yard. The arms that measured were typically those of merchants and traders: men who oversaw quality. If you oversaw quality, you also determined what to reject. Much like today, profit (when it is to be made) typically accrues in the late stages of textile production. What can we know of the bodies who laboured in the early stages of textile manufacturing, before the tip of the nose to the outstretched hand measured a length of cloth? What hopes, or desires, existed in the bodies who worked in conditions none would freely choose? [1]

The large second floor room off Storgata where the Norwegian artist Franz Petter Schmidt currently weaves once contained the workers of Prindsen. "Being imprisoned at Prindsen was not considered part of a process of improving people's state or position, nor did their work experience facilitate employment outside the institution." [2] Instead, bodies faced work as a punishment intended to destroy the vice of idleness. Redemption is difficult to imagine. Instead, we might wonder about the lives that led to forced labour. Insolvency, public disorderliness, or perhaps the simple impossibility—as we see with alarming rebound today—to explain or defend oneself against the norms of governance?

In his latest series of works, Schmidt has measured movements that may have been made by the labouring bodies that once occupied Prindsen. Before weaving, weft threads marked out distances from the main door to the window, or from the desk to the loom where he weaves today—back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. Routes possibly taken by bodies who, in turn, oversaw the endless repetition of textile production: spinning fibre into yarn; plying threads onto bobbins; finally, tamping pick-by-pick on the loom. Coloured with graphite or grease from Prindsen's remaining looms, the new weavings are patterned with stripes [3] based on the site's interior measurements. Other weavings suggest an industrial-ikat [4], if you will, drawn from measurements of a historical manufacturing site.

Some of the resulting patterns are as delicate as works by the American artist Agnes Martin. A few even share the same peachy pink favoured by Martin, although Schmidt acknowledges very different associations. "Convict's garb is striped pink and white" writes Jean Genet in his autobiographical novel *The Thief's Journal* [5]. Schmidt refers to Genet's opening lines in the closing lines of his own PhD, recalling that "I read the novel *The Thief's Journal* by Jean Genet in my late teens [...] He is gay, a beggar, a prostitute, a thief and in motion." [6] Unlike the graphite- or grease-coloured stripes, Schmidt's blush of colour was not intentionally added. It may be a fugitive [7] residue, a trace of earlier contact with another substance in the space that remains unstable and changes over time.

Prindsen offers a remarkably untouched microhistory of Oslo's (what was then called Kristiania) once thriving textile manufacturing near and along the Akerselva river. As a workhouse for those serving labour sentences, it very likely operated as a place of surveillance. [8] Horsehair weaving was present in Prindsen's past [9], lengths of tough fibres that can easily slice into human skin. But rather than cut, Schmidt's weavings are a commitment to painstaking recovery. Spools of snapped and spoiled linen and wool the artist had long owned have been repaired with knots that reconnect fragments into a single long thread again. In some finished weavings, the knots are apparent: miniature sutures that bring purpose back to the discarded. In contrast with punitive cultures of surveillance, each suture seems to bear witness to past violence through the possibility of repair.

Schmidt has acknowledged that what has now become a decade long "presence in the weaving workshop at Prindsen allows for an exploration of the social history of the institution, aspects of penal labour, the treatment of people on the margins of society, social distress, mental disorders and degradation." [10] His weaving occurs at a site that once forced squinting eyes to coax recalcitrant machinery and demanded the endless bending and twisting of spines. [11] Penal institutions were, and are, spaces of sensory extremes. If, in the past, labour occurred with inadequate light, in the modern prison complex there are lights that never turn off. [12] The constant presence of dust and absence of fresh air caused respiratory ailments, [13] and cold is now documented as an additional, albeit covert, form of punishment.

[14] Finally, the prison deploys the relentless silence of solitary confinement [15] where Prindsen once produced the inescapable racket of manufacturing.

Schmidt's extraordinarily delicate woven textiles carry patterns of Prindsen. Some are measured, others imprinted from textures of the space. In his most recent work, the artist's own body appears, ghostly shadows cast by graphite onto the loom's warp. They are weavings that acknowledge the physical reality of the space where the artist works today, as well as the bodies who occupied the same space long before him. Might the measurement and imprints that mark these textiles be understood as desire lines? Desire lines, also known as desire paths, are the routes urban planners acknowledge as shortcuts that break with expected and planned movement. [16] They are connections that remain unsanctioned but occur nonetheless, re-routing what was either ill-conceived or purposefully denied. The individuals who once occupied this space may have moved beyond allowed patterns of behaviour at the time, desiring human connections society refused to acknowledge. We cannot know. But we can imagine Prindsen has witnessed lives which, if lived in another time, may have borne an uncanny resemblance to our own.

