

### **Analysis 4.2.3.**

Climate/Kettle inquires into two ideas: 'Staging the opponent' and 'collective body'.

It is organized in a high school, Det Fri Gymnasium, that is known for its left-wing traditions and has fostered pupils that took an active part in the activist-scene in Copenhagen.

These themes are explored on two levels; by a textual analysis of two events taking place in connection with the protests surrounding the COP15 UN Climate Summit in December 2009. The texts are read out by the artist/researcher: in the first part as a voice-over, in the last part live. On the other level the themes are probed as two performative scenarios involving the audience as passive participants in the first part, and as active participants in the second part.

The textual level delivers a didactic presentation of the two events in question. Events are seen from a distance from, an analytical, non-personal angle. This as a stark contrast to the position of the narrator in 'Revolution By Night' (3.1.), where events were presented from a very personal angle, positioning myself, Frans Jacobi, in a truthful and authentic manner. Here, in Climate/Kettle it is rather the artist/researcher speaking, observing everything from the outside.

In this vein the format of the two performative situations, the two sense-events, are re-enactments of two quite specific situations from the original events, chosen to probe the two themes by 'aesthetic thinking'. Re-enactment chosen as a relatively objective way representing an event as a performative situation.

Whether the two scenes can be termed re-enactments is of course up for discussion. The practical circumstances force a drastic editing of which features of the original event are to be re-enacted. This editing is of course an interpretation. Even in more traditional re-enactments done outside, maybe on the exact site of the original event, re-enacting also the duration of the original event, an interpretation takes place. In the case of Climate/Kettle here, re-enactment is rather to be understood as an attitude in staging the sense-events, than as a strict, realistic format.

Both concepts to be explored in Climate/Kettle are derived from direct confrontations between activists and authorities. The intention in the performance is to stage these confrontations in a kind of laboratory situation, where the relevant aspects of the confrontation can be considered and contemplated, isolated from the extremely complex context they evolved in. Whether this selection of certain aspects of the given situation is productive, is one of the questions to be probed by the performance. In short, it works well in scene 1 and it doesn't work at all in scene 2.

The performance operates with two audiences; an internal audience from Det Fri Gymnasium, and an outside audience mobilised in the same manner as the audiences for the other performances. These two audiences are kept separate all the way during the performance, thereby allowing for various confrontations between these two groups.

The original intention was to organize the performance as a closed event for the students from Det Fri Gymnasium and a similar student group from the Police Academy. This plan had to be given up, when the Police Academy rejected the idea.<sup>1</sup>

The pragmatic solution that we managed to organize didn't create the same kind of tension between the two audiences as originally intended. The difference between the two groups were simply not as dramatic as intended. In spite of a long process of negotiating with and presenting the project for the students at Det Fri Gymnasium, only a few students showed up and we had to improvise an inclusion of a few persons from the outside audience in this inside group. As a result, the two groups were more or less identical, both in age and apparent personalities. This lack of difference becomes crucial in scene 2, where an active confrontation between the two groups is set up. In the discussion following the performance, another difference in the audience evolves. I will come back to this.

The two audiences are positioned in different relations of power; one relation in scene 1 and another in scene 2. These power relations are expressed in the spatial arrangement and in the gaze defined by these spatial circumstances.

Since both initial themes of inquiry deal with individuality versus collectivity, it is important that these themes are probed by audience groups. Whether the performative situation set up in each scene creates the kind of collectivity in question, and whether this collectivity evolves in the sense-events the audiences are directed into. Or rather, what is interesting might not simply be whether or not the collectivity in each scene evolves convincingly – but what we can learn from the way these collectivities evolve, and why or why not they happen. As we shall see, we might learn as much from the fact that scene 2 doesn't work as intended, as we might learn from the succes of scene 1.

In both cases, the physical, bodily experience of collectivity is probed. The physicality is central, not only to Climate/Kettle but to my project as a whole. It is by probing the various themes as physical, performative scenarios an 'aesthetic thinking' is evoked. It is in 'thinking with the senses', the audiences and the various persons, including myself, are probing the themes in question. Here, it is the direct physical experience of being led into collectivity that is tested. Does this physical experience add to the analytical understanding of the themes we are presented with by the artist/researcher?

### **Scene 1:**

The 'staging of the opponent' is here inflicted upon the group of outside audience. They are asked to wait outside in the yard or in the staircase before entering the space, where the performance takes place. When the door is finally opened, it is completely dark inside, and they enter into an unknown situation, the only thing greeting them apart from the darkness is a loud annoying alarm-like tone. Walking into this threatening ambience, they realize that they are fenced in by metal fences. After a while, 3 large strong spotlights are turned on, blinding everyone; causing the ones closest to the fence to back off. Regaining sight, they realize that another audience group are looking at them – that they are themselves 'on stage'. Only after a quite long while, the annoying tone is lowered a bit, and a voice-over starts.

It is here, in the opening of scene 1 that this part of the audience is staged. They walk into a fictive situation, a prison-cell, resembling closely the so-called climate-prison, described in voice-over. They are imprisoned. The stage-light and the realization that there is another audience present, makes it obvious that they are the ones being staged – quite literally – they are standing in a scenographic situation in front of an audience.

