

ON WATER (3.3.1.)

The artist/researcher: Amira Jasmina Shalaby Jensen

Patti Smith, Lars Bang Larsen, 3 dutch architects & Hakim Bey: Molly Haslund

Parfyme: Stinus Duch Andersen, Johann Ebbesen

The Upbuilders: Frans Jacobi, Kim Jezus, Tobias Kirstein

A stack of building-materials, tools and microphones. An audience sitting in a circle. A discussion afterwards.

Soundtrack (live): Tobias Kirstein, Kim Jezus

Discussion: Appolonia Susterjec, Frans Jacobi

SCENE 1:

The space is dark. A single spot is turned on. An accordion is playing a single chord. Patti Smith climbs onto the stack of building materials, into the spotlight.

Patti Smith:

Outside of society, that's where I want to be.
Outside of society, they're waitin' for me.¹

As Patti withdraws the music fades and the artist/researcher starts her talk.

The artist/researcher:

Dear audience, welcome to this performance - or performance-lecture or maybe even more precisely: Lehrstücke as Bertolt Brecht would have called it². Lehrstücke. Learning-play. My name is Frans Jacobi. I am the artist/researcher. We are here to learn and we are going to collaborate on this learning. If you will be so kind to take a seat on one of the chairs or on the floor here in a circle. Thank you.

So here we sit inside an art venue. Sitting in a circle. Such a circle is a basic symbol of collaboration and equality, in the circle we are all equal. The only person out of the circle is me. I am above you and in control. In this sense this is a manipulated equality; you will feel manipulated during the next hour or so. But if you look at it as a kind of game, a social game, I hope we can reach a kind of simulated collaboration here, a simulated equality.

One of the key issues here tonight is exactly this difference between open collaboration inside art and open collaboration outside art: In a sense we are safe here, inside this art project; the collaboration is simulated, afterwards we can all go home on our own.

I am going to present two projects here tonight. They look very much alike, but differs exactly on their context: One is inside art and the other one is outside. Before we start though, I would like to present you to the danish art historian Lars Bang Larsen.

Lars Bang Larsen rises from the circle of sitting persons. As he is talking four persons - Parfyme & The Upbuilders - starts building a strange structure of the building materials. They will continue building this structure all the way to the last part of the performance. As part of the structure there are various platforms. When they are ready parts of the audience are guided to sit on these platforms. In the end the whole audience sits on the structure which takes the shape of a very unregular raft.

Lars Bang Larsen:

One can propose that the political in art consists in the potential for working through concepts and representations as unfinished and becoming, in temporal periods you share with others. It is in such periods - where the reality of the real becomes controversial - that one can glimpse an outer side to the present circumstances.³

Lars Bang Larsen takes his seat again. As the building of the structure continues the noises from the tools - the hammering, sawing and screwing - are captured by a set of microphones. The sound is manipulated, echoed, distorted by a musician (Kirstein). An unsteady rhythm echoes back and forth.

The artist/researcher:

This is what we are going to attempt here - on a small scale - 'working through a concept in a temporal period' we share with each other. And this exactly what the two projects we are going to discuss tried to develop on grand scale. Lars also mentions 'an outer side to the present circumstances'. This is the border we are trying to look across tonight: Does an outside exist at all? How can we approach it? Who can claim it? And why is it so goddamn slippery?

May 2008. By large media-attention a group of activists - lets call them 'The Up-Builders' - squats a street in Copenhagen. Situated in between the so-called freetown Christiania and a quiet stretch of Copenhagen harbour, Refshalevej is a kind of forgotten backside on the edge of the city. In the following 2 and a half month a new 'free' community develops spontaneously in cars, tents, temporary huts and houses both on the barricaded street and out on the water by the side of the road. On July 16th the police and the city authorities clears the settlement and The Up-Builders disappear as fast as they arrived.

