

## **INTRODUCTION (0.2.)**

### **Purple & Black**

On November 23rd 2006 I was visiting Gothenburg in Sweden. Walking down the main street, Kungspartavenyen, in the center of the city, I ran into a demonstration by chance. Around 50 young people were marching along after a car. The marching youth was surrounded by a similar number of police, and the whole demonstration was tailed by 10-15 police vans. The number of police officers was quite astonishing compared to the rather small crowd of demonstrators, and this irregularity immediately caught my attention. Another strange thing was that the demonstrators only carried two banners – a small purple flag and a large black banner, both without any text. Neither the music blasting out from the front car nor the occasional shouts and rants from the youngsters gave any clues about the goal and content of this demonstration. I was really baffled by this lack of communication in a situation normally designed especially for communication. During the 15 minutes or so I followed the demonstration, two persons were arrested after very short outbursts of disturbance, a tall guy in his twenties and a young girl not more than 17, both of them more or less laughing and smiling all the way down to the police vans in the back, apparently waiting for a huge number of arrests. Apart from these two minor incidents, the atmosphere between police and demonstrators were friendly, many seemed to be chatting with the other part, and a female police officer was running around the edges of the march photographing each and every demonstrator with a large telescopic lens.

What at first sight seemed to be a very recognizable event, soon made me wonder: What was actually going on? Why the massive turn-up of police? Why the empty banners? Of course I could have asked somebody – police or demonstrator – what was going on, but by intuition I chose to stay uninformed, keeping my position as a casual passer-by. I took a photo with my mobile phone, followed the march for some time and left, curious and bewildered. Somehow aware that something crucial, something important, was hidden in the situation that I had just stumbled upon.

A demonstration is a democratic statement; somebody wants to be heard and the demonstration is a gesture to communicate whatever it is this group of people want. What does it mean when such a platform is used to communicate silence? This silence must be a reaction to something. The situation was opaque, something was obviously hidden in it and had to be deciphered; it made me curious.

### **Searching for a method**

Back home, as I saw the photo I had taken, my curiosity grew. Here was a phenomena outside the field of art, but it had a range of visual and performative features. Could art be relevant to investigate these aesthetic aspects? Could art be used as a research tool?

How to reflect upon such a situation? Another kind of researcher would maybe start her inquiries by figuring out who the demonstrators were, conduct some interviews, gather information. By applying various theoretical positions, she would distill the gathered information into a hypothesis. The hypothesis would have to be tested against the information gathered, and an analysis would emerge.

Art-research must be conducted differently. The thinking constituting the argument must be aesthetical. What does this mean? If we define aesthetics as the language

of the senses, then the inherent thinking is a thinking with the senses. The event or topic in question must be considered by aesthetic means, by the senses. So, the art-research must set up a situation, where the topic in question can be questioned by the senses.

In the case of the demonstration in Gothenburg, performative gestures constitute a large part of the features it consists of: There is a group of people acting out something that unfurls in time. There is this group of people acting and there is another group of people watching - it is an audience, or rather there are two audiences; the police force and the casual passers-by on the pavement. Then, as the signature aesthetics there is the black banner and the purple flag. These are not only scenography or costumes. In the choreography of the traditional demonstration, it is the banner that speaks out on behalf of the people in the demonstration. The banner is the site of the formulated demand of a demonstration; the headline of the demonstration. When the banner is silent, the whole demonstration is not only silent, but outspokenly silent. The silence is not acted out though – the demonstrators are talking and walking. The silence is rather the chosen headline, designating the potential action with a declamatory meaning. 'In the name of...': We walk in the name of silence. We demonstrate in the name of silence.

To question these performative gestures by art-research, it seemed appropriate to create a performative situation, where various aspects of the demonstration could be considered – where a 'thinking with the senses' could take place. In such a situation, certain features of the demonstration would be re-enacted or rather transformed into a temporal sequence of actions. The participants – the audience and the performers – would then be able to consider these actions, this sequence, not with the intellect, but with the senses.

The project would then become an inquiry on two quite separate levels:

- 1: On the one hand it would be an inquiry into the silent demonstration and the kind of activism it entailed.
- 2: On the other hand - in its set-up and in its form - it would be an inquiry into art-research. The project would perform art-research, and in this performing it would act out the problems and the qualities of art-research. It would be a probing of art-research, a case study in itself.

The use of performance would be threefold:

- A: The silent demonstration would be interpreted as performance,
- B: My 'thinking about it with the senses' would take place as performance,
- C: As a kind of meta-reflection, I would be performing art-research by using an artistic medium as the medium of my reflections.

The aesthetic thinking takes place as performance. What does this mean? How can we talk about, write about and discuss this? If the main thinking is 'thinking with the senses', wouldn't this create a rupture, a split between these sensorial experiences and the language we would use in discussing these experiences? Or would it be

possible to create a performative situation where the topics in question could be considered with the senses and the intellect simultaneously?

When I first saw the demonstration in Gothenburg, I immediately and by intuition rejected the idea of asking anyone around what was going on. Instead I took a photo of it. The demonstration with the empty banners was such a strong image in itself, I didn't need any explanation. The image spoke for itself. It was only afterwards, when I had decided to make this image the topic of my research project, that the need for an explanation arose. What kind of demonstration was it? Who were these people demonstrating and why such a massive presence of police forces? This information would provide me with some kind of depth to the inquiries I was about to undertake, but it wouldn't explain the image. An image has a meaning of its own; it can't be explained. Any analysis or attempt at explanation is only an approximation, an estimate. This is the special character of the relation between words and image. They produce different kinds of meaning, and there is never a total identity between them. Even with all the information at hand, I wouldn't be able to give a total explanation of the silent demonstration in Gothenburg. My instinctual decision to take a photo of the demonstration and not to ask for explanation was very precise in this sense; only another image would be able to convey the meaning of the original image.

