

## **Silent Stand (second edition) (5.1.1.)**

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The artist/researcher: Amira Jasmina Shalaby Jensen

Several Eye Witnesses, Someone On Facebook, The Truth Army, Wael Ghonim, Georgy Katsiaficas, We Are All Khaled Said, Omar Suleiman, Defend The Egyptian Revolution and Gilles Deleuze: Frans Jacobi

5 belly-dancers: Maizena, Linnea, Zasje, Jannie (Danmarks Mavedanserskole), Helle Winther (Zahfia).

Soundtrack and music: Lonely Boy Choir.

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## **Scene 1: SADNESS**

*Soundtrack 1: the sound of electronic waves fills the space as the audience find their seats.*

### **THE ARTIST/RESEARCHER:**

Well, my dear audience, welcome to this performance. During the next half an hour we are going to Egypt together. My name is Frans Jacobi and I am the artist/researcher. I will ask you to participate in this session in various ways which I hope you will do in the good-spirited manner it is meant.

What you are listening to here is the sound of waves breaking on the shore.<sup>1</sup> Well, actually its two different sets of waves and two different shores they break unto. And, of course, it's not just any shores in the world: it's the seashore of Alexandria and the banks of the river Nile in the middle of Cairo. The word Cairo - Al Qahira in Arabic - means 'the triumphant one',<sup>2</sup> and this is actually what this story is about: triumph!

But before we reach Cairo and the triumphant conclusion, we are going back to Alexandria, to the waterfront in the hot summer of 2010. Up on the curb by the balustrade along the street, a long line of people are standing, silently looking at the sea. They are all dressed in black, standing silent. It's a strange moment, a sudden calm in the middle of the chaotic traffic. Silence spreads and covers the entire esplanade. A calm, sad silence. Hundreds of black silhouettes, just standing still.

Today we are going to recreate that moment together. I know it's not Alexandria, and it is certainly not summer. But right here behind me we have another shoreline - the harbourfront of Copenhagen. The idea is to walk to the harbourfront right out here - all of us together - and stand in line with appr. 5 meters between each of us. You just have to stand still and look out over the water.

No action, no movement, just relax, standing there for a while. Silently looking at the water. Just let the silence sink into you, let the world in. This is called The Silent Stand. Afterwards, I will tell you more about this action and how it changed Egypt forever. So, lets try it. If you will please put on your coats again and follow me out. I will tell you when to stop and come back in.

*The artist/researcher guides the audience and all performers out to the waterfront. They spread out and*

*stand in line, silently. After around 5 minutes they are asked to go back in. They are guided to sit along the walls.*

## **Scene 2: BLOOD**

*Soundtrack 2: the sound of strange humming voices and shrieks fills the space. While the music is playing, Frans Jacobi takes a piece of fabric and forms a red pool in the center of the floor.*

### **THE ARTIST/RESEARCHER:**

Thank you! That was perfect. Please sit or stand if you like. We just have to clear the middle of the floor here, thanks. What you see here on the floor is a pool of blood – or rather the image of a pool of blood. It is closely connected to the idea of the Silent Stand we have just performed.

We have now moved back into the city, into a small side-street, where we find a small internet café. This is where Khaled Said, a 28-year-old internet nerd, was arrested on June 6<sup>th</sup> 2010. His crime was that “he posted a video on the Internet of police officers sharing the spoils from a drug bust among themselves”.<sup>3</sup> He was on his way out of the café when two police officers grabbed him and dragged him away. He was then beaten to death.

*Frans Jacobi holds a piece of A4-paper with the text SEVERAL EYE WITNESSES up in front of his face. The text works like a mask. He is now SEVERAL EYE WITNESSES.*

### **SEVERAL EYE WITNESSES:**

Khaled was taken by the two policemen into the entrance to a residential building, where he was brutally punched and kicked. The two policemen banged his head against the wall, the staircase and the entrance steps. Despite his calls for mercy and asking them why they are doing this to him, they continued their torture until he died.<sup>4</sup>

### **THE ARTIST/RESEARCHER:**

To commemorate their friend, Khaled Said, and to protest against the way he died, a small group of internet enthusiasts invented the Silent Stand. A group of people meets up by the waterfront or elsewhere in their city, dressed in black, and stand in a line with about 5 metres between each, facing the water. They stand silent for some time, maybe reading the Quran or the bible.<sup>5</sup>

The Silent Stand was designed to bypass the strict Egyptian emergency law that had been in place for 30 years, banning mass public assemblies; mass meaning 5 people or more. By keeping the 5 meters between them, the line of people in the silent stand does not become a public assembly. Signs, banners, slogans and other kinds

of direct communication are also banned by the emergency laws, but by using the strict silence, this ban is also not relevant. Or as someone commented on Facebook:

*Frans Jacobi holds up another A4-mask in front of his face.*

**SOMEONE ON FACEBOOK:**

if speaking up only brings more violence, then silence will have to articulate our grief.<sup>6</sup>

**THE ARTIST/RESEARCHER:**

I will take that quote again since it is so brilliant:

**SOMEONE ON FACEBOOK:**

if speaking up only brings more violence, then silence will have to articulate our grief.

