

Climate/Kettle (4.2.1.)

The artist/researcher: Frans Jacobi

Two groups of audience: inside and outside.
Soundtrack (live!) and music by: Lonely Boy Choir.

We are in the canteen of Det Fri Gymnasium (The Free Gymnasium). First the internal audience – a group of students at the gymnasium and a few people related to the production of the performance – find their seats in two rows of chairs. The lights are turned off.

The external audience – anyone who is attending from the 'outside' – is waiting outside in the corridor. After a while, they are let into the canteen. The space is dark. As they enter, they find themselves fenced in by a prison-like structure of metal fences. A loud monotonous tone is hovering in the space. Nothing happens.

After awhile, as everyone has come in, the doors are shut behind the audience. A row of strong spots are turned on, one by one, blinding the audience. The howling tone is still the only sound.

Scene 1:

A voice-over starts speaking. The voice is calm and authoritative. The loud tone ebbs out as the voice continues.

The artist/researcher:

Dear people, welcome to this performance – or more precisely: this re-enactment. Together we are going to re-enact two scenes from recent political history. I am the artist/researcher and I am going to conduct you through these two scenes.

Re-enact? Oh my God, you might think, but don't worry, it won't be that stressful. Apart from the mental nuisance it will cause you, it will be easy; already by entering this prison-like structure here you are re-enacting the first scene.

Together we are going back to the COP15 Climate Summit in Copenhagen, December 2009. The first scene, that we are already inside here, has been actualized recently by the court case digging into the legal conditions at stake within it. Although the Eastern High Court, Østre Landsret, gave a very clear verdict, the case is still controversial and has been the object of several political media stunts in the month since the verdict.

We are, of course, dealing with December 12th 2009, and the arrest of those 905 demonstrators taking part in the large demonstration, urging to strong political action against climate change at the COP15 conference. The 905 persons were cut off from the rest of the demonstration, arrested and forced to sit on the bare asphalt, chained together in long rows, in so-called 'choo-choo' formations. Here they sat in up to 4 hours in the cold December evening, until they were transported to the temporary 'climate-prison' on Retortvej in Valby.

We are not going to go into the legal circumstances here – others have done that convincingly in the court case and in the media. What we are interested in are pictorial and performative aspects of this event. Or more precisely, seeing it as a staged event. As staging.¹

The story starts with Brian Mikkelsen, the by-then Minister of Justice of Denmark.

Brian Mikkelsen :

“Autonomists cannot be allowed to take charge, playing games with the authorities and the police,

the police can easily handle such a bunch of autonomists. Although there are many of them, they're not very smart, certainly not as bright as a new penny. And they're not particularly strong, they're stoned and cock-eyed by drink. They are drunk, and so on, so the police can easily control them, and they should also do so the next time."²

The artist/researcher:

Staging. To stage something or someone, that is: To present a situation, where this something or someone is on, as if it or he/she were on stage or in a scene.³

What does it mean to be on stage? To be staged? First of all, it means that someone is watching you. That what you are doing is being watched, and that what you are doing is seen as having some kind of dramatic or image-like character. You have become an image.

Staging is an act that involves 3 participants: The one who stages, who sets the stage – the director – or at least the active part. Then there is the one that is being staged – the passive part – or at least someone whose actions are being directed by someone else. The third part is the audience; those who look at the staging – the recipients.

In the sound-clip we hear the Minister of Justice staging a group of activists. No matter how silly and confused Brian Mikkelsen sounds here, it is actually an attempt by the State to stage a group of citizens as something other than what they see themselves as.

The statement was made after a much debated episode, where a group of activists barricaded a small side street in the center of Copenhagen, Hyskenstræde. Inside two barricades a wild pirate-party evolved. Even though it is funny, this short, bewildered statement by Brian Mikkelsen became the starting-point for a large-scale campaign of staging that ended up at the climate-prison at Retortvej.