My hope was that by creating a situation in which to consider the demonstration as a sequence of performative actions, I would be able to convey another kind of interpretation of the event in question. By performing various aspects of the demonstration, re-enacting certain features, I would be able to consider these elements in a double manner; with the senses and with the intellect. The performance would then constitute a double meaning – a direct sensorial understanding and an analytical interpretation. These two levels of understanding would be simultaneous, but not necessarily identical. Rather they would per definition be different.

This is my bid at art-research. The knowledge produced in the research is constituted as image. In my case here as performative images, but in general any kind of image-media could be used for art-research. This makes sense only with certain topics, within certain fields of interest. Given the right topics, though, art-research might be able to produce an imagery which creates other insights into the field in question than other kinds of scientific or academic research. Aesthetic analysis is not reserved for artistic research – it is done in many of the humanities as well, but artistic analysis is done as praxis. The reflection upon and the contemplation of the topics in question are grounded in praxis, in which the senses play an active part.

An image is open for interpretation. It has a meaning we are unable to explain fully. We can only give an approximate description of it. Approximation is a basic feature of the relationship between image and text.

The analyses of the performances constituting this project are only approximate attempts at encircling the meaning of those performances; the 'real' meaning is expressed in the performances as sensorial experience. It is meaning constituted as image and hence open for interpretation, unavailable for a complete analysis. This approximation is the basic condition of art-research. It is in this rift between the discursive and the non-discursive, between the analytical and the experiences of the senses that art-research must inquire, it is here such research is needed.

This problem of approximation is also conditioning various fields of humanistic research, especially in fields such as art history, literature, music theory. Here too, aesthetic topics are dealt with that can only be partially described in language. Artistic research is different, in that it deals with the problem of approximation from the other side; aesthetic thinking takes place as praxis – as art. The artistic reflection is thereby in another relationship to its subject, and the problem of approximation is positioned differently compared to humanistic research.

The rift between the analytical approach and the experiences of the senses is explored in the first performance, 'A Short Course in Realism from the Perspective of the Police' (1.1.), where a strict division between these two layers of meaning are set up. It is a general theme in all the performances, explored in various ways and in different blends according to the specific agenda of each performance.

### **Mistake**

Starting my research for real six months after I spotted the silent demonstration, I went back to Gothenburg to find out what this demonstration really was. Who were these demonstrators and what kind of activism were they engaged in? After a long day of digging into newspaper reports and a short meeting with a representative of the Swedish police, I realized that the demonstration in question was NOT a real demonstration, but a police exercise.<sup>1</sup> From a gymnasium the police had employed a large group of young people who acted as demonstrators, while the Swedish police was training new methods of dealing with violent youth.

Reality had made a practical joke on me; the police were already re-performing violent demonstrations and the result was already intriguing the viewers, in this case me, as if the whole operation had been a work of art. Of course I felt stupid and silly. How could I let myself be guided by such a superficial gaze? But as I got a little distanced from my disappointment, I saw that this misreading actually added two new figures to the event I had imagined: The police forces as active agents and the viewer/audience, the individual person on the street, as well as the media.

Out of this initial misunderstanding my project has developed; digging deeper into the mistake I realized that a whole series of themes for my investigations lay hidden here: The strategic use of performed imagery, the underlying attempts at staging reality as well as my own misguided fascination with the picturesque surface of the event.

Now, the demonstration was fake, but it did provide a matrix for further investigations. If we – just as a sketch operation – assume it was real: What we have then is no longer a traditional demonstration, it is rather a complex mesh of performative images, active and passive agents and multiple audiences. The event evolves as scripted from various positions, each claiming the final interpretation of the images constituting the event. This scripting is intricate and even improvised, but the most radical feature is that the political message – the content or meaning – is constituted and performed as image. Here it is the image of the silent demonstration, the empty message, but if this is the mode of contemporary demonstrations, then the images produced in such situations will vary according to the context or the situation it is embedded in or evolving from.

But the demonstration was fake. Did these ideas fit real events too? Did real political activism communicate in performative images as well? And what consequences would it have for the political content of a given demonstration, if the communication was to be understood as performance? Would the problem of approximation described above adhere to such events too?

### **Topics of investigation**

To probe this I have chosen a series of ongoing struggles and confrontations, where I would be able to follow events directly as they evolved. The two main sequences of events are:

The riots following the demolition of the so called Youth House in Copenhagen, March 1st 2007 and the year-long series of 'Thursday-demos' evolving into what became The Youth House Movement.<sup>ii</sup>

The large-scale demonstrations and activist events surrounding the Climate Summit COP15, also in Copenhagen, December 2009. Here it is especially two events, on December 12<sup>th</sup> and December 18<sup>th</sup> I have chosen to investigate.

An important factor in the choice of these main sequences was of course the assumption that these events would share the conditions of the silent demonstration in Gothenburg – that they to a certain degree would be constituted by aesthetic features. This assumption was based on my brief participation in a couple of demonstrations preceding the demolition of the Youth House on March 1<sup>st</sup> 2007.<sup>iii</sup>

These demonstrations transgressed the format of the traditional demonstration; instead of communicating a specific demand in the framework of democratic exchange, a rupture in the institutionalised exchange of political statements and demands occurred. The rupture was created as a kind of spectacle - often violent, complex and loaded with meaning, hard to grasp. What triggered me was that it seemed to be the rupture itself that produced meaning, and not the often vague and confusing demands that were communicated at the surface of these events. The spectacle of these demonstrations was performative; it unfolded in time and used the cityspace and its inherent power-structures as a stage. In short temporal interstices, this space was re-claimed and re-modelled, and it seemed to me as if it was in performing these other versions of public space that meaning was produced. These ruptures were not to be understood as traditional political demands for another societal order; the ruptures were in themselves another order. The new political order was constituted in the ruptures, where it was performed as spectacle.