They are on stage, but they are pacified. There is a subtle double play on the given site: On one level they are in a fictive place, the prison-cell – a representation of the real climate-prison at Retortvej – on another level, they are in a school. The voice-over is very didactic, spelling everything out in almost too clear terms – it is the voice of a schoolmaster, over-explaining the content to a group of pacified kids.<sup>2</sup> This understated injection of pedagogical aesthetics is the addition of this performance to the ironic figure of the artist/researcher. For the outside audience this double staging adds to the feeling of being threatened to passivity.

In the discussion afterwards, a member of this group stated that the thing provoking her the most in this situation was the two camera-men circling around the fence of the prison cell, filming the group inside. For her the cameras were a double threat – they reminded her of how the police are filming the participants in demonstrations and political actions to identify and register them in the archives of the police, but the cameras also provoked an anxiety over how the video-footage was going to be used here in connection with the performance. She felt she was unwillingly being cast as a participant in some kind of film, she had no control over and had no wish to appear in.

Here, as in some of the other performances, the camera-men are present both inside the fiction created by the performance and outside in the reality where the performance is set up. They are, so to speak, both inside the sense-event, and outside of it, recording it. Their position paraphrases Gilles Deleuze's beautiful example of the thin membranes of the film-strip and the screen as exemplifications of the 'thin depth' between image and reality. Here, it is the lense of the video-camera that marks the edge of fictionalization. The intricate arrangement here, though, is that both sides of the lense is fictionalized to various degrees. The audience - who would traditionally be in the real world, looking at a fictional world when looking at the stage – is here staged as well.

This intricate mesh of fictionalizations set up to create in the audience inside the fences not only the very obvious feeling of being staged as prisoners, but also a more subtle sneaking feeling of being manipulated as an audience – as participants in a set-up out of their own control. This unexplained staging, underneath the obvious prison-staging is where the collectivity is probed for real. The outside audience doesn't know each other from before and is only gathered here by way of common interests. Will this scattered crowd of 10-15 people feel united? Will they unite in a common irritation at the staging they are treated to? Will the fact that they are trapped together for awhile make them feel some kind of communality?

The entrance sequence is extremely effective – it is obvious that the audience stepping into this scenario feels overwhelmed by the attack of sound and darkness/light they are treated to. The cell-structure is at first an almost funny symbolic trap, but as the voice-over drags out over a long period and the camera-men keeps recording the people caught in the stark spotlight, the entrapment becomes real. This transition from a symbolic set-up to something that is actually felt as a physical condition is important. This is where the experience becomes performative, and where contemplating the theme – staging of the opponent – becomes an event of the senses.

In the obvious layer of the scenario, the audience becomes stand-ins for activists in the demonstration described in the voice-over. They are treated to a small-scale, but

similar staging as the 905 imprisoned climate-activists. This transformation from individual members of a small scattered audience to 'innocent extras, cast as the enemy by the authorities', is self-evident. It happens as soon as they walk into the dark space; in that moment they become a cast, united by the staging. The obvious layer of staging creates that collective identity instantly. This is how staging works. It is a kind of conceptual re-arranging of power positions – here in the performance it is not really threatening, because it is a recognizable theatrical measure.

The other subtle 'hidden' staging is not as easily recognizable, and it doesn't take place in such a clear fictional space as the first layer. This second staging evolves in the reality of this specific evening at Det Fri Gymnasium; it rearranges the reality of the audience directly, and there is no invisible 'fourth wall' protecting it. In this sense it is relational; it evolves directly in the social relations we are part of. It isn't conceptual either. It evolves in a process of physical presence; the irritation and feeling of 'this is too long and too didactic' that unites the audience inside the cell evolves in real time in real space. It is a collective emotion that performs in the social space of the group.

## **Scene 2**

The second scene is far more problematic. The theme of the 'collective body' is radical, controversial and strange to another degree. It is also far more difficult to stage as a performative experience. The 'collective body' is set up as the kind of 'constructed situation' roughly outlined in the Glossary (0.3.). A kind of social game, where the participants play out an idea amongst them. Intended as a reversal of the power relation in the first scene, it is now the internal group of (mainly) students from Det Fri Gymnasium who is trapped between two parts of the fence. Here, they repeatedly shout a chant together from the 'real' event in front of the Bella Centre. In addition, they should be pushing the fences together, up against the other group that should push the fences from the outside. My idea was that this repeated chanting and shouting would enable a feeling of synchronization inside the group, and that this collective feeling of being 'in sync' would transgress into the collective body.

Evaluating this, I can see that various factors made this situation somewhat unfocused. First of all, the introduction was far too long – whereas the very long and monotonous voice-over in the first part served an explicit purpose, here it somehow took the drama out of the situation. Familiarizing myself by reading the text in the second scene live also relaxed the atmosphere too much. The drama that was still in the air when the outside group was released from the prison-structure faded out during this all too friendly introduction. My intention with the friendliness was to create a humorous playfulness that would make the participation by both groups possible.

