

Analysis (4.1.3.)

An enormous empty space. Copenhagen City Hall. The house is build in the late 18th century. It is rigorously ornamented. Two rows of chairs are placed in 'horse-shoe'-formation at one end of the space. Close by a strange looking assemblage of cardboard-boxes, Coca-Cola cans and sound-equipment on a green carpet; an island. Two men and a woman wearing green t-shirts with the text HOPENHAGEN, sitting on this island, waiting. A woman in front of the formation of chairs. Ready.

The audience walks in, find their places, on the chairs. When everyone are sitting down, the woman finds her scrip-cards and turns to the audience.

What now evolves is a double performance in that the woman, presenting herself as the artist/researcher AND as a guide, in the manner of a tour-guide, or tourist-guide, guides the audience around on the enormous floor while she and her assistant is talking/reading the audience through a 'guided' introduction to the phenomena of Hopenhagen. The tour covers the entire space in a meandering, steady pace. At the same time the three performers perform their tour across the floor, in a slow and tedious, linear progression – or rather - the 'carpet-island' is dragged through space in this tedious manner while the dancer covers the entire space in her own improvised movement, but still, her moves are spatially related to the movement of the island.

The two separate performances only meet when the guide introduces the three performers on the island, in the beginning, before they have embarked on their journey. In a sense they meet again in the last part when the guided tour is over, as the audience stands looking at the last third of the other performance.

By dragging the audience around like they were tourists, the guide is staging them. They become spectators. Of course they are already an audience and in this sense already spectators. In the staging the touristical aspects of their role is accentuated, but it is the staging in itself that is most important. The feeling of being staged. That the audience feels they are being staged, and thereby becoming passive participants in something controlled by someone else.

This role of the passive participant illustrates the the role of the passive consumerist participants in an inflated representative democracy being described in the introduction of the guide. Maybe illustrate isn't the right word. The staging is subtle, unspoken of. It is going on throughout the performance in manner that some members of the audience might not even think of as being staged. It is up to each member of the audience to make the connection to the consumerist passivity mentioned in the text of the guide.

As this group – the audience and their guide – moves across the floor, they are taken away from the object of their gaze – the island and the three performers. Instead of following what they are supposed to follow, or at least what the guide has pretended they are supposed to follow, the guided tour takes on a life of itself. The introduction is so extensive that the object of it gets out of focus. The introduction text becomes a goal in itself. Each member of the audience has to ask herself what is most important here, the text or the sensual experience of the 'real' performance. Again, it is not the text or the performance that is most important, but the split experience, the uncertainty that the split casts.

The text – meta-text – and the sensual experience of the performance – the sense-event. The meta-text and the sense-event. This is the two basic tools of my research through performance. How to concretize them in a specific performative situation? How to establish such a situation, in a given space, with an audience, with some performers? And what is the outcome of such a concretization? Can the interaction of the meta-text and the sense-event tell us something about the original event in question, that we didn't know beforehand? What kind of inquiry is actually going on?

The content of this performance, Clone Wars, is extremely complex. The event of the climate summit, COP15, is a multilayered mega event, that involves almost every possible complexity of post-modern, meta-medial, post-political agenda one can think of. The activism surrounding the climate summit, seen alone, is mega complex. Even Hopenhagen, the limited object of this inquiry, is highly complex. How to stage such a content in manner that makes sense, both for an audience as well as an artistic inquiry?

The position or the role of the audience is central, at least in this performance. Its is through the positioning of the audience that the parameters of the inquiry is set up.

So, what we have here is an audience that is staged as passive participants in something controlled by someone else. The control is in the hands of a guide. A guide is normally a mediator – someone who presents something on behalf of someone else. Compared to the role of the artist/researcher in the other performances there is a slight shift here. The artist/researcher is here more of a guide, she is more of a mediator on the behalf of someone not present in the performance. This points to some larger power in control of the situation, some murky presence behind everything, reminiscent of 'the International Advertising Association' lurking behind Hopenhagen.

What then, is this audience supposed to look at, what is the guide supposed to present? The green 'island' with the three figures: Atlas, Buddha and Helena Christensen. On a quest to save the world. Presenting the three figures with these names and with such a quest fictionalises the scenario to a somewhat silly degree. It becomes a humourous ensemble. The way of narrating an action is reminiscent of the narrative methods of Disney and other big players of the global culture industry. A random pick at some well-known figures in the universal memory bank, inscribed in a easy-to-understand, somewhat silly narration with a bombastic feel-good morale.