Tantamount to this assumption was the possibility of following these events as they evolved. To be able to recognize the performativity of a given event, I thought it important to watch this event evolve as it happened. Being able to follow events directly also gave me an opportunity to select my own path through the immense web of narratives, recollections and interpretations that create the representation of such an event. Even in the very moment of a conflict, it is obvious that the various participants have very different and opposing interpretations of what is happening. The interpretations are immediate, and an inherent factor in how a sequence of actions evolves. To recognize and understand these processes it has been crucial to be present as they happened.

After long considerations I decided NOT to participate as an activist or demonstrator, although my political sympathies would have made such an involvement natural. I participated in certain demonstrations, but always trying to maintain an outside position, i.e. by following the photojournalists. This chosen distance is crucial; in order to establish a research practice it is important to define a set of distances and differences. It is by these distances and differences the positions of the various elements and figures in the investigations are defined. It is by distance the research method is structured. If we are to take the idea of artistic research seriously, it has to involve a formulated distance between the researcher and the topic of investigation.<sup>iv</sup>

Each of the two main events are multifaceted, highly complex sequences of positioning and struggles evolving over long stretches of time.

### **5 events and 8 chosen moments**

After the demolition of the Youth House in March 2007 and a series of desperate, chaotic riots where large parts of Copenhagen are turned into veritable war zones, The Youth House Movement evolves into an imaginative, large-scale movement that rules the streets of Copenhagen in a consistent series of weekly demonstrations and actions in the year following after the eviction. After long and meandering negotiations, a new Youth House was finally granted the movement in June 2008. Out of this plethora of demonstrations and actions I have chosen 3 key moments which exemplifies different stages of the movement.

These 3 moments are explored in the 3 scripts/performances:

- 3.1: 'Revolution By Night'
- 3.2: 'G13greenredturquoiseyellow'
- 3.3: 'On Water'

COP15, the UN climate summit that hit Copenhagen in December 2009, was a multilayered mega event, gathering all the world leaders from Obama, the Chinese president, Hu Yao Bang, to Hugo Chavez and Evo Morales. Under the pressure of the expanding climate crisis and the turbulent financial crisis, this event was a complex and gigantic spectacle attracting the global media to Copenhagen, exposing all the post-modern, meta-medial and post-political aspects one can think of. The activism surrounding the climate summit, seen alone, was extremely complex too. Here - in the logic of such of events - it is the staging and the positioning of the various opponents in the conflicts that are the focus of the moments I have chosen to investigate.

The demonstrations surrounding COP15 are explored in the two scripts/performances:

- 4.1: 'Clone Wars'
- 4.2: 'Climate/Kettle'

In connection with another project - an exhibition commemorating the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the 1989 student uprising on Tiananmen Square in Beijing, China - I stumbled upon the curious fact that the student activists staged their critique of the Communist Party as celebrations of certain crucial dates in the history of the exact same Communist Party. Doing this they re-used - reclaimed - the aesthetic features of communism; the visual design of the demonstrations, the slogans and the theme

songs. This intricate and sophisticated appropriation – or cloning as I term it - of the visual and symbolic features of the opponent seemed to be an example of a kind of post-modern play with images, preceding the aesthetics constituting contemporary activism.

Choosing ‘cloning’ as the term to connect this historical event to certain contemporary events, I decided to use the Tiananmen Square Uprising as an outside point of reference; this is explored in the script/performance ‘Ghost Choir Karaoke’ (2.1.). Cloning can be understood as a reclaiming of imagery. By reclaiming communist imagery, the students reclaim the ideal values of communism; equality, justice and democracy.

Cloning occurs again as the main theme of ‘Clone Wars’ (4.1.), but here it develops in the opposite direction; it is the authorities that clone the aesthetic language of activism to promote their views on Climate Change. Here the cloning inflates the difference between critical opposition and governmental power, resulting in a confusing public debate, where positions are unclear and undecipherable. In the performance, ‘Clone Wars’, a metaphorical attempt at reclaiming this cloned imagery is undertaken as a long meandering journey through a vast space.

As the Arabic Spring exploded in the winter of 2010/11, I witnessed a global event unfolding, sharing features with the local events I was in the midst of examining. Here, in the sequence of events following the self-immolation of the young Tunisian fruit vendor, Mohamed Bouazizi, on December 17th 2010, a political movement based on performative imagery and aesthetic gestures evolved rapidly. What in my chosen examples had been either temporary manifestations of ‘another world’ (i.e. the occupation of Refshalevej in the The Youth House Movement) or frustrated attempts at establishing a counter-reality against a superior state force (i.e. ‘Climate Justice Action’ against COP15), all of sudden became the predominant language of a wave of uprisings and protests that resonated with increasing force throughout the world in 2011. After Tunisia followed Egypt, several other Middle East countries, and then it spread to the West (‘los indignados’ in Spain and Occupy Wall Street in the US). To acknowledge these new developments and in pure excitement at the seemingly revolutionary momentum, I decided to include the Egyptian uprising – from the killing of a young computer nerd, Khaled Said in the summer of 2010 to the occupation of Tahrir Square in February 2011 – as another outside point of reference to my main case studies.

Mirroring the script/performance on the Tiananmen Square Uprising this script/performance on the Egyptian uprisings, ‘Silent Stand’ (5.1.), is researched strictly from a distance, based mostly on information found on the internet and on the news channels. Since contemporary social media – Facebook, Twitter and an array of blogs – played a crucial role in the unfurling Middle-Eastern uprisings, it seemed an appropriate (although controversial) manner of gathering information.<sup>v</sup>

### **Sense Event**

The main parts – the 5 scripts/performances dealing with The Youth House Movement and the activist-events surrounding COP15 – are researched in an intricate mesh of close distances. Investigating a range of what I call ‘direct source’-material – webpages, manifestos, demo-calls, posters, video and photo documentation (i.e. on YouTube.com and flickr.com), newspaper and online reports, timelines and minute-by-minute participant diaries - I try to get an insight into these

events, not as a participant, but as an outside observer. In addition, I participate in certain demonstrations, but, as stated above, always maintaining an outsider position.