Soon afterwards, the Minister of Justice presented a proposal for a set of new laws, popularly referred to as the 'hooligan-package'. This was a set of laws, designed to handle potential riots in connection with the forthcoming Climate Summit, COP15, where top leaders from all over the world were coming to Copenhagen. An aspect of the Hooligan-Package was the introduction of 'preventive arrest'. The police would now be able to arrest somebody, not because they had done something

illegal, but on the mere suspicion that they would possibly do something illegal in the near future.

Preventive arrest. In the very language, an element of staging seeps in. The police imagine that you will do something illegal soon, therefore they have to arrest you. Imagine. They got the impression. Created an image of you in advance.⁴

The spokesman for the Danish Liberal Party, Venstre, Peter Christensen, presents the Hooligan-Packet in the newspaper Jyllands-Posten on September 14th, 2009:

Peter Christensen:

"Venstre wants to raise the fine to ten times the current level for street-rioting, destruction of public or private property or for forcing oneself through the barriers of the police in connection with the Climate Summit in Copenhagen. I expect that this will prevent some of those persons who are already now planning to destroy Copenhagen during the Climate Summit from actually doing it. And those who do it anyway, for them it will be very costly. They can start talking with their parents now about raising their childrens' savings."⁵

The artist/researcher:

Those planning to destroy Copenhagen. Peter Christensen here makes a reference to the German network, Never Trust A Cop. As a prelude to COP15, Never Trust A Cop released a kind of action-trailer on the Internet. Across a montage of street-fighting, burning cars and black-clad activists, direct combat is requested:

Never Trust A Cop:

"In Copenhagen 7th to 18th of December.
COP15 will try to get capitalism back on track.
We don't.
We will go to Copenhagen.
To show a dead system how to die."⁶

The artist/researcher:

This 4-minute video on YouTube is a determining factor in the arming of the Danish police, preparing for the Climate Summit. Thousands of ravaging, black-clad hooligans are expected in Copenhagen. In numerous statements from both the politicians in Government and top police brass, references to Never Trust A Cop and the coming destruction are made.

Parallel to the preparation of the Hooligan-Package, the Danish police prepare for the Climate Summit by organizing the largest police force ever seen on Danish ground. New extraordinary equipment is bought, i.e. the impressive fire and clearance vehicles which are presented to the public on December 3rd.⁷ A whole series of similar presentations in the media showcases the armament of the police forces. As if to say: "Come on, we are ready to fight!"

Why these repeated public presentations of the massive armament of the police? Apparently it is about deterrence, discouraging the opponent. If the enemy realizes how strong the police are going to be, it will discourage 'those planning to destroy Copenhagen'.⁸

Deterrence is only the public facade, though; 'those planning to destroy Copenhagen' are sitting somewhere out there in Europe. They don't watch TV2News or DR1News. The deterrence is communicated to a Danish audience – it is much more about creating an image of the enemy. Staging the arriving activists as ravaging troublemakers – as hooligans.

This staging deprives the activists of a political agenda. In the view of the authorities, the protests have no political content; it's all about vandalism and destruction. About destroying Copenhagen. Destroying our society.

The Black Bloc is a militant form of action on the European Far Left. In a sense, The Black Bloc represents the typical cliché of the violent demonstrator: The stone-throwing troublemaker, clad in black. It is this stereotype troublemaker that the Danish authorities try to conjure up by a massive effort ahead of the Climate Summit.

The stereotype covers a deliberately militant form of action. In direct action society can be confronted. But what does it mean that this is a form of action? A form?

A form of action is a way of demonstrating, a way of enacting political activism. A variety of action forms exists, The Black Bloc is just one of many others. The Clown Army is another. Activists can choose between different forms of action. In a certain situation, one form is appropriate, in another situation, another form is more effective. As an activist, you are not identical with one of these forms, the form of action is something that you can choose according to the given situation.

In the rhetoric of the politicians and the police, The Black Bloc is not a form, but an identity. It is something that you either are, or are not. Something that you can be convicted of. Somebody who is expected to behave in a certain manner. Someone that can be arrested preventively, in advance, because we know what you are going to do.