From June 2008 and 6 months ahead the Danish artist-group Parfyme establishes The Harbour Laboratory in the other end of Copenhagen harbour. The Harbour Laboratory is part of U-Turn, the new quadrennial for contemporary art. It is situated close to the citycenter on an expensive part of the harbour owned by the large architectural foundation Realdania. Under the slogan 'The harbour is for All' Parfyme explores the waterways of Copenhagen in various ways and tries to build up a community of adventurous participants.⁴

The Upbuilders and Parfyme. On the waters of Copenhagen. Well, in a sense its easiest to start with Parfyme:

SCENE 2:

One of the Parfyme, taking a break from the construction work:

Parfyme:

..half a year on this parking lot, we wanted to test new ways of using the harbour, it was all part of an exhibition, but could it be part of everyday life? Could the harbour of copenhagen be used by everyone? The complicated story of how our idea made a lot of people happy...Some people angry, And Some people slightly richer. Well we're not sure about that But what else?? But what now?!⁵

Parfyme then continues working on the structure.

The artist/researcher:

Invited by U-Turn to make a proposal for a project in public space Parfyme proposes The Harbour Laboratory. U-Turn then connects them to Realdania who is the largest fund for contemporary architecture in Denmark. Realdania owns property all over the country and is known for developing and financing a whole string of large new building complexes.⁶ Here Realdania supplies Parfyme with the needed property on the harbourfront.

Already from the beginning Parfyme are aware of the precarious position they put themselves in. At one hand trying to open up the harbour for 'the people', exploring new and adventurous ways of using the harbour. At the other hand being representatives of - or at least being used by - Realdania and the city of Copenhagen to camouflage the quite disastrous architectural development of the harbour in recent years. But they choose to go ahead anyway.

During a long summer they struggle hard to realize their ideas about an open creative use of the harbour in spite of a long series of economical and bureaucratic obstacles. They build a temporary base out of two containers and some haphazard wooden constructions, supplying the project with an air of anarchistic creativity. Out of this platform a long series of adventures is undertaken - 24hours boat trips, camping on the water, romantic dinners, swimming, cooking, concert under the bridge, places under other places, bottleship workshop, movie night, birthday party, ferry service, marimba playing and a seasick monster singing sad love songs to the opera house.

Well, its time for a break. Lets hear what the 3 dutch architects Merel Pit, Karel Steller & Gerjan Streng, has to say:

The 3 dutch architects rise from the audience.

Merel Pit, Karel Steller, Gerjan Streng:

Parasitic architecture can be employed as a mediator between the changes in society on the one side and the urban systems on the other. The parasite is informal compared to its host. Therefore, the parasite can be used to stimulate and accommodate spontaneous processes and informal initiatives. This is achieved because the parasite provokes, explores mental boundaries in order to offer opportunities for the elusive and new propositions.

In this way parasitic architecture can start a process of changes. The parasite functions as a medium used by a group of people to negotiate with existing systems and to propose certain changes of these systems. So, the parasite is a political means. It is a clear sign and symbol of a desire, of an urban problem, of a hidden possibility existent in society. The parasite provokes both opposition and support for its proposal. To overcome indifference is a goal in itself.⁷

The artist/researcher:

Both the architecture and the activities of The Harbour Laboratory are carefully designed to express a quite specific notion of freedom: a carefree adventurous lifestyle filled to the brim with laughter, outdoor activities and naive, colorful creativity. Parfyme are positive people; if the project is critical it is in the sense that it works as a positive example on how public space could be activated.

The address is double: First of all The Harbour Laboratory is directed towards what Parfyme calls 'the people'; anyone who wants to participate, anyone who needs this kinda place to hang out. Out of these more or less coincidental passer-by's Parfyme builds a community, a group of people taking part in the creation of the situation.

By this they 'have a voice'. Its not a voice in the sense that some kind of slogans or critique is formulated - the activities are an expression in themselves. Being active, being playful is communication. So the first audience are participants and by participating they become 'the people having a voice'. There is a seamless identification between the tree members of Parfyme and their participating audience - they are all one big happy family.

The second audience are the beaurocrats - the board of Realdania, the politicians in the citycouncil, the establishment, society at large. As a response to the role they suspect they are given in the grander scheme of gentrification, Parfyme offers The Harbour Laboratory as a way of implementing regular peoples idea's about public space. The project is not a model or proposal for

something to be done in the future; it is a temporary realization of how things could be done all of the time.