How to process this material? How to create a situation where aesthetic reflection is possible? How to think about these demonstrations with the senses? How to process this material with the senses?

In a note to his foreword to *Antigone*, 'Masterful Treatment of a Model' Bertolt Brecht has included an excerpt from a correspondence between Schiller and Goethe:

"A dramatic plot will move before my eyes; an epic seems to stand still while I move round it. In my view this is a significant distinction. If a circumstance moves before my eyes, then I am bound strictly to what is present to the senses; my imagination loses all freedom; I feel a continual restlessness develop and persist in me; I have to stick to the subject; any reflection or looking back is forbidden me, for I am drawn by an outside force. But if I move round a circumstance which cannot get away from me, then my pace can be irregular; I can linger or hurry according to my own subjective needs, can take a step backwards or leap ahead, and so forth."<sup>vi</sup>

Looking at my photo of the fake demonstration in Gothenburg, I am looking back in time. I am separated from the event by a distance in time. It is the photo that establishes this distance. The photo also fixes various elements in a composition. In the photo this composition is stable. It is an image of what happened back then, and this image is established already in the instant when I took the photo. If I had shot a video of the demonstration back then, as I stood on the pavement watching it walk by, the representation would have been similar; although the various elements in such a video would have been fixed, not in fixed composition, but in a fixed sequence of time, looking at such a video would have been looking back in time, too. This is the representational conditions of documentary material. It's an image, or a sequence of images, that will take us back to another event, separated from us by time. In its raw form documentary photo and video footage are images constituted back then in the moment when things were happening, back then in that original event. The images are constituted back then in the instant when the shutter of the camera was released or the video camera was in rec-mode.

What I found so intriguing about the fake demonstration in Gothenburg was that the image I saw in it, was created as I looked at it. It was as if the image was evolving, emerging out of the situation. As if the photographic instant where an image is constituted was dragged out, and I could observe it happening. In this dragged-out moment I was able to contemplate the various elements of the situation in a manner similar to Schiller's 'moving around a circumstance'. I was able to 'think with my senses'. The constituting instant of the image was dragged out and became an open process where I could move around and reflect upon it while it was happening. Instead of being documented as in documentary photo or video, instead of being fixed instantly, the image was here being performed, as it was evolving, as it emerged. To use a Deleuzian term, the image was becoming. In this process of becoming image I was even able to contemplate its various elements with my senses. The aesthetic experience was unresolved, and thus open for reflection, aesthetic reflection.



In his introduction to "Robespierre or "the Divine Violence of Terror", Slavoj Žižek quotes Gilles Deleuze:

"They say revolutions turn out badly. But they're constantly confusing two different things, the way revolutions turn out historically and people's revolutionary becoming."<sup>vii</sup>

Žižek calls this 'revolutionary becoming' a 'sense-event'. 'Sense-event' is also a concept taken from Deleuze. It is one of the central points in his book 'Logique du sens'.<sup>viii</sup> To put it very briefly, the revolutionary becoming happens inside a sense-event. For Deleuze sense-event is a very broad, complex concept, but already in the translation of 'sens' to 'sense' - from French to English - a simplification starts. It is Žižek who has compressed this complex argument into one term, the sense-event.

I immediately found the very word 'sense-event' a perfect description of that open process of aesthetic reflection I had stumbled upon in the fake demonstration in Gothenburg. An event of the senses. Deleuze, and with him Žižek, connects it to a 'revolutionary becoming' taking place inside moments of revolt. I experienced it happening there in front of me, as the fake demonstration in Gothenburg evolved into an image, that somehow separated itself from the circumstances it was emerging from. Sense-event seemed a perfect way of describing that moment of aesthetic becoming that I paradoxically experienced in the fake demonstration in Gothenburg.

Furthermore, I had a notion that this term could be developed into the central concept in my version of artistic research. If the 'becoming image' happened in a sense-event, then the aesthetic reflection and thinking with the senses I saw as the central act of artistic research could happen in a sense-event as well. The sense-event could be the situation in which Schiller and Goethe's 'moving around a circumstance'<sup>ix</sup> was made possible. The sense-event could be the situation in which an aesthetic reflection emerged and became image.

Instead of creating stable, fixed documentary imagery from the original event in question, leaving the research to be a question of interpretation, a research based in a new sense-event, would create a situation where the various pieces of information gathered from the original event could be considered in a process of thinking with the senses. This process of aesthetic reflection would in itself be a 'becoming image'.

The process of becoming is a process where the various features from the original event are coming together, an inquiry and an evaluation are taking place, various elements are sensed. In this process an image emerges, the various parts begin to relate to each other, they interact and connect. The image is shaped. As we shall see, the process of 'becoming image' is in many ways more exciting than the image itself. It is in the process, in the creation of the image, that 'thinking with the senses' is peaking. This is where it takes form. This is where a new image is created on the information from the original event.

'Moving around the circumstances' by performing it - opening up the material to the senses - creates a new sense-event, reflecting the original event, but evolving a new imagery of it.

A longer explanation of my version of the sense-event can be found in the commentary 'Sense-Event' (4.1.4.1.).

As a consequence of this, I decided not to use any kind of documentary photo and video-footage of the events I had chosen to investigate. Instead I wanted to create new sense-events where my 'direct source material' would be performed. 'Aesthetics of Resistance' - this dissertation - consists of 8 such sense-events. These 8 performances are the core research experiments in the project. These new sense-events are then documented by photo and video. However, this is another level of documentation, representing what cannot, essentially be represented.

