

G13 greenredturquoiseyellow (3.2.1.)

A reading-piece for 6 voices:

The swarm: Anna Rydén, Robert Bolin, Agnes Forstenberg, Jenny Jensen

The artist/researcher: voice-over by Yvette Brackman

The guide: Frans Jacobi

An empty black space, a sound system, a video camera on a tripod; 2 banners, 2 flags, a signboard ; 4 rolls of yarn: green, red, turquoise and yellow. An audience.

SCENE 1: GREEN

THE GUIDE:

"14.31 - It's become a little easier to get a general view of the size of the demonstration after it has started to move. A witness on the spot calls it "very, very big", possibly up to 10.000 participants. The different blocks of the demonstration include activists in black wearing ribbons around arms and heads in the colours of the block. There are several hundred demonstrators in each block."¹

The guide positions the tripod with the video camera pointing in the direction of the green member of the swarm. The green person picks up the green banner, walks to a person in the audience and hands her one pole of the banner. The green person walks back and stretches out the banner. She turns to the camera and starts reading aloud her text.

THE SWARM / GREEN PERSON:

"Green bloc rambles in sick ninja style. On G-day, we will be the totally green bloc of the demo, with push-tru-cops-gear and other extravaganza. The fun bloc with a heavy, confrontational, unified visual expression. We distribute the coolest green ninja masks. The mission is to reach and conquer our new house. You can help us by being in total control and one with the bloc - we will push through the armored chains of the cops, blocking them out, exploiting their weaknesses, and we'll be mega crafty. Our strength is our numbers, our cunning and a high level of information. We care for and stand up for each other. So come along in the green bloc; whether you're mega-fresh in the front line, super skilled in pushing ahead; whether you're good to climb the fences or if this is your first squatting; whether you are 12 or 60 years old - you are all needed here."²

THE GUIDE:

"15.45 - Now teargas is hurled onto Borups Allé. Masked police forces are advancing against the demonstrators. Protesters are standing still; clinging to each other. There is police behind the protesters too; they are locked up here."

The voice-over fills the space. The guide picks up the green yarn, ties one end to one pole of the green banner and starts unfolding a long line of yarn. When reaching a member of the audience, he winds it round a hand and continues, slowly creating an intricate 3D web of colored lines, criss-crossing through space.

THE ARTIST/RESEARCHER:

Now, my dear audience, I think we need a bit of explanation. This is a portrait of a so-called swarm. In his essay 'Network Maps, Energy Diagrams: Structure and Agency in the Global System' the writer Brian Holmes identifies 'the swarm' as "a specific form of organization being put to multiple uses", by various social movements in the last decades.³ First observed as the general strategy of the Zapatista Movement in the early 1990s by John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt:

"Swarming occurs when the dispersed nodes of a network of small (and perhaps some large) forces can converge on a target from multiple directions. The overall aim is sustainable pulsing – swarm networks must be able to coalesce rapidly and stealthily on a target, then disperse and re-disperse, immediately ready to recombine for a new pulse."⁴

Brian Holmes argues how this technique of swarming has been used by first the counterglobalization movement, later even by the US Government in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, where a "swarm doctrine" was set to work. The swarm is a strategy of attack, used to combat an enemy of greater power. Apart from its strategic qualities, it has a symbolic function as well; the swarm is a great metaphor for the people, this is how even the poorest equipped 'people's-army' can conquer even the mightiest army by their sheer numbers. We are many, we are smart, so no matter how invincible an enemy you are, we can defeat you.

The G13 action is one of the most monumental of the many, many actions and demonstrations of the so-called Youth House Movement in Copenhagen in 2007/08. G13 marks the turning-point of the severe fight between the movement and the enemy-triad: the city administration, the police and the religious sect, The Fatherhouse. This dark drama of the Youth House versus the Fatherhouse is a long labyrinthine complex of absurd culture politics, far too long to dwell on here – it is addressed in other parts of this PhD-project.⁵ What is interesting right here is how G13 is organized as a swarm structure and how it turns the tables in a conflict that up to that point was frozen in fixed positions.

SCENE 2: RED

THE GUIDE:

15.54 - 300-400 activists from Turquoise Bloc has entered the railway tracks that runs along the G13-grounds. They are pursued eastwards by a group of police officers.

The guide positions the tripod with the video camera pointing in the direction of the red member of the swarm. The red person picks up the red flag and starts waving it. She turns to the camera and starts reading her text aloud.