**THE ARTIST/RESEARCHER:**

Exactly by respecting the emergency laws, and inventing another way of acting accordingly, the silent stand circumvent these laws. The main goal is to express sadness:

*Jacobi becomes WE ARE ALL KHALED SAID.*

**WE ARE ALL KHALED SAID:**

We will just stand silent, upset, wearing black clothes. Black because we are sad at what happened to our country, and at what is happening daily to our people.<sup>7</sup>

**THE ARTIST/RESEARCHER:**

Sadness is a fundamental, human feeling. Sadness cannot be forbidden. Sadness is also a feeling everybody knows and can connect to. Sadness connects everyone. This is wrong, and we are all sad.

The group behind the Silent Stands use Facebook to mobilize others to participate. Creating a Facebook group called 'WE ARE ALL KHALED SAID' they soon mobilize large crowds of people in Alexandria and all over Egypt to participate in the Silent Stands. At the third one on July 9<sup>th</sup>, hundreds of people gather along the coastal line of Alexandria and the banks of the river Nile in Cairo, and by the fourth and fifth – on July 23<sup>rd</sup> and August 20<sup>th</sup> – there are several thousand, standing 'silent, upset, wearing black'.<sup>8</sup>

The turning point comes, when two photos of Khaled Said is made public on Facebook.<sup>9</sup> The first one is a portrait of Khaled – just a normal young guy with a smart haircut

and a grey sweat-shirt. The second is a horrifying picture of Khaled's tortured face after he is killed. His face is completely demolished, one eye closed by the swollen eyelids, the lower lip split as if by a knife, several parts of the face swollen and his skull and chin looking almost amorphous. A pool of blood is seeping out beneath his head.

The 2 photos state the basic argument of the 'We are all Khaled Said'-group: Khaled was a human being like everyone else. But the way he was treated is inhuman. We are human. The way we are treated is inhuman. Human. Inhuman.

*Soundtrack 2 (again): the sound of strange humming voices and shrieks fills the space again.*

### **Scene 3: REVOLUTION**

#### **THE ARTIST/RESEARCHER:**

Now my dear audience, if you will collaborate on this next part, it will be nice. Please come closer and help us spread out this fabric. The pool of blood has now become larger, it's a whole area now. I know it's not a real square, but maybe you can imagine it as a square, a public square. In this narrative, it stands in for Tahrir Square, the famous Freedom Square in Cairo. Please gather around it and imagine that you are there, we are there.

In the same sense, of course, these dancers are not the Egyptian people, but my translation of 'the crowd becoming the people'. It's now January 25th, 2011. We are in Tahrir Square in Cairo, and it's time for a revolution:

*The fabric is now extended to its full size, creating a kind of square in the middle of the space. There are 7 holes in the fabric. The belly-dancers find their places in these holes.*

*Soundtrack 3: Sounds of murmurs and voice-fragments echoing start in the background.*

*Frans Jacobi becomes THE TRUTH ARMY. The dancers perform a series of sign-like postures with their arms.*

#### **THE TRUTH ARMY:**

Worldwide Revolution! 2011 - Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, The World. SHARE IF YOU SUPPORT THE REVOLUTIONS!!! The whole of humanity has finally woken up! We have had enough of the corruption and destruction of the evil illuminati! God willing, we will destroy this worldwide corruption and replace it with a system of sovereign nations working together to build up economies, with real money based on credit systems (NO DERIVATIVES), and placing the HUMAN SPIRIT as the bottom line, NOT fake money and consumption. We are too intelligent to buy into false notions of 'communism' or 'capitalism', these things don't exist as systems, they are only aspects. The only good government is that which protects and benefits The People, anything contrary is illegitimate. PEOPLE OF THE WORLD UNITE!!! WE DON'T NEED THE ILLUMINATI!!! WE DON'T WANT THEIR NEW WORLD ORDER OF DEATH AND DESTRUCTION!!! WE ARE HUMAN BEINGS!!! WE ARE CREATED BY GOD WITH A PURPOSE!!! LET US UNITE AGAINST OUR COMMON ENEMY AS ONE HUMANITY!!! VICTORY IS WITH THE BELIEVERS. MAY ALLAH REWARD YOU! PEACE!<sup>10</sup>