The concept of the sense-event is introduced and explored in the performance 'A Short Course in Realism from the Perspective of the Police' (1.1.), where it is set up in stark contrast to another tool, invented to insert a kind of meta-voice into the performances, the figure of the artist/researcher. 'A Short Course in Realism from the Perspective of the Police' is a very direct probing of the concept of the sense-event. An attempt at creating a situation where the audience is overwhelmed by a direct attack on their senses. The situation is, so to speak, flooded by sensorial experience, and the text the performance is based on is demolished in aesthetic destruction.

In the other performances, the sense-event is constituted in various ways; sometimes discreetly as in 'G13greenredturquoiseyellow', sometimes intimately and participatory as in 'Silent Stand' and sometimes aggressively and confrontational as in the first part of 'Climate/Kettle'.

### **Formats**

Around the sense-events an array of text, documentation, discussion and discourse are layered. These various attempts at description of the aesthetic experience inherent in the sense-event are by definition approximations. The crucial thinking in this project is the aesthetic reflection in the sense-events, but we are bound to discuss it from a certain distance, through other, indirect media, in the various formats layered around the sense-event itself.

The structure of these layers is:

Script

-----

Performance/Sense-Event

-----

Discussion (following directly after the performance)

Analysis

Commentary

Appendix: Video documentation of the performance, interviews, various crucial source-material etc.

-----

Introduction / Exhibition

Conclusion

The script is where the conditions for the performance is laid out, it is where the various source-material is processed into performative elements, edited and arranged as 'circumstances to be considered by moving around it'.

The sense-event is the central laboratory experiment in this set-up. It is where the aesthetic reflection is taking place. The performances constituting the sense-events are elaborately fitted to the given circumstances, the space and the audience. Various performers, musicians and others are employed to perform various parts. Each sense-event involves a different set-up of participants. Sometimes the audience is involved. Sometimes it takes the shape of a performance-lecture. Sometimes it is dominated by sound or visual features, sometimes it is almost entirely textbased. The sense-event is experimental in that it is based each time on a certain set of ideas or assumptions. These are then acted out, performed. Sometimes this is successful, sometimes it's a failure. It is highly interesting that a failed experiment can be just as useful for the overall investigation as a successful experiment. In this, art-research differs from other art forms.

How to evaluate such an experiment? How to register the reactions of the audiences involved in the sense-events? The discussions following directly after each performance/sense-event was an attempt at creating a platform for such an evaluation. Sometimes a discussion between the performers and the audience, sometimes a discussion with various guests, invited to initiate discussions with the audience. By various means we have tried to create select audiences that would have some kind of relationship to the original events dealt with in the specific performances. The discussions took on a life of their own - sometimes very fruitful, sometimes scattered, inhibited by circumstances - but as a whole they gave me a key evaluation of the degree to which the performances managed to reflect the original 'real' events and the themes inherent in them.<sup>x</sup>

At another level these discussions – or at least the 3 of them that were successful - can be seen as a micro example of how artistic research could be envisioned to serve a different purpose and a different audience than art in general is capable of. In these discussions, the artistic research creates a contemplative space where a reflection on the aesthetic aspects, and the implications of these for the activism in question, is undertaken. It is the underlying proposal of this project as a whole that artistic research in general might serve such purposes.

If the sense-event is the laboratory experiment in this structure, then an analysis of the experiment has to be undertaken as well. The analysis presented after each of the 8 performances/sense-events is another layer of evaluation. Here other aspects of the experiences are scrutinized:

My own experiences from within the performances – how did the actual performance differ from the intentions laid out in the script? How did specific themes the performance was intended to be a realisation of, occur? Did these themes transform into a sense-event, or did they only occur as illustrations?

The psychosocial behaviour of the audiences<sup>xi</sup> - the subtle, but easily detectable movements, utterances and social behaviour of the audience, during and after the performance. What did this behaviour say about the sense-event? What kind of evaluation was to be extracted from this?

The given circumstances influencing the outcome in positive or negative ways; the problems in the set-up delivered by the script or by coincidental things, like a participant cancelling or various technical problems.

The unexpected, surplus reflection evolving in the interaction between the participants, the audience and the staging. Often there were moments of unexpected occurrences that gave certain new insights or relevant new angles on a given topic.

In other kinds of research, the analysis of an experiment might be definitive, but it is crucial to note that since the sense-event is by definition an experience open for various interpretations, the analysis of the sense-event can never be definitive. It is only one of many possible interpretations, and it was obvious in the discussions following the performances/sense-events that in every audience very different interpretations immediately occurred. Still, the analyses here work as my attempts at an approximate interpretation of the 8 performances/sense-events.

The source-material derived from the original event is often edited quite hard to make it fit the performance format defined in the script. Maybe a certain aspect of the event in question is singled out to be re-enacted in the sense-event, because it made sense to test exactly this element as a performance. Maybe other elements were just as important, but didn't fit the situation in which the performance took place. Because of this, a range of socio-political facts, theoretical references and artistic considerations are omitted. These are then reflected in the commentary texts. Although organized as commentary to the specific scripts/performances, the content of these texts criss-cross the themes and questions inherent in all the performances. The structure of the commentary is deviating and scattered, enabling a lingering reading.

The video documentation of the performances/sense-events is the prime representation of the sense-event. As documentation of performance often is, it isn't able to capture the full presence of the moment when the sense-event happened. There is a crucial difference between being present in the situation of the sense-event and to watch its representation as video, but it provides an overview of what happened and works as another tool for evaluating the experience. The 8 videos documenting the 8 performances/sense-events are edited as straightforwardly and simply as possible. They are real-time video renderings of what happened during the performances, with as few omissions as possible.