THE SWARM / RED PERSON:

The strength of our movement is our numbers, our mobility and our creativity! These are the key elements in our bloc! We encourage you to turn up in red, in as many red clothes you have! If you forget the red masking at home, we will help you! Follow the red bloc and show the politicians, police and the rest of Denmark that we mean business, and that we can't be stopped! Be prepared to climb every fence, every barricade. We will push and stress the police so we can create holes in the blockades and break their chains!⁶

THE GUIDE:

16.40 - The Turquoise Bloc, crossing the railway tracks and making their way through the communal gardens behind the G13-grounds, was greeted by 30-50 police officers, who struck the demonstrators hard and without provocation, beating them up.

As the voice-over of the artist/researcher fills the space again, the guide continues the slow construction of the web of lines, now with the red yarn.

THE ARTIST/RESEARCHER:

G13 is a large, political action taken by between five and ten thousand people in Copenhagen. The masterplan for G13 is announced months before; on October 6, 2007 the movement will squat a certain empty house on the north-western outskirts of Copenhagen. If they succeed, this house will function as the new Youth House, a public culture house for different, alternative subcultures that will replace the former, now demolished Youth House. A series of workshops, where participants train their combat skills are set up, and a massive sms-campaign secures a huge turn-up of protesters on G-day, October 6th. The crowds are organized in 4 groups, each identified via a certain color – green, red, turquoise and yellow – and a specific strategy on how to approach and enter into the G13-grounds. The name itself, G13, comes from the

address of the desired house, Grøndalsvænge 13, but is also a marker of where the inspiration comes from for the strategy of announcing everything, time, methods and goals, in due time before the action itself. The G8-protest movement surrounding the G8-summit in Rostock earlier the same year deployed a similar strategy.

As the day progresses and G13 is met by a very large police force, a series of dramatic street-battles evolve. During the day, around 450 people are arrested, at the time a national record for arrests in a single day.

G13 doesn't manage to squat the house for more than a few hours, and only a few hundred of the many activists make it that far. But the flag of the movement, the pirate flag, is raised on the roof of the building.

SCENE 3: TURQUOISE

THE GUIDE:

16.50 - There is a large hole in the fence around the G13-grounds. 400-500 protesters have got through the hole at the KPMG building which is the adjacent property. Protesters are making speeches from inside the ground, and there is cheering while more and more people penetrate the fence. Police forces are now clearing the neighboring grounds and are preparing to enter the G13-grounds to hunt down the protesters.

The guide positions the tripod with the video camera pointing in the direction of the turquoise member of the swarm. The turquoise person picks up the turquoise flag and starts waving it. He turns to the camera and starts reading his text aloud.

THE SWARM / TURQUOISE PERSON:

In the turquoise finger the style is black with a marker of turquoise. You have to be practically dressed for off-road running and climbing. The plan is to stick together, but force the pace on a wide front. In the struggle for more autonomous houses we are creative, flexible, mobile, fast, prepared, united and ready to take our new house with unbridled energy and real street style.⁷

THE GUIDE:

17.01 - About 200 protesters are now inside the central G13-house and on the roof, where a large pirate flag is raised. Police have surrounded the area but stay calm so far.

As the voice-over of the artist/researcher fills the space again, the guide continues the slow construction of the web of lines, now with the turquoise yarn.

THE ARTIST/RESEARCHER:

The swarm moves in apparently coordinated and correlated ways. But how? In his essay 'The hard core can't be arrested' the Danish writer and former activist Nikolaj Villumsen explains how the Youth House Movement is structured like a network of loosely associated groups, small and large. In such a structure, there isn't a traditional power hierarchy; there is no 'hard core that leads the rest of the movement. Each group has very different modes of decision-making and quite different agendas as well. Still, the movement as a whole depend on fast and joint decisions:

"To get other parts of the network engaged, the contact between the groups in the network is crucial.

The connections between the groups are maintained by personal contacts. These are essential for communication. It is not necessarily the internally important persons in a group who have personal contacts in other parts of the network."⁸

Two factors are central for this networked decision-making: the means of communication and the mutual respect between the different groups in the movement.