The Black Bloc is the antithesis of mainstream politics – the enemy that the state needs in order to justify the massive arming of the police forces and the suspension of civil rights inherent in the Hooligan-Package.

In a sense, The Black Bloc has been appropriated by the state apparatus. From being a form of action, created by European activists, it has now become a completely one-dimensional identity – the subversive enemy activist, scheming to destroy society.

On November 26th 2009 'L 49 Om straffeloven og lov om politiets virksomhed' – the Hooligan Package – is passed by the Danish parliament.

When the Climate Summit hits Copenhagen, The Black Bloc is in the streets, but in numbers very, very far from the expectations of the police. Riots are few and sporadic. Dispersed and somehow at random. In the 11 days the Climate Summit lasts, there are demonstrations registered for every day, but none of them evolves into the huge destructive street-fighting scenario that has been conjured up by the authorities in advance.

The large-scale projects by the activists are entirely different. Civil disobedience and non-violent confrontation is the code of conduct. New and creative forms of action are being developed.

When 100.000 people march on December 12th in a very peaceful and very colorful demonstration, it is a strange and perplexing surprise that this is the moment the Danish police choose to perform their massive, collective arrest. What is going on? What is the rationale?

Do they really need to justify the image of The Black Bloc they have so meticulously shaped in the media by trying to stage all 905 arrestees as The Black Bloc, arresting them and treating them in a humiliating manner, as if they really were a threat to society? Do they really need to justify the excessive arming in terms of personnel and material, simply by using this personnel and material on a large scale like this? Does the Climate-Prison on Retortvej lose all meaning, if it is

not filled up with furious protesters at some point in the process? Is it really necessary to implement the concept of preventive arrest to justify it?

The staging is certainly effective. The wholesale arrest steals the picture, as you say. In the media, this is a great topic in the following days – it doesn't matter whether there were 100.000 or 12 people demonstrating for a better climate that day.

To steal the picture. This is exactly what staging is about. By their dramatic interruption, the police forces steal the picture from the demonstrators. They become passive participants in the image the police is staging.

As is written in the ruling of the Eastern High Court, Østre Landsret, from January 25th, 2012:

Eastern High Court:

"The operation of the police took place with great media attention, and images of the detained persons, positioned in 'choo-choo', with their hands chained on their backs, were shown in newspapers and on television. The placing of the detainees in 'choo-choo' were commenced around 20 minutes after the initiation of the pincer movement at h 15.26, and the Eastern High Court therefore concludes that most of the detainees sat on the cold asphalt for several hours, in some cases for up to 4 hours, until they were transported from the scene."⁹

The artist/researcher:

The staging is sustained and physical. The street, Amagerbrogade, is turned into a stage and the detainees are exhibited on this stage to the world, the media, for all to see, restrained and humiliated in long rows. Forced to perform the image of the violent, but now defeated troublemakers.

Now, on January 25th, 2012 the Eastern High Court ruled the wholesale arrest illegal with reference to the lack of probability that so many of the 905 participants in the demonstration had a feasible connection with the Black Bloc that they could be considered potential troublemakers.

Where does this leave the 905 detainees? Well, in a sense they are still sitting there on Amagerbrogade, now as innocent extras, cast as the enemy by the authorities.

Well, this must be enough on this case for now. We will now leave Amagerbrogade and the Climate-Prison on Retortvej, to move four days ahead, to December 16th 2009. But first we need a break. I will now dismantle the prison here – out here on the other side you will find some chairs. Please sit down and relax for a while. Meanwhile we will play a piece of music by Lonely Boy Choir for you. I will return after the music with yet another tale about a completely different kind of image formation.

The audience in the cage are released and are guided over to the rows of chairs waiting for them.

Break:

The audience is sitting in two separate groups listening to 'Kettle Blues' by Lonely Boy Choir.

Scene 2:

The artist/researcher stands up and starts speaking, this time 'live'.