In the Appendix we also find various interviews with other artists dealing with similar themes as well as various sources extracted from the internet.

This Introduction is a general introduction to the project as a whole. As a parallel to this textual introduction, the exhibition that, with my dissertation, forms my overall doctoral submission, will work as an aesthetic introduction, giving the viewer an overview of the project as a whole. Here, a completely different editing of the video-footage and the sound-recordings will be produced. The exhibition will be an attempt at creating a labyrinthine installation, where the aesthetic elements of the documentation are singled out and re-staged in a new sense-event. A sense-event to be explored by the viewers in a similar mode as would Schiller and Goethe:

“...if I move round a circumstance which cannot get away from me, then my pace can be irregular; I can linger or hurry according to my own subjective needs, can take a step backwards or leap ahead, and so forth.”<sup>xii</sup>

If we define the sense-event as the research experiment in this structure, then another aspect of the project as a whole appears. In a sense, the project as a whole is a paraphrase of a certain simplified understanding of scientific research. Both the format of the structure as a whole, but also the format of some of the layers are paraphrases of existing formats of inquiry. The sense-event is paraphrasing a scientific experiment, the analysis is paraphrasing scientific analysis and so on. Thus the project as a whole performs an idea of artistic research. This paraphrase is not without self-irony – to a certain degree the whole project is mimicking research, imitating its own purpose. This humorous distance is not to be understood as a rejection or ridiculing of artistic research as such. It is rather an attempt at managing the above-mentioned approximations, the inherent gap between the aesthetic experience in the sense-event and the various incomplete possibilities of describing this experience. The humour is used to show how the various attempts at a description is done with a awareness of the impossibility of such a task.

### **The artist/researcher**

An important part of this imitation is 'the artist/researcher'; a figure invented to represent myself in the role of artistic researcher. This figure is properly introduced in the first performance 'A short course in realism from the perspective of the police'. The artist/researcher is a kind of meta-guide to the performances. It is on one hand a satirical, all too obvious, solution to the problem of art versus research. How to implement a layer of theoretical reflection into the sense-event that in its pure sensual form excludes rational explanation and leaves the interpretation up to the viewers? At the same time, the artist/researcher is a narrative tool that not only mocks the idea of artistic research, but also guides the audience through the thoughts and reflexions inherent in the performances. In this sense, it's an ambiguous figure or, as it asks in the first performance: "Is my figure here, inside – a part – of the artwork? Or is it outside, as an all too present academic nuisance?" The artist/researcher here paraphrases the general suspicion of art-research, that it is an academization of art. Even though the artist/researcher is a representation of myself as researcher, the figure is transformative and takes on slightly different roles in each performance. It is also performed by other persons, even of the other sex, than myself. In some of the performances by a person on stage, in others as a voice-over. All these measures are intended to create some of the above-mentioned distances. Still, the artist/researcher as a figure is an attempt at bridging the inherent gap in artistic research between aesthetic experience and rational argument. As the script, the analysis and the commentary, the artist/researcher is bound to an approximate discussion of what is going on in the sense-event, but situated within the performance/sense-event the figure makes the gap an inherent part of the performance. A constant reminder of the rupture between senses and intellect that we have to deal with, not only in artistic research, in the humanities in general, in anthropology especially, but also in the aesthetically driven political activism that is the topic of this project as a whole.

### **Back in Black**

A month after my experience in Gothenburg on December 27<sup>th</sup> 2006, I found myself inside the Youth House at Jagtvej 69 in Copenhagen, at the 7<sup>th</sup> floor, taking part in an aesthetic action to defend the house against demolition. The action itself was rather ridiculous, but being inside that house in such an agitated moment made a huge impression on me. The whole house was painted black inside and all the walls were covered with graffiti – there was a strange silence there; a silence filled with premonition of disasters to happen. It was as if the house itself took on an emotional

state of rage and anger and all of us inside became one with this feeling. It was if the whole situation took on a performative, emotional character; not just the small action I was doing with my two colleagues, but the situation as a whole: The doomed architecture, the demonstration, the participants in the demonstration, the claustrophobic political intrigue involving the users of the Youth House. All this created what I would term a sense-event.<sup>xiii</sup>

As quoted above, Gilles Deleuze – and with him Slavoj Žižek - talks about the ‘revolutionary becoming’ or ‘becoming the people’ that happens in the sense-event.<sup>xiv</sup> It was exactly such a becoming I suddenly found myself in the midst of that evening inside the Youth House. All of a sudden it was as if I could identify completely with the movement - something I had big trouble with earlier on that same afternoon, as I joined the demonstration that led us to the Youth House. It was as if my personal identity merged with that of the movement, I became part of a larger body of demonstrators and activists. For a short moment my own identity evaporated and I became one with what can be termed the collective body of the action. It might be wrong to use the words ‘revolutionary’ or ‘the people’ in this connection, but there was certainly a collective becoming at play. As my further investigations would reveal, this ‘collective body’ and the way in which the activists immersed themselves into collective identity are fundamental aspects of the political cosmology these activists are struggling for. Another striking feature of my own short-termed immersion into the collectivity of the Youth House was that it happened as a predominantly emotional experience; it was the experience of the dark premonitory atmosphere inside the pitch black interior architecture of the Youth House, and the participation in a (admittedly small and completely inferior) performative activity to protect the house that triggered the feeling of being part of the collective body. It is also significant that the identification was an emotional response to the intense sensorial experiences.

### **How to use theory?**

In the kind of Direct Action I have chosen as the main topic in my doctoral submission the edges of society are tested and visions of ‘another world’ - an alternative to the present circumstances - are not only presented as visions or proposals, but are acted out, performed as temporal realities.