Lets take these ideas again: 'A temporary realization of how things could be done all of the time' and 'having a voice consists of being active'. So the alternative public space in question here exist by being performed. Temporal and performed. Remember this; it will become crucial also when we reach Refshalevej.

The double adress is only allowed because The Harbour Laboratory is an art-work. The fact that the project is both being sponsored by Realdania and being critical of Realdania at the same time is only possible because it is art. It is even expected of an artwork of this kind to be critical of its context.

The other Parfyme, now standing high up in the structure they are building, starts talking.

Parfyme:

What do we think about all this?? Ok there was:

#1 money problems

#2 bureacracy, control, bla bla

Is that what we want to say? Well, then you might say: go suck your mummies titty. We guess that's how it is and so what? Same old story but could projects like this be used to develop space? This was not a vacation!

Could this be continued? Could people's voices be heard?

"participation" should be more than a buzz-word

"innovation" my butt hole

"public hearings" HA!

Through this project we can conclude: People are ready to rumble! The question is: Will anything happen in the future? Who decides how our public space should look and what it should be about??⁸

Parfyme continues their work.

The artist/researcher:

Parfyme clearly accepts their role as artists, they even accept the existence of their patrons, even though they are struggling with them. Their aims are realistic in the sense that they wish Realdania and the other big players of Copenhagen city planning will pay attention and learn from their accomplishments. They see their activities as corrections to the already existing superstructures of society. We are still inside 'the present circumstances' that Lars Bang introduced earlier. But what now? Could

this be continued? Two years afterwards the site houses a
cayak-rental and a mainstream café.

But lets leave Parfyme now; in the other end of the
harbour The Up-Builders aims for higher goals:

SCENE 3:

The Up-Builder stands on a platform above the audience. He starts reciting a manifesto, speaking in rhythmic dialogue with the music.

The Up-Builder:

Refshalevej is a new free community! A free self-organizing collective!⁹ Our goal is to create a self-managed, economically and ecologically sound, sustainable society, shaped by the myriad of diverse individuals who constitute it! This is achieved through direct democracy, ie. flat structure, communal-meeting as decision-making authority, no closed groups and no hierarchy, mutual help, respect and engagement!

A society without war and destruction, without persecution and torture, instead of the Danish State, which in foreign countries stands as creator and even the guarantee of exactly war, destruction, persecution and torture, conspiring with the United American States, whose actions more and more assumes an attempt to establish a global fascist empire! War brings no peace!

We are a demonstration of an alternative to existing society! We are the world that lies ahead! The existing system of ideological and social organizational principles belongs to the past and to history! We bring the future, we bring freedom!¹⁰

The artist/researcher:

Hey, stop now! Please....stop!!!!

The Up-builder, the musicians and Parfyme, still building, stop for a moment.

The artist/researcher:

Lets considers this before you go on! A 'free' community? What defines this freedom?

After a demonstration with no clear agenda ends up at Refshalevej, the occupation develops spontaneously. The first afternoon people start building what they think could be some kind of playground, but soon the idea of staying spreads. Already the next day around 200 people are staying overnight in intermistic shelters and sleeping-bags.¹¹

As the police isn't showing up, the building of huts and houses, becomes a collective fever. Hammering and sawing is heard all day and the new city is growing fast. Even though people come from very different backgrounds a community is established and soon the rest of Copenhagen seems far, far away.

What differentiates this new settlement - or 'Reffen' as it is also called - from The Harbour Laboratory is its legal status, or rather its illegal status. By occupying a whole street and moving in without any kind of permissions the 'Up-builders' are breaking the law. This, of course, places Reffen on that 'outer side of the present circumstances', as Lars Bang called it. By being illegal 'Reffen' establishes a real alternative situation. Something that has real consequences for those involved.

Although Reffen resembles The Harbour Laboratory in the sense that it is an image that is being performed, this image has another kind of consequences; it exists as lived reality and not in the greyzone reality of 'relational aesthetics'. By performing the image of a free community, not as art, but outside the law, the Up-Builders can claim freedom to a much larger degree than Parfyme. The unclear contextual restrictions that The Harbour Laboratory struggles with - its status as art, its debt to the sponsors and the inherent political roleplay - is substituted by a much clearer opposition to society at large.

Like The Harbour Laboratory Reffen is a temporary realization of how things could be done all of the time, but the scope is different. Its not a correction or an ad-on to existing society; its a refusal of the present circumstances and an attempt at realising another kind of society.

The Up-builder, the musicians and Parfyme now starts the reciting, the music and the construction-work again.

The Up-Builder:

We want a society based on peaceful, voluntary initiative and direct influence on the world, the processes and the structures that directly affect us as vibrant, creative and sentient beings; as free, untrammled people, whose skills and talents will not be forced into a hierarchical class society!

We don't need a system that can't house its members, can't feed them, isn't based on respect or engagement, can't resolve the psychological distress, it itself creates; where the people are in fact impoverished, never asked whether they want this position! We learn to believe that we need representatives to defend our interests because we are told that we are not able ourselves, and by this power is concentrated by the top of the hierarchy!

This is in fact a dictatorship, because a society where individuals are not included in the directly relating processes of decision-making - where the leadership, the government does not provide space

for individual and collective existence on other premises than those of itself - can not be considered as being democratic if we understand democracy to mean, freedom and equality for all!

We are born, without choice, into a system where power over the necessities of life to be mobilized for a society to exist, is assigned only to a privileged and rich upper class. This governing class then tries to dictate - by whim - what to say where to go, what to wear, what sexuality to be, what ethnic or cultural background that is right, just to name a few of the big blunders of the existing system! In other words the controlling elite presses its own self-image down our throats, and all those who will not subordinate themselves in barbarism and slavery, shall be punished with economic sanctions, detention and threat of physical harm, if they do not fall into line!

We reject this ruthless selfishness and instead says YES to the world you can experience if you come out on Refshalevej, where you unhindered can drive through, because there are only roadblocks to reduce motorists' speed, like on any other common road, or get yourself a nice cup of coffee at the free soup kitchen!

We are not aggressive and we will only defend ourselves against police violence by passive resistance, like Ghandhi did in India!

We hoisted the flags of revolution and pushed the ship off shore!¹²

SCENE 4:

As the last tones of the music dies out the parasitic structures is finished. The Up-Builder and Parfyme guides the last parts of the audience up onto the structures where they all sit down. There is a small platform somehow on the edge of the structure. From here the artist/researcher takes her last round of comments. As she speaks the lights fades and a series of video-projectors is turned on. The space and the structure is now enveloped by images of water, waves and the sea. As she speaks the musician with accordion slowly starts a new tune, a longing romantic tunes that comes to full force as the last comment is uttered.

The artist/researcher:

One of the beauties of Reffen is the temporality of the whole thing. Living on the waterfront in intermistic huts and tents is only fun in the summertime; when the danish winter kicks in the Up-builders would have to leave anyway. No matter how successful the revolutionary experiment will be, it has a natural ending. It will only last for awhile and then it will disappear. Now, the police and the City Authorities are much faster; they clear off the settlement already in mid-july.

The Up-Builders disappear when their community is erased by society. Havnelaboratoriet disappear when their time on the sponsored lot runs out. But both leave behind a question: Why the harbour, why the water, why the sea? If we take seriously the idea that both projects are performing images of something, then the image common to both projects, is the image of 'living on water'. Exactly here both projects share a symbolic, poetic language.

Living on the water is temporal and fluid. Its not a stable, solid situation. We are drifting. We are nomads. This is the core of the new society being performed here.

'We hoisted the flags of revolution and pushed the ship off shore!' With the last sentence in the manifesto of the Up-Builders we become pirates. The mysterious writer Hakim Bey starts his seminal text 'The Temporary Autonomous Zone' describing a global network of pirate communities:

Hakim Bey stands up.

Hakim Bey:

THE SEA-ROVERS AND CORSAIRS of the 18th century created an "information network" that spanned the globe: primitive and devoted primarily to grim business, the net nevertheless functioned admirably. Scattered throughout the net were islands, remote hideouts where ships could be watered and provisioned, booty traded for luxuries and

necessities. Some of these islands supported "intentional communities," whole mini-societies living consciously outside the law and determined to keep it up, even if only for a short but merry life.¹³

The artist/researcher:

Hakim Bey calls these inclaves 'Pirate Utopias' and see them as historic examples of Temporary Autonomous Zones, temporal realizations of alternative societies. Today such situations can still be found: Places where the oppressive structures of the 'megacorporate information State, the empire of spectacle and simulation'¹⁴ can be escaped for a while, places where real freedom can be performed and experienced. 'Reffen' can be understood as exactly such a 'temporary autonomous zone'.

So lets push this ship off shore! Lets hoist the flag of revolution! Lets pretend that this intermistic platform here is out there: out on the sea, outside the present circumstances! Lets head of for another Pirate Utopia, another fluid situation!

Outside of society. They are waiting for us.

As the structure floats on images of the sea, we all sit listening to the music; slowly growing like the ebb tide.

Notes:

¹ Quoted from the chorus of the song 'Rock'n'roll Nigger' by Patti Smith and Lenny Kaye (Kobalt Music Publishing Ltd., EMI Music Publishing, Warner/Chappell Music, Inc., Universal Music Publishing Group)

² The *Lehrstücke* are a radical and experimental form of modernist theatre developed by Bertolt Brecht and his collaborators from the 1920s to the late 1930s. The *Lehrstücke* stem from Brecht's Epic Theatre techniques but as a core principle explore the possibilities of learning through acting, playing roles, adopting postures and attitudes etc. and hence no longer divide between actors and audience. Brecht himself translated the term as *learning-play*, emphasizing the aspect of learning through participation, whereas the German term could also be understood as *teaching-play*. (this note quoted from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Learning_play)

³ From Lars Bang Larsen: *Projektløshedens problematik* in Lars Bang Larsen: *Spredt væren* (Århus: Det Jyske Kunstakademi 2010) (quote translated by Frans Jacobi)

⁴ These 2 events were not connected in any way. Still the striking similarity in both aesthetics and their expressed social/cultural aims is interesting. The intention here is to explore those similarities and as a natural consequence, contemplate the differences. This investigation includes the quite obvious themes – art versus activism, legal versus illegal, social movement versus artistic authorship – but it also touches upon the aesthetics of temporality and the meaning of water/sea as a metaphor for...yes for what?

⁵ This and the following quotes by Parfyme are from the video 'Everyone Can Use The Harbor' to be found at the webpage of Parfyme, where also photo-documentation and other video-clips from The Harbour Laboratory can be found: <http://www.parfyme.dk/projects/harbor-laboratory/>

⁶ A curious detail here is that in this period Realdania was in serious and complex negotiations about taking part in the financing of the new legalized Christiania. The resulting proposal was later dismissed by a small majority in Christiania and the process of legalization became a court-case.

⁷ Merel Pit, Karel Steller, Gerjan Streng: *Parasitic Architecture #1*, p. 8. published at: <http://www.gerjanstreng.eu/files/T02%20essay%20parasitic%20architecture.pdf>, here included as Appendix 3.3.5.3.

⁸ see note 5

⁹ In order to make the script work as basis of the performance some parts of the manifesto by the Upbuilders are taken out. The first excerpt occurs here. Excerpt 1: "Refshalevej is not a part of Christiania! Christiania is our neighbor and Christiania has our total love and respect!"

¹⁰ This manifesto was presented as a press-release and a poster at the occupation of Refshalevej. It can be found online together with photo-documentation from occupation: http://www.graffitigalleriet.dk/main/gaden/opbyggerne_08/index.html Here it is included as Appendix 3.3.5.4.

¹¹ The location directly on the edge of Christiania creates confusion. In the media the first idea is that this an expansion of Christiania, which stir up a lot of aggressivity. Christiania is in the middle of long complicated negotiations on legalization with the authorities and has no need of a new illegal little-sister. So both parts has to announce their independency of each other. Still the new community resembles Christiania a lot, also in their ideas about democracy and their claim for independence from the rest of society. But in a young fresh and contemporary version.

¹² See note 10

¹³ Hakim Bey: The Temporary Autonomous Zone (<http://www.t0.or.at/hakimbey/taz/taz3a.htm>), included here as Appendix 3.3.5.5.

¹⁴ see note 13