*Soundtrack 4: The fanfares of revolution.*

*When the fanfares start, the dancers start an improvised slow belly-dance. The fabric is now being lifted up and down by the audience, so they see the dancers from over the fabric and under the fabric at various times.*

*After a while, the music changes to a single instrument, and the fabric is kept on the floor. The artist/researcher starts talking while the dancers are continuing their dance.*

**THE ARTIST/RESEARCHER:**

The revolution starts January 25th 2011. It's like an ongoing explosion of fearless engagement. Thousands and other thousands of new protesters swarm into Tahrir Square, to be part of the uprising. The movement is now consisting of a whole range of independent groups and persons. Even though the different groups have completely different agendas, they act with sober restraint.

Even the Muslim Brotherhood – feared by the whole European elite for possibly taking over with a new fundamentalist regime – refrain from taking the leadership or pushing their own agenda. "This is an uprising searching for a leader" as AlJazeera is repeating over and over again scanning Tahrir Square for possible candidates. But they are wrong: this revolution is headless, there is no leader.

Wael Ghonim is one of the two administrators of the "We are all Khaled Said"-facebook page. In an interview on the CBS talkshow 60minutes he states:

*Frans Jacobi becomes WHAEL GHONIM.*

**WHAEL GHONIM:**

Our revolution is like Wikipedia, okay? Everyone is contributing content, but you don't know the names of the people contributing the content. This is exactly what happened. Revolution 2.0 in Egypt was exactly the same. Everyone contributing small pieces, bits and pieces. We drew this whole picture of a revolution. And no one is the hero in that picture.<sup>11</sup>

**THE ARTIST/RESEARCHER:**

But if there is no direct leadership and still more and more people participating, how does the movement develop? How are decisions taken and how is the correlated, highly disciplined and extremely focussed attitude of non-violence kept? How do these millions of individuals

and a seemingly dispersed bunch of small activist groups suddenly – in one day – become one? How do the masses become 'the people'? Overnight and out of the blue?

The American sociologist, Georgy Katsiaficas, has invented the term 'the Eros Effect' to describe such a development. Yes, its not a joke, he actually calls it 'the Eros Effect':

*Frans Jacobi becomes GEORGY KATSIAFICAS.*

**GEORGY KATSIAFICAS:**

Essentially, the Eros Effect refers to the transcendental qualities of social movements, to what occurs in moments of suddenly popular social upheavals which dramatically transform established social orders. ... the Eros Effect occurs in moments when the basic assumptions of a society -... the authority of the government, the hierarchy...- vanish overnight. During moments of the Eros Effect, popular movements not only imagine a new way of life and a different social reality, but millions of people live according to transformed norms, values, and beliefs.<sup>12</sup>

**THE ARTIST/RESEARCHER:**

For Katsiaficas, the Eros Effect transforms the normal individual self-interest into what he calls species-interest. Here, the instinctual need for freedom becomes a new collective identity. In Tharir Square, the opressed masses are now becoming human, human for the first time in 30 years, and the whole state system of repression is fought back. And soon, very soon, everyone is actually participating. High and low, rich and poor, young and old, woman and man, Christian and Muslim, even the secular, join in.

After a couple of days of dramatic street-fighting with the police forces, Tahrir Square is taken. People are now staying overnight, living on the square. Tahrir becomes an image, a model of a possible society. A model of public space. Truly public, open for all. It is the power of this image that overthrows the regime. It is not so important if the number of protesters are 1 million or half a million, as soon as the true symbolic image of Tahrir Square is established, all resistance becomes futile.

The image of open participatory democracy as performed by the millions in Tahrir Square is so strong that no one can resist it. It's a new icon of liberation. And as long as the revolution can hold Tahrir Square, this image

radiates out to the rest of Egypt, to the rest of the Middle-East, to the whole wide world. Tahrir becomes the center of the world, a new site of hope in bleak and dark times.