The edge of society and the borders that guide this edge, namely the law, is the topic of the performance ‘On Water’ (3.3.). By comparing two very similar events – an artwork and a political action – situated on opposite sides of the edge constituted by law, the premises for autonomy, real or imagined, is probed.

In the ‘N30 Black Bloc Communiqué’ by ACME Collective from Dec 4 '99 a section of the Black Bloc, taking part in the protests against the WTO Summit in Seattle 1999, describes their attacks on a series of shops, companies and other capitalist targets:

“When we smash a window, we aim to destroy the thin veneer of legitimacy that surrounds private property rights. At the same time, we exercise that set of violent and destructive social relationships which has been imbued in almost everything around us. By "destroying" private property, we convert its limited exchange value into an expanded use value. A storefront window becomes a vent to let some fresh air into the oppressive atmosphere of a retail outlet..”

The attacks by the Black Bloc has a double meaning. They are on the one hand real; real attacks on real capitalist businesses. On the another level they are a 'shattering of assumptions'; an exorcising of 'that set of violent and destructive social relationships which has been imbued in almost everything around us'. This shattering and exorcising of the capitalist spell is both real and symbolic, but the two levels are dependent on each other. The real action can only be justified because it has a symbolic meaning, and the symbolic meaning only has an effect when it is actualized by being performed in the real. The shattering and exorcising of meaning and the poetic reclaiming of functions are about recreating the world around us, reclaiming it. Paradoxically, the destruction is meant to create another world, another society.

The reclaiming of reality and its inherent features are some of the recurring features of the riots and struggles I have chosen to follow. As I watched the two main sequences of chosen events evolve, a string of theoretical ideas were actualized. Some of these ideas I borrowed from other thinkers, some I developed myself. Because a large part of the riots and actions are constituted by aesthetic features – the form IS the message - the theoretical themes work as lenses to view these events through. They are tools in the textual layers of the structure comprising this thesis, used to describe the sense-events, both the original events and the sense-event I have constructed at the core of this project. Here, it is not the images that illustrate the theory, rather the contrary; it is the theory that is used to interpret the images.

### **Performative Devises**

In addition to this analytical use, some of the core conceptual tools are used as performative devises too. They are the performative tools that link the sense-event to the original event, the 'machinas' that are probed in the sense-events.

Apart from the sense-event and the artist-researcher which are used as the basic research tools in all the performances, the main conceptual tools are:

- |                                     |   |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| Resonance:                          | Used as a destructive device in 'A Short Course in Realism from the Perspective of the Police' (1.1.) and to create transcendence and harmony in 'Clone Wars' (4.1.)  |
| Cloning:                            | Used in 'Ghost Choir Karaoke' (2.1.) and 'Clone Wars' (4.1.) to analyse the original events, but also to create metaphorical images/figures in the performances.  |
| Apotheosis of Revolt / Eros Effect: | Used in 'Revolution By Night' (3.1.) and in 'Silent Stand' (5.1.) to detect the transformation of individual identity into a collective body.   |
| Collective Body:                    | Used as a performative tool and probed as such in 'G13greenredturquoiseyellow' (3.2.) and in 'Climate/Kettle' (4.2.) as one of the main political arguments constituted by form in the majority of the activist events chosen for this inquiry. |

Staging the Opponent:	Used in the analytical layer of 'G13greenredturquoiseyellow' (3.2.) and probed as sense-event in 'Climate/Kettle' (4.2.).
Physical presence / embodiment:	Also a general performative tool, used in various ways to handle text in most performances. Tested as a string of sense-events in 'Silent Stand' (5.1.), where it is the ability of the physical presence of a collective body to perform imagery that is probed.
Kettle:	Used as a performative tool in 'Climate/Kettle' (4.2.), where it is used to test the possibility of a 'collective body'.
Active Time/Dead Time:	Used in 'Revolution By Night' (3.1.) as the central analytical device, and again in 'Climate/Kettle' (4.2.) where an attempt at performing Active Time is undertaken.

In the glossary - the second part of this introduction – I describe these and other theoretical terms / performative tools, and the way they are used in the various scripts/performances.

### **Amplitude<sup>xv</sup>**

In the 5 events I have chosen here – from the inferior police exercise in Gothenburg to the global-scale significance of Tahrir Square – it is the performative images, open for interpretation and participation, that are the main arguments in the political struggles they express. The contents and the goals are not only argued for with aesthetic means, they are defined in the aesthetic. When the traditional political rhetoric of the activists in the Danish examples I have chosen seems vague and out of sync with the society they are opposing, it is because this rhetoric is only a textual signifier in a much larger picture. The real visions lie in the imaginative aesthetics of these movements; it is as images and gestures their acts are to be understood.

Wael Ghonim, one of the two administrators of the “We are all Khaled Said”-facebook-page commemorating Khaled Said, whom I mentioned above, has stated that he and most of the other young Egyptians aiming for revolution, were not interested in politics at all. They were driven by the need to react against humiliation by society.<sup>xvi</sup> They transformed the act of beating and killing Khaled Said into an image of fundamental inhumanity, and it was in the creation and distribution of this image the movement came to life. After the initial phase of the uprising, after Mubarak has fallen, complex political thinking is needed again, but that is another story. In the revolutionary becoming, in the expansive imaginative phase of the uprising I am focussing on here, the thinking and acting in images are central.