Narrating the scenario like this is a sarcastic irony on the intentions of Hopenhagen, and how it was set up. It also casts that part of the performance as purely symbolic, thereby indicating the purely symbolic functions of the real Hopenhagen as well. But what is the underlying quest of the performance then? The aesthetic quest underneath the all too obvious humoristic/sarcastic narrative surface?

The positioning of the audience, the artist/researcher and the three performers in the narrative structure, sets up the parameters of the quest, of this inquiry. As a last figure completing this image of a an overmedialised, cloned situation, the cameraman documenting the performance is here included in the rolist as another performer. He is acting as 'the media'. Everything is already image, allready seen through the lenses, allready representation.

The aesthetic quest of the performance is to break through this 'spell of pre-scribed images'. This quest is both real and symbolic. Can all these cloned fragments be sampled to establish a sense-event. A sense-event that situates the experience in the given space, that constitutes a now; a present that transgress the many layered distances established both in the original event Hopenhagen and in the scenario of the performance. If such an aesthetic presence can be established - here, now – it will also have a symbolic meaning, referring back to the cloned reality of Hopenhagen.

On the symbolic level it means that we are actually able to reclaim the images stolen from us by projects like Hopenhagen.

The first part of the travel undertaken by the three figures on the island is about unravelling the tools. Atlas unpacks the baloon and fills it with air, Buddha initiates the waves of resonance later to become the core element in the aesthetic experience, and Helena Christensen makes her first probing moves out on the immense floor. This unravelling continues all through the movement across the floor as Atlas is little by little unpacking more packages and adding new elements to the moving scenario. It is a scenario in becoming.

At some point midway Atlas unpacks three tubes of neonlight, connects them to the power, and leaves them as three points of green lighting on the floor. These three neon tubes are discrete signifiers of Hopenhagen. They are actually ready-mades from the original Hopenhagen-camp that resided outside of this building on the City Square of Copenhagen. The greenish neon light was very prominent in the ambience of that camp; it was illuminated by that sick green light. Here, in the performance, they create a sequence, where the island is also cast in the same green light. This lasts as long as it takes Atlas to drag the island past the neon tubes that is being left behind the island on the floor. This green sequence leads up to the culmination of the performance and introduces the element of light to the proceedings.

When Atlas has dragged the island two-thirds of the distance across the floor, he unpacks a large spot-light, places it on a tripod and turns it on. It beams a strong light unto the green island and the scenario – the island, the debris left behind it, the empty coca-cola cans, the loud-speakers, the large green baloon, the struggling Atlas, the scattered green 'pamflets', the methodically moving Helena and the deeply concentrated Buddha – the whole set-up is lit up and in that moment it becomes an image. It is as if the whole process of moving across the floor, leads up to this moment. It coincides with the moment when the guided tour is over and the audience is 'set free' to focus directly on the three performers.

The word 'illustrate' in the sense of 'illuminate, shed light on' origins from the verb *illustrare*, from *in-* 'upon' + *lustrare*.¹ To shed light upon something. To illuminate it. The word illuminate has to do with spiritual or intellectual enlightenment. The moment we shed light upon something we can see it clearer, we get to know it better. Illustrating something means to clarify and visualise ideas. It is in this context the act of turning on the large spot-light in the performance has to be understood. At the moment the spot-light is turned on the whole scenario is illuminated. It takes on another quality, everything becomes brighter and clearer.

One aspect of this illumination is of course the filmic, dramatic quality the scenery gets from the beam of light. It is quite obvious in the way the spot-light and the tripod

is handled by Atlas; it stands there on the floor as a signifier of the filmic quality. The spot-light divides the space in a scenographic way. What is inside the beam of light, the area that the light hits, is 'on stage' – central image. The area outside of the light is 'off stage', background imagery. The beam of light focusses the attention on the island and creates a drama by adding shadows and contrast to the image evolving. The attention in the whole enormous space is focussed now. The scenario that Atlas has been building up has this filmic quality; the debris left on the trail, the green banner, the sound- and light-equipment being dragged along and the large balloon adding a comic twist to the proceedings.