The journalist, Ulrik S. Kohl, describes how chains of SMS develop into the central media of communication and decision-making in the Youth House Movement.⁹ By sending an sms-message out into her own personal network, a person or a group in the movement can organize an event. If the message is well received, it will be sent further out into the next circles of personal networks, and in this way a single message can be circulated to thousands of mobile phones within a very short time. The receiver of the message immediately senses, if this is a message that has widespread support; if so, he will receive the same message, maybe in different versions, many times on his mobile, "like a hail-storm". Kohl describes how at certain crucial moments, whole waves of sms-messages spread extremely fast, and a crowd of thousands of activists can be mobilized within half an hour to meet up somewhere and start protesting. If the message doesn't gain support, it won't be circulated, and it dies out fast. In this way, the chains of personal contacts make collective decisions via the sms-waves. Soon a special activist-lingo develops – N.Villumsen has a quite funny explanation of how the word 'creative' in this lingo means 'violence': if for instance a message says "..go out and show your creativity..now", it actually means "meet up for vandalizing, stone-throwing and civil disobedience...now!"¹⁰

The other basic factor is the mutual respect between the different parts of the network. This is manifested as a general codex of not criticizing each other. If a message contains critique, it will soon die out in the chains of communication. Even hard violence and vandalizing are supported on a broad basis in the movement. The lack of internal critique secures a large and united movement.

So, these are some of the basic features of the swarm. The pulse that Arquilla and David Ronfeldt so poetically described above is fuelled by the sms-waves and internal solidarity. The swarm moves.

SCENE 4: YELLOW

THE GUIDE:

17.19 - Approximately 1,000 protesters are in the tunnel under Bispeengbuen. The police announce that the demonstration is dissolved because of violence and vandalism, and that people should retreat to Nørrebro. Massive amounts of teargas are thrown against the sealed-off demonstrators. An eyewitness compares it to a war-scenario.

The guide positions the tripod with the video camera pointing in the direction of the yellow member of the swarm. The yellow person picks up the yellow signboard, gesturing with it. She turns to the camera and starts reading her text aloud.

THE SWARM / YELLOW PERSON:

Yellow bloc is G13's queer feminist bloc. We can be recognized by the yellow wagon, and the many yellow banners with monsters. Our main strategy is to stick together and push obstacles away, using the fact that we are many, and don't subside. We move together into Grondal Vænge 13, and try to avoid it being about sex, age and experience; whether you mean to participate in the squatting or not; the only prerequisite is that you want a Youth House in Copenhagen. The style is very direct. We will go forward in a massive bloc, with the front of the bloc – the fingernail of the formation – wrapped in ladders and foam to push away the police. We must be a solid, yet flexible bloc. We must have a solid communication between the different parts of the bloc, so that we can change the plan or move forward together fast, if necessary. If the police choose to shoot with teargas against us, we will try to navigate away together. All those in need will get lemon and a piece of cloth to breathe through, and we will also have a limited number of diving goggles to wear up in the front. This should make better navigation possible, maybe even helping somebody else get out. The aim is wherever possible to avoid panic and move forward as a bloc in spite of the teargas. When we enter the new premises, the idea is to squat a separate building, a queer feminist house, where those of us who think it's important and want to can create one of the things we lack in Copenhagen: A public, accessible space that potentially can be free of gender power and heterosexism. Once we have taken our new Youth House, we have plenty of time to find out, how to do it. The proposal of a specific queer feminist space / house will be presented at G13's first communal meeting as an up-and-running Youth House.¹¹

THE GUIDE:

17.46 - Inside the G13-grounds 80 protesters are detained by the police. They are picked out one at a time by police officers and put in a 'train'; locked in rows on the ground with wrists strapped. According to TV2 News, at least 200 people are arrested. Politiken, the newspaper, writes 300; two people are knocked unconscious by teargas grenades, and several people have been hurt severely by truncheon blows and dog bites.

As the voice-over of the artist/researcher fills the space again, the guide continues the slow construction of the web of lines, now with the yellow yarn. At the end of this sequence, the guide picks up a pirate flag, and erects it by fastening the pole into the now intricate web of the colored lines. This flag is now held aloft by the audience holding the strings of the web. When the voice-over stops, he returns to the computer for the final time-note.

THE ARTIST/RESEARCHER:

Another important aspect of G13 is the way it is conceived and acted out as a purely symbolic action. Already long before the action itself, the website of G13 announces it as an incredible success, and so are the general reactions afterwards. How can a squatting of a house that only lasts a few hours become such a success? The obvious symbolic victory is the raising of the flag on the roof of the G13-house. Even though this is a quite banal sign of triumph, it's a marker that's easy for everyone involved to understand. As a funny note, it reverses an earlier incident where police officers were spotted pissing on the empty ground where the Youth House stood before the demolishing. Territorial pissing. And since the squatting only lasts a few hours, the conquest must be understood as purely symbolic.

In public opinion, the Youth House Movement is considered violent, destructive and out of control right up to G13. This is partly true, but it is interesting to note that even with this negative aura of revolt, the movement still gains huge amounts of sympathy and engages more and more followers, also of completely different ages and backgrounds than what is to be expected. This sympathy probably stems from a general feeling of desperation and despair that the demolition of the Youth House creates in far wider circles of society than those who had actually used the Youth House when it still existed.