What happened was a quite short performance of the collective body by the internal group that displayed an open, but also anti-dramatical attitude during the shouting and chanting. Right before the action started, I took the spontaneous decision not to use the outside group to push the fences from outside, sensing that it would be too dramatical a set-up for the people present. The act was rather funny, and it demonstrated the various factors constituting the collective body, but it obviously didn't transgress the situation. It was an illustration, rather than a performative act where the collective body would emerge as a physical and emotional fact, felt by the group as a whole.

The real collective body, though, evolves in situations of extreme pressure and consequence. To re-create such emotional pressure takes another kind of drama. In retrospect, the stylistic aggression displayed in scene 1 might have been a better strategy to continue the pressure on the audience in scene 2. Such pressure might have evoked collectivity as a direct reaction to the circumstances, instead of as now, to be a playful illustration of a thematic idea.

The synchronic body arises as a reaction to extreme powerful measures taken by the police forces. A reaction is not an alternative. It is rather an inherent part of the system it reacts against. If the experiment of scene 2 can tell us something, it might be this: That the collective body and the inherent Active Time isn't as much an alternative to the Dead Time of the Security State, as it is a mode of critical survival. The collectivity in the synchronic body is an emotional tool to reclaim the subjectivity that is under extreme threat, not just in large-scale police actions like the examples described here, but on all levels of the capitalist Security State.

In the discussion following 'Climate/Kettle', one of the activists present describes how the authorities individualize the activists by registration and surveillance; thereby creating a psychological pressure. This individualization can be seen as a psychological version of 'staging the opponent'. By staging the individual activist as a 'troublemaker', thereby de-politicizing her, by registering her and stalking her around the city, the activists' right to act as a group is denounced. Collectivity, in the form of internal solidarity and supportive friendship, are important factors in challenging this pressure. The concept of the collective body is an attempt at describing the emotional bonds evolving under this kind of circumstances.

In the court case concerning the 905 demonstrators who were arrested on 12. December 2009 at Amagerbrogade - as described in scene 1 – it was evident that the police tried to argue for the individual guilt of each of the detainees, whereas the the activists' lawyers argued that the suspicion of 'disturbance of the public order' couldn't be pinned down to any of the persons arrested.<sup>3</sup>

The strict insistence on collective decision-making and flat, leaderless power structures are the more ideological aspects of this collectivity, manifesting a collective political subject.

The apparent failure of scene 2 also shows the importance of physical presence – bodily presence – not only in constructed situations like these, but first of all in the real confrontations. Here, the risk taken under extreme pressure and the consequences, legal and physical, create a radical engagement that can only be hinted at in my performative experiments.

Another important factor is the way in which the synchronic body evolves in an improvised collective process; it is not something created after a specific plan by one or more persons taking decisions on behalf of the crowd. As explained in the discussion by the invited activists, it is rather a scenario, where a set of goals and directions are decided in advance at various group meetings as a general framework for the specific action. This framework is termed the 'style' of the action. Then, when in the situation, confronted by the police forces, the collective of activists improvise according to the agreed style, and the action evolves as a collective improvisation.<sup>4</sup>

My direction of scene 2 is individual, based on my own interpretation of the 'collective body'. What is re-enacted is only the aesthetic surface, the performative gesture of the 'collective body'. All the inherent psychological and political circumstances constituting the 'collective body' in its real context cannot be re-enacted in the framework given here. The immense drama it arises in isn't reproducible in a context like this, or at least it wasn't part of my version here. The collective process of decision-making and improvisation in the moment of action is also missing. Whether such a collectivity can be produced in the framework of an artwork is a question. Or maybe it is, as one participant in the discussion proposed, a sign of respect for the existence of the 'collective body' that a 'real' re-enactment isn't attempted. By refraining from trying to reproduce it for real, by illustrating it as a kind of social game, we show respect for the fact that it is out there, in the very real confrontations with the massive powers of the state, that the real collectivity evolves. It is out there the risks are taken, the hard consequences are felt and the struggles for another political subject are fought.

The physical presence and the subsequent risk in confronting a repressive state are some of the topics dealt with in the last performance 'Silent Stand'.

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**Notes:**

<sup>1</sup> More on this attempt in the commentary 'Searching for an audience' (3.3.4.1.)

<sup>2</sup> The tone of recitation is modelled on the famous, all-reassuring voice of the Danish hero of childrens' television, the now late Thomas Winding.

<sup>3</sup> The arrest was a so-called 'preventive arrest' which complicated the matter even more. The persons arrested were suspected of being able to commit 'disturbance of the public order', turmoil or even violence. The police had to argue for the relevance of such a suspicion, while the lawyers of the activists argued that the possible threat to the public order was far overrated, and the massive arrest illegal. The police lost the case.

This court case is the topic of the small performance-ecture 'Aesthetics of Resistance?'. The script is included here as commentary 4.2.4.1.

<sup>4</sup> The themes of style and improvisation are discussed in depth in the commentaries 3.1.4.5: 'Get Rid of Yourself' and 3.2.3.2: 'On Style'.