The artist/researcher:

Before we attempt the second re-enactment here tonight, I will introduce you to the background for this performance experiment. It is an attempt to reconstruct a moment of so-called Active Time. I will return to this concept in a while.

The kind of staging we experienced before is rather well-known and quite common, not only in art and politics, but also in a lot of more everyday situations. It is a way of establishing or challenging a power relation between two or more parts.

The kind of collective image production we will now investigate is more radical. It is not so much about the opponent in a conflict, but rather about using a conflict to establish another, alternative reality. The image produced is not being projected unto others or shown to an audience; it is an image created by a group of participants and experienced from within this group.

This image is only active when it is performed. What does this mean? It means that a reality is created, and that this reality only exists in the moment it is performed. A reality that is simultaneously an image. A performed reality.

Maybe image isn't the right word; in any case, it is a social, spatial image, existing in time. In a given moment of time.

Yes, I know it sounds rather abstract – I hope it will be a bit more clear, when we try to re-enact an example of such an image.

On December 16th 2009 a large group of Danish and international activists tries to break through the barricades of the police surrounding the Bella Centre, housing COP15, the Climate Summit. It is the non-violent, civil disobedience action 'Reclaim Power – Pushing for Climate Justice'. Their goal is to establish a People's Convent, a critical alternative to the by then already stalled, official negotiations, and to protest against the total lack of real commitment amongst the world leaders inside the Bella Centre.

For the COP15, the Bella Centre has been fenced in by

extensive barricades of concrete and fencing, seemingly impossible to break through. 'Reclaim Power – Pushing for Climate Justice' is structured with several 'fingers' with different strategies. The activists can choose to meet up at different points of departure and to attack the fences in different ways.

The main group starts off as a more traditional, large-scale demonstration, crossing Amager. After an hour, around 5000 activists reach a corner of the Bella Centre, flanked by large police forces. At arrival an additional set of armoured vehicles and another set of police units await them.

The participants in the demonstration now gather in a large unified group in front of the barricades with the sound-truck at their back, immediately to be surrounded and fenced in by chains of police forces.

Such a situation, where a large crowd of demonstrators is confined by police forces, occurs quite often in connection with protests all over the world. This way of fencing in and confining crowds is one of the often used operational maneuvers of the police. In the internal jargon of the police, this maneuver is called the 'kettle'. But as with water boiling in a kettle, pressure evolves inside the kettle. The compression of activists results in a powerful eruption of collective energy inside the kettle.

Up on the sound-truck a woman starts shouting into a microphone. The crowd repeats her guide-lines:

Shouting-choir:

"The woman: First we will take three steps to the left,
All: First we will take three steps to the left,
The woman: then we will count down from ten,
All: then we will count down from ten,
The woman: then we will push and push until we can get over the fence.
All: then we will push and push until we can get over the fence."¹⁰

The artist/researcher:

Simultaneously the crowd of activists pushes against the chain of police and vehicles blocking the fence around the Bella Centre.

The anthropologist, Stine Krøijer, whom we will meet later tonight, has written her phd-thesis on radical

leftist activism. Like me, she was present that day in front of the Bella Centre, and like me she kept outside 'the kettle'. She writes about the shouting-scene:

Stine Krøijer:

"I believed that she did this because not all people assembled there were able to hear what she said. Later, I thought it was an exercise to make people feel confident about the collective, illegal endeavour, but now I am inclined to believe that her words, and the fact that everybody repeated them, generated a bodily synchronization or sense of belonging to the same time. In that situation, the activists proceeded in accordance with her/their words, but in not managing to cross the fence, a tight pack of people was produced between the sound-truck, the police and the fence. Aske, who later described the experience of pushing against the police line as that of 'one big body acting together', confirms my understanding of the emergence of a synchronic body in moments of confrontation."¹¹

The artist/researcher:

A synchronic body. A mass of people, individuals, who suddenly turn into one big body. A collective body. All shouting with one voice. One body with one voice. All pushing and moving in the same direction, synchronically, in sync. One body one push. One body, one huge breath.