Given these negative public expectations, another not outspoken aim of G13 is to change the image of the movement from 'spoiled violent youth' to 'creative smart-

mob'. Not an easy task with thousands of violent protesters in a crowd that has spent most of the last six months burning cars, crashing shop windows and throwing stones at the police. By displaying strict non-violence and collective self-control G13 manages to win public opinion. Exactly because everyone are expecting violent street-fighting, the non-violence is seen as a conscious retreat from violence. A retreat that the opponent – the police forces – aren't able or willing to match. The heavy use of teargas, the confrontational show of force and the massive waves of arrests portray the police forces as the violent aggressors.

This shift of roles is the real outcome of the events. The whole narrative of squatting a house, of announcing everything in advance, of cunning urban hide and seek, can be seen as camouflage. A kind of Hitchcock-McGuffin-like plot that lures the police forces into acting out the role of aggressors. The real victory of the protesting activists is the self-discipline and the retreat from violence. Their retreat leaves the stage open to the police forces who willingly perform the image projected onto them.

A new theatre of the streets: In the days that follow, even the chief police officer of the operation, Per Larsen, announces his respect for the "disciplined non-violence of the protestors" and calls for a political solution of the Youth House problem, urging the mayor of Copenhagen to start negotiations. And the mayor, Ritt Bjerregaard, immediately starts the negotiations she has rejected for months and years: "We are always open to dialogue with serious people who don't use violence", as she states to a local news-channel, TV2Lorry.¹²

THE GUIDE:

23.02 - According to reliable sources, several hundred arrested activists are held in an underground garage at Valby Police Station. Among these are those who entered the G13-house. They have all been kept sitting on the rough concrete floor for many hours, since around 17.00. They are wearing strips, and according to the sources, they can't get water and they can't get to the toilet. Among them are allegedly minors.

THE END

Notes:

¹ All time-based entries by the Guide comes from: *G13: Modkrafts liveupdate*, 7. October 2007 (Copenhagen: Modkraft.dk 2007)(published at: http://www.modkraft.dk/spip.php?page=print&id_article=6342), included here as Appendix 3.2.4.3, translated by Susanne Jacobi

² from *The Fingerplan*, (Copenhagen: Aktion G13 2007) (first published at: <http://aktiong13.dk/index.php?ufo=arkiv>), included here as Appendix 3.2.4.7. Translated by Frans Jacobi

³ Brian Holmes: *Network Maps, Energy Diagrams: Structure and Agency in the Global System* in *ESCAPE THE OVERCODE Activist Art in the Control Society* (Eindhoven, Zagreb, Istanbul: Van Abbemuseum WHW 2009), p. 55

⁴ D.Ronfeldt, J.Arquilla, et al, The Zapatista "Social Netwar" in Mexico (Rand Corporaton, 1998), chapter 2, quoted from Brian Holmes: *Network Maps, Energy Diagrams: Structure and Agency in the Global System* in *ESCAPE THE OVERCODE Activist Art in the Control Society* (Eindhoven, Zagreb, Istanbul: Van Abbemuseum WHW 2009), p. 55

⁵ see AoR 3.1. 'Revolution by Night'

⁶ see note 158

⁷ see note 158

⁸ Nikolaj Villumsen: '*Den hårde kerne kan ikke anholdes*' in '*Kampen om Ungdomshuset – studier I et oprør*', ed. René Karpantschof & Martin Lindblom (Copenhagen: Frydenlund & Monsun, 2009), p.218-219 (quote translated by Frans Jacobi)

⁹ Ulrik S. Kohl: '*Glødende Mobiler*' in '*Kampen om Ungdomshuset – studier I et oprør*', ed. René Karpantschof & Martin Lindblom (Copenhagen: Frydenlund & Monsun, 2009), p.201-214

¹⁰ Nikolaj Villumsen: '*Den hårde kerne kan ikke anholdes*' in '*Kampen om Ungdomshuset – studier I et oprør*', ed. René Karpantschof & Martin Lindblom (Copenhagen: Frydenlund & Monsun, 2009), p.219

¹¹ see note 158

¹² Quoted from '*G13-aktion banede vejen for nyt ungdomshus*', Martin Lindblom/Monsun - 27. november 2007 (Copenhagen: Modkraft.dk 2007)(published at: http://modkraft.dk/spip.php?page=nyheder-artikel&id_article=6812), here included as Appendix 3.2.4.6.