### **The Eros Effect**

The events in Egypt are clear examples of this ‘image-politics’ - with the Silent Stand as an emotionally charged exemplification – but it runs through all of my examples. Creating an image of another world and performing this image, thereby becoming other oneself. This process is regenerative in the sense that these images are created as variations of other images –. The cloning, copying, paraphrasing and



karaoke used all through this project are various degrees of these regenerative processes. Regenerative also hints at the more psychological aspects of these processes. The 'revolutionary becoming' is an 'instinctual need for freedom' as the American sociologist, Georgy Katsiaficas, calls it. He has invented the term 'the Eros Effect' to describe such a development. For Katsiaficas the Eros Effect transforms the normal individual self-interest into what he calls species-interest. Here the instinctual need for freedom becomes a new collective identity.<sup>xvii</sup>

### **An outside to the present circumstances**

In a complex, medialisised world, where all attempts at critique are easily swallowed by an all-encompassing capitalism, it often seems hard or even impossible to imagine any alternative. There is no outside of capitalism as it is often stated. This melancholic state of acceptance and even compliance saturates contemporary culture, and threatens to undermine representative democracy to a degree where – borrowing a term from Ranci re - politics are reduced to mere policing. In such a bleak political landscape, only a few dare postulate an alternative. My first encounters with the activism described in this project was coincidental and scattered; what I immediately sensed, though, was that here were in fact a group of people who struggled for exactly such an alternative to capitalism. In the beginning, their actions seemed opaque and hard to grasp, but my fascination only grew as I started my inquiries.

What these kinds of activism offer is a radical model for participation that transgresses the representational democracy to a degree that often makes it difficult to understand from a traditional political point of view. By using performative aesthetics as the lens to look at the events chosen for this project, I have gained at least a partial insight into how alternatives to capitalism aren't argued for, but are performed and exists as temporal interstices in the regularized terrain of the Security State. In this sense, these alternatives to capitalism only exist for those who engage actively in Direct Activism. Not only does this activism engage diverse people/participants in the sense of making them equal participants – in its radical form Direct Activism offers a transformation of the identities of the participants, a 'becoming other'. A transgression of the individual self into a 'collective body', a new political subject.

These struggles for 'another world' that at first sight might look opaque, are in fact developed as complex aesthetic performances, offering a radical, political imagery, grounded in collective improvisation and an inventive, contextual consciousness. My project has been driven by my fascination with these activists and their devoted determination to produce new consciousness and temporal autonomy, often at great risk and against all odds.

In the following, this fascination is unfolded as script, performance, analysis and commentary. A linear, progressive reading is only one of many options: I hope you will criss-cross through this material, as I myself have criss-crossed through the chosen events constituting the topic of this dissertation.

---

**Notes:**

<sup>i</sup> Emma Berthling: *Kravaller igen – men bara på låtsas*, in Göteborgs-Posten 24.11.2006

<sup>ii</sup> see Commentary 3.1.4.1: '69scenes' for extensive accounts of these events

<sup>iii</sup> These encounters and my position in/out of the demonstrations are described in the script and performance 'Revolution By Night' (AoR 3.1.)

<sup>iv</sup> This 'geometry of distances' that structures my concept of artistic research is further elaborated in the commentary 1.1.4.1: *Verfremdungseffect*

<sup>v</sup> The problem of positioning is a constant theme of negotiation running through all parts of this project. In my work with 'Silent Stand', the script/performance on the Egyptian uprising, it became even more crucial. My decision NOT to go to Cairo has been controversial and up for debate in each of the fora, where I have presented this work. In my own reasoning it still makes sense; I would have been a tourist in someone else's revolution. Of course my experience of the events on Tahrir Square would have been different, if I had been there on site, but for the purpose of my entire project, where 'Silent Stand' works as a point of reference, rather than one of the main topics of research, I think the distance marked by the chosen format of inquiry is appropriate. A further discussion of the 'touristic gaze' employed in this script/performance is undertaken in the Analysis of Silent Stand (AoR 5.1.3.)

<sup>vi</sup> 'Schiller-Goethe correspondence, 26 December 1797' as quoted in 'BRECHT on theatre – The development of an AESTHETIC', edited and translated by John Willett (New York: Hill and Wang 1964) p. 210

<sup>vii</sup> Slavoj Žižek: "Robespierre or "the Divine Violence" of Terror" in *Robespierre: Virtue and Terror* (London: Verso, 2007), pp. xxxiv – xxxv

<sup>viii</sup> Gilles Deleuze: *Logique du sens* (Paris: Les Édition de Minuit 1969)

<sup>ix</sup> 'Schiller-Goethe correspondence, 26 December 1797' as quoted in 'BRECHT on theatre – The development of an AESTHETIC', edited and translated by John Willett (New York: Hill and Wang 1964) p. 210

<sup>x</sup> The adventures and problems that arose in the process of organizing these discussions and the audiences envisioned to take part in them is described in the commentary 'Searching for an Audience' (AoR 3.3.4.1.)

<sup>xi</sup> Psychosocial Behaviour is a term, also discussed further in the comment 'Searching for an Audience' (AoR 3.3.4.1.)

<sup>xii</sup> 'Schiller-Goethe correspondence, 26 December 1797' as quoted in 'BRECHT on theatre – The development of an AESTHETIC', edited and translated by John Willett (New York: Hill and Wang 1964) p. 210

<sup>xiii</sup> This situation is the starting point of the performance 'Revolution By Night' (AoR 3.1.2.) and further interpreted as an occurrence of 'active time' in the script (AoR 3.1.1.)

<sup>xiv</sup> Slavoj Žižek: "Robespierre or "the Divine Violence" of Terror" in *Robespierre: Virtue and Terror* (London: Verso, 2007), pp. xxxiv – xxxv

<sup>xv</sup> In physics amplitude is the maximum extent of a vibration or oscillation, measured from the position of equilibrium, or the maximum difference of an alternating electrical current or potential from the average value.

<sup>xvi</sup> Whael Ghonim interviewed on the CBS talkshow 60minutes:  
<http://www.cbsnews.com/video/watch/?id=7346812n>

<sup>xvii</sup> <http://www.eroseffect.com/articles/eroseffectpaper.PDF> included here as Appendix