*Jacobi becomes WE ARE ALL KHALED SAID.*

**WE ARE ALL KHALED SAID:**

Welcome to the Republic of Tahrir Square, Cairo: In addition to Freedom of Speech & Democracy for all, we have the following FREE services: hospital, daily newspaper, kitchen for hot meals, security, artists' corner, singing & slogans club, poetry competitions, border control, signs, exhibition & political brainstorming sessions. Not only that, a free school has just started where several languages are taught free.<sup>13</sup>

*Soundtrack 4 (again): The fanfares of revolution at full blast again. The fabric is lifted up and down again while the dancers continue dancing.*

*All of a sudden the music is cut and the dancers freeze. The fabric is lowered.*

**THE ARTIST/RESEARCHER:**

On February 11<sup>th</sup> in the evening, there is a short communiqué by the vice-president, Omar Suleiman, on national TV:

*Frans Jacobi becomes OMAR SULEIMAN*

**OMAR SULEIMAN:**

In the name of Allah the most gracious, the most merciful. My fellow citizens, in the difficult circumstances our country is experiencing, President Muhammad Hosni Mubarak has decided to give up the office of the President of the Republic and instructed the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces to manage the affairs of the country. May God guide our steps.<sup>14</sup>

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#### **Scene 4: POSTSCRIPT**

##### **THE ARTIST/RESEARCHER:**

Dear audience, if you like, please sit with us here on the fabric. Lets share this last part together. Yes, thank you, thats nice.

*Soundtrack 5: A dark drone starts and continues under the last spoken part. The audiences sits down on the fabric with the dancers. The artist/researchers also sits down with them.*

##### **THE ARTIST/RESEARCHER (sitting):**

We did this performance the first time in May, a few months after the defeat of Hosni Mubarak, and what we thought was the new beginning of Egyptian democracy. Back then we ended the performance here on an optimistic, exhilarated note, inviting everyone to dance with us to an Arab disco beat. Back then, the triumphant feeling of revolution was still fresh and magical.

Now, when I am writing this last and new part, it is December 20th, still 2011. Tahrir Square is again a fierce battleground of fighting between demonstrators and the police forces of the new Egyptian regime. The recent and still ongoing elections might lead to a new democratic parliament, but the imprisonment and torture of critical opponents continue, even more violently this time. Hosni Mubarak and his close family have disappeared, but the brutal police state continues.

Again, I receive horrifying messages like this:

*Jacobi becomes DEFEND THE EGYPTIAN REVOLUTION.*

##### **DEFEND THE EGYPTIAN REVOLUTION(sitting):**

A woman protesting against General Tantawi, head of the military committee, was detained and then tortured by having the letter "T" in English carved into her scalp with knives.

Hassan Mostafa, an engineering student, was killed today. He bled for 50 metres as he was carried away from the front line.<sup>15</sup>

##### **THE ARTIST/RESEARCHER(sitting):**

The revolution is not won yet. The struggle continues. The outcome is still unclear. Whatever happens, it might be worth remembering the words of the French philosopher, Gilles Deleuze, writing on the Iranian revolution that took a dramatic and disappointing turn after the revolutionary take-over:

*Jacobi becomes GILLES DELEUZE.*

**GILLES DELEUZE** (*sitting*):

They say revolutions turn out badly. But they're constantly confusing two different things, the way revolutions turn out historically and people's revolutionary becoming.<sup>16</sup>

**THE ARTIST/RESEARCHER** (*sitting*):

Revolutionary becoming. The people's revolutionary becoming. What ever happens in Egypt, the military leaders cannot take that away from the protesters. They risked everything and became a revolution. They became the people. In Tahrir Square they even created a new worldwide matrix of freedom and real democracy.

During the year now gone since January 25<sup>th</sup> the concept of the occupied square as a platform for performing peaceful revolt has spread, not only throughout the Arab world, but also throughout the Western capitals.

In Spain, 'los indignados' occupied the Puerta del Sol in Madrid and other main squares in other large cities for 4 weeks from May 15<sup>th</sup> and onwards. 'los indignados' evolved rapidly and mobilised large crowds all over Spain, protesting against neo-liberal capitalism, welfare cuts and political corruption.

In the US, the Occupy Wall Street movement spread like a nationwide wildfire from New York City to all large cities, also using occupied public space as their main symbolic platform. Here, the occupation of Liberty Plaza became the inspiration for an unlimited number of similar protest camps all over the Western world, uniting an unprecedented number of critical citizens in protest against crisis-ridden neo-liberal capitalism.

Khaled Said didn't die for nothing; the outrage over his death became a spark that ignited a global revolutionary becoming. Tahrir Square has become a matrix for all kinds of protests. An icon that can be performed by anyone, anywhere.

My dear audience! Thanks for your patience! And thanks for your participation!

**THE END**<sup>17</sup>

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**Notes:**

<sup>1</sup> There is a discrepancy between the 'gentle synthesizer wave, rising and falling' and the sound of the real waves that the artist/researcher here announces. This small difference is used to introduce a distance between the textual information and what the audience is actually experiencing, thus pointing at the two levels of information - the textual and the sensual – that this story is told on. The two levels don't fit exactly, thereby questioning the order between them.

<sup>2</sup> *New Oxford American Dictionary