[1] For example, Anna Arabindan-Kesson's *Black Bodies White Gold: Art, Cotton, and Commerce in the Atlantic World*, Duke University Press, 2021 considers depictions in visual culture of enslaved bodies who laboured in America's cotton production which provided the raw material for a significant portion of Britain's early industrial textile manufacturing.

[2] Franz Petter Schmidt *REFLECTION Weaving Fabrics for Suits*, Norwegian Artistic Fellowship Programme, Oslo National Academy of the Arts, 2017, p. 79.

[3] Michel Pastoureau's *The Devil's Cloth: A History of Stripes*, Trans. Jody Gladding, Washington Square Press, 2001.

[4] Ikat is a technique for patterning woven cloth by dying the warp and/or weft prior to weaving. Double ikat requires enormous precision because the dye placement of both the warp and weft must align if the pattern is to be accurate when woven. A woven cloth patterned with the ikat technique often has a slightly feathered edge to the pattern. Ikat is not an industrial production technique, although there are examples of industrially printed cloth that mimic ikat.

[5] Jean Genet, *The Thief's Journal*, Grove Press, New York, 1964, p. 7.

[6] Franz Petter Schmidt *REFLECTION Weaving Fabrics for Suits*, p. 80.

[7] Fugitive colours are inherently unstable and change over time. In textile dyes, greens tend to have more fugitive properties than other colours. See Salome Egger, *The Rays are Colouring: The encounter of a phenomenon*, PhD, Nottingham Trent University, 2017.

[8] For a fascinating study of Swedish prisons and "the double nature of prison media: the entanglement of media infrastructures inside and outside of prison through prison work, how prison architecture serves as a medium in itself, and in what ways prisons constitute test beds for technology development" see Anne Kaun and Fredrik Stiernstedt, *Prison Media: Incarceration and the Infrastructures of Work and Technology*, MIT Press, 2023, p. 2.

[9] Personal communication with author, Franz Petter Schmidt, Johanne Bergquist and Caroline Juterud February 27, 2024.

[10] Franz Petter Schmidt *REFLECTION Weaving Fabrics for Suits*, p. 80.

[11] Early 20th century American photojournalist Lewis Hine (1874-1940), whose career included nearly a decade of work as a photographer for the National Child Labor Committee, recorded young female factory workers whose spines were often damaged at an early age by factory labour. Undressed from the waist and photographed from behind the images reveal the damage textile manufacturing left on their bodies. Hines photographs are acknowledged to also convey a sensuality suggestive of the male voyeur's gaze. For a woven response to Hine's photography, see American artist Lisa Oppenheim's series *Spine* (2017).

[12] For the impact of light deprivation, see: Jane Kilpatrick, Sondra S. Crosby and Brock Chisholm, "'The Darkness': Deprivation of sunlight as a form of torture" *TORTURE: Forensic Documentation of Psychological Torture* Volume 33, Number 1, 2023, International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims, pp. 79-91; See for the impact of constant lighting: Lauren Jaech "Obstacles to Proving 24-hour Lighting is Cruel and Unusual Under Eighth Amendment Jurisprudence", *Washington Law Review*, Volume 97, Number 4, 2022, p. 1087-1118.

[13] Hsuan L. Hsu's compelling book *The Smell of Risk: Environmental Disparities and Olfactory Aesthetics* describes our sense of smell as: "the human body's most sensitive tool for detecting invisible chemical threats across space is also deeply ambiguous, fraught with uncertainty, socially constructed, culturally neglected, and resistant to representation." p. 6

[14] See artist and academic Susan Schuppli's *Cold Cases* which gathers evidence of extremes of low temperature used as punishment: https://susanschuppli.com/COLD-CASES-1

[15] See Maria Ristani "Sound prisoners: The case of the Saydnaya prison in Syria" *Violence: An international journal* 2020, Vol. 1(2) p. 273–284. DOI: 10.1177/2633002420945711

[16] While the term originates in landscape architecture, researchers have extended the concept to the social. See for example Laura Nichols "Social desire paths: a new theoretical concept to increase the usability of social science research in society" *Theory and society*, 2014-11, Vol.43 (6), p. 647-665 DOI 10.1007/s11186-014-9234-3


TEXO - NORRKÖPING
TEXO A-B


UITGANG