Even though this body emerges in confrontation with the police in dangerous and stressfull combat, it is experienced as a mutual strenght, a collective platform.

Stine Krøijer calls this phenomenon Active Time. Active Time is a figuration of another society, fought for by the activists. A figuration? In a sense, it is an image of this future society, but then again, an image is an unprecise description. It is rather so that this other society actually exists in Active Time – in that short timespan, where for instance the synchronic body emerges.

In those 30 minutes in front of the Bella Centre, in which the Push!-action takes place, a huge synchronic body emerges. In that moment when the whole crowd of demonstrators inside the kettle has become one. The synchronic body is another society, a temporary glimpse of how we could relate to each other, of how we could be living together.

This other society only exist in that short moment, while the activity is happening, while the figuration is performed by the activists.

Now, this is a very dramatic and confrontational moment – but Active Time can also be peaceful and contemplative. It is, though, always a moment torn out of, a rupture from normal, capitalist society time, Dead Time.

Dead Time is the all encompassing time of capitalism; entertainment, surveillance, consumption. Passive time.

Active Time is a concrete, realized alternative. A real, present proof that something outside of capitalism actually exists. That we can come together as something else than consumers. An active, political image.

Now, here tonight, we're not in any kind of confrontation. Still, we will attempt to recreate such a kettle, as I have been talking about here. It can, of course, never be real to any degree that compares with what was happening back then in front of the Bella Centre. It will only be a reconstruction, a kind of social game, wherein we will try to create that synchronic body.

The idea is, to let the part of the audience, who sat over here watching the others enter the prison in the beginning, act as activists being 'kettled'. They will have to shout in unison. Really shout it all out, to get in sync , to become a collective, synchronic body. We, the rest of us, will confine them in between 2 sections of fence here. So, lets try to make this work, please come over here and help me.

One part of the audience, the students from Det Frie Gymnasium, rises and gathers in the middle of the space. The artist/researcher and 4 helpers from the other audience bring the sections of metal fence onto the floor and fence the group in between them.

The artist/researcher:

Boris will now introduce a simple effective rythm that will help us in creating the right atmosphere. When you are ready, I will act as the woman shouting. Then we will see, if it is possible at all to get anywhere near that intensity and rage, anywhere near Active Time. You inside the kettle please shout after me.

The artist/researcher starts shouting and the group of activists shouts after him. The 4 helpers put pressure on the fences, and tension between the two groups builds up.

Shouting-choir:

"The woman: First we will take three steps to the left,
All: First we will take three steps to the left,
The woman: then we will count down from ten,
All: then we will count down from ten,
The woman: then we will push and push until we can get over the fence.
All: then we will push and push until we can get over the fence."¹²

The shouting and the pushing goes on for about 7 or 8 minutes. Afterwards the fences are removed and the group inside takes their seats again.

The artist/researcher:

Well, that was kind of wild. But did it work? Did the synchronic body emerge?

Of course the physic and psychological pressure here was completely superficial, so the tension rising might be more like an illustration. But still, thanks for taking part and trying to get into this state – it's absolutely not an easy thing to enter into such an active image. Also thanks to Boris – Lonely Boy Choir – over here, for delivering the soundtracks for these scenarios. Please give him a hand.

Now, we will take a real break – the interim bar is open over there. Afterwards, there is a discussion where we will try to adress differnt aspects of what we have just been through together. I might finish off this part by introducing the 3 guests I have asked to initiate the discussion:

Stine Krøjier is the anthropologist I referred to; her ideas on Active Time versus Dead Time is the foundation for the last part of the performance. As said, she has written a phd-thesis on radical left-wing activism, called Figurations of the Future.

Tannie Nyboe and Stine Gry Jonassen are both activists. They were standing on the sound-truck and kept the action 'Reclaim Power – Pushing for Climate Justice' organized and going. They were both arrested during the action, and were later prosecuted for their part in the planning of this action. It will, of course, be really interesting to hear their version of the events. They experienced this whole thing from within, and have afterwards been forced to live with the retaliations of society.