The sound environment being build up by Buddha and the improvised movements of Helena add another layer to image though. The reverberating resonance that fills up and dominates the entire space creates a contemplative calm rhythm with obvious meditative and spiritual undertones. This focus on repetition is mirrored in the improvised moves of the dancer, her body rehearsing variations on a ranges of moves. Together the two repetitive elements gives a spiritual air to the proceedings, adding to the illumination suggested by the strong beam of light.

The new image vibrates for a while, like an apparition. Then it recedes, as Atlas stops the slow movement and Helena and Buddha stop their actions.

The quest was to reclaim the images cloned by Hopenhagen. This reclaiming is a central point in my entire work as an artist. How to counter the massive cloning of all kinds of images taking place in contemporary capitalist culture? There is no way of going back to some kind of primordial existentialist level of image production. That kind of innocence is lost forever. Only by reclaiming and re-working images from the immense culture of cloned images it might be possible to establish an imaginative presence, otherwise lost in the ever expanding experience-industry.

Here it is various features from the cloned event Hopenhagen that is recirculated and reclaimed in an attempt to create a vibrating presence, open to the senses in an immediate NOT pre-scribed manner. This sense-event is similar to the kind of presence created in some of the original events I have chosen for this survey. If it is established here at the City Hall, it is not as an illustration of the original events, it is more about establishing something similar, something with similar features as the original events. This is where the research becomes artistic – the working-through the original events, doesn't produce as straightforward explanation and direct illustration of certain concepts as would other kinds of research. The artistic research produce situations that – in the successful cases – has an indirect and metaphorical relation to the original events. In the next script/performance 'Climate/Kettle' we will see an example of a more direct attempt to re-enact a certain action that originally created a sense-event; a re-enactment that falters and doesn't evolve the necessary intensity and presence needed to create a new sense-event.

If 'Clone Wars' succeed in creating a sense-event it is still contrasted by the meta-text of the guide. If the sense event breaks through the spell of pre-described images in Hopenhagen, the meta-text on the contrary suggest how we might be forced to capitulate to cloning in order to do something serious on the grand scale of climate cultivation. The sense-event is an option on a small scale, a way out into active time, for small active participatory groups. The climate crisis needs action by the masses.

It is this open contradiction that is the outcome of this inquiry.

Discussion

The discussion organised after the performance of 'Clone Wars' was seriously distracted by an unfortunate circumstance: The extremely difficult sound-ambience in the space. The enormous size of the space and the stone floor made it very difficult to hear voices on distances larger than the most intimate. In the intermission between the performance and the discussion, the City Hall generously served drinks and fruit for the audience and the performers. This was served on a long table at the end of hall. As the discussion began, the two hosts of this serving started clearing off this table and started dishing somewhere adjacent to the large hall. The scrambling noises from this act somehow reverberated into the large hall and made it even more difficult to hear what anyone was saying in the discussion.

Of the three invited speakers one fell ill and cancelled by not showing up. The other two made very monumental statements, both highly relevant, but hard to discuss in their lack of suggestiveness.

Rene Karpantschoff - a social researcher, who has been researching political activism in a danish context extensively - argued that the activist movements lost the battle on COP15 and that in some ways this had been the end of activism on the danish scene for the entire period afterwards. 'Absolutely nothing is happening at the moment', as he stated. In some sense he might be right, but the determination in his argument was so clean cut, that it left no space for any discussion afterwards, apart from a couple of obviously offended remarks from some activists present.

Colonel, the artist, asked to comment on the theme on the account of his participation in various artistic events surrounding the COP15, gave a condensed and very inspiring account on a string of global events post-COP15, proving that cloning is in no way a feature limited to Hopenhagen, but occurs continuously as an increaslingly intense feature of almost every contemporary political event.

In different ways both arguments supported the somewhat misanthropic fatalism of my meta-text and I didn't succeed in my role as moderator to bring into the discussion the more optimistic undertones introduced in the performance by the sense-event. Given the extremely lousy sound conditions in the space - and a guard who several times asked me to cut off the arrangement so he could close off the hall according to the agreement - the discussion fell short and never really started.

Notes:

¹ British Dictionary: illustrate: ORIGIN early 16th cent. (in the sense 'illuminate, shed light on'): from Latin *illustrat-* 'lit up', from the verb *illustrare*, from *in-* 'upon' + *lustrare* 'illuminate'.