But first – 20 minutes break. Thank you!

THE END

Notes:

¹ ¹ staging /stāji ng l

noun

1 an instance or method of presenting a play or other dramatic performance : *one of the better stagings of this Shakespearean classic / the quality of staging and design.*

• an instance of organizing a public event or protest : *the fourteenth staging of the championships.*

2 a stage or set of stages or temporary platforms arranged as a support for performers or between different levels of scaffolding.

3 Medicine diagnosis or classification of the particular stage reached by a progressive disease.

4 the arrangement of stages in a rocket or spacecraft.

• the separation and jettisoning of a stage from the remainder of a rocket when its propellant is spent.

² <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y2n4SkWQINc> (translated by Frans Jacobi)

³ scene /sēnl

noun

1 the place where an incident in real life or fiction occurs or occurred : *the emergency team were among the first on the scene / relatives left flowers at the scene of the crash.*

• a place, with the people, objects, and events in it, regarded as having a particular character or making a particular impression : *a scene of carnage.*

• a landscape : *thick snow had turned the scene outside into a picture postcard.*

• an incident of a specified nature : *there had already been some scenes of violence.*

• a place or representation of an incident : *scenes of 1930s America.*

• [with adj.] a specified area of activity or interest : *the country music scene.*

• [usu. in sing.] a public display of emotion or anger : *she was loath to make a scene in the office.*

2 a sequence of continuous action in a play, movie, opera, or book : *a scene from Brando's first film.*

• a subdivision of an act of a play in which the time is continuous and the setting fixed and which does not usually involve a change of characters : *beginning at Act One, Scene One.*

• [usu. as adj.] the pieces of scenery used in a play or opera : *scene changes.*

PHRASES

behind the scenes out of sight of the public at a theater or organization. • figurative secretly : *diplomatic maneuvers going on behind the scenes.*

change of scene another way of saying change of scenery (see scenery).

come (or appear or arrive) on the scene arrive; appear.

hit (or make) the scene informal way of saying come on the scene above.

not one's scene informal not something one enjoys or is interested in : *sorry, that witchcraft stuff is not my scene.*

set the scene describe a place or situation in which something is about to happen. • create the conditions for a future event : *the congressman's speech set the scene for a bitter debate.*

ORIGIN mid 16th cent. (denoting a subdivision of a play, or (a piece of) stage scenery): from Latin *scena*, from Greek *skēnē* 'tent, stage.'

⁴ Forestilling: In the performance, the text as a whole was presented in Danish. In this paragraph the Danish word used instead of 'imagine' is 'forestilling', which has a multiple meaning of 'presentation/performance/theatre-play/projection/presumption/ presupposition.

⁵ http://www.dr.dk/Regioner/Kbh/Nyheder/Hovedstadsomraadet/2009/09/15/051810_10.htm®ional (translated by Frans Jacobi) <http://jp.dk/klima/article1816632.ece>

⁶ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DWEzLoUgXw0>

⁷ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2beLujOvf4k>

⁸ Show of Force: On the concept as introduced in Kai Vittrup: OPERATION (Copenhagen: Copenhagen Police 2003)

⁹ Udskrift af Østre landsrets Dombog B011400P – AHA: Dom afsagt den 25. Januar 2012 af østre Landsrets 12. Afdeling, p.152 (translated by Frans Jacobi & Susanne Jacobi)

¹⁰ taken from Stine Krøijer: FIGURATIONS OF THE FUTURE *Forms and temporality of left radical politics in northern Europe*, PhD thesis (Copenhagen: Department of Anthropology, University of Copenhagen 2011). p. 229

¹¹ Stine Krøijer: *FIGURATIONS OF THE FUTURE Forms and temporality of left radical politics in northern Europe*, PhD thesis (Copenhagen: Department of Anthropology, University of Copenhagen 2011). p. 229-230

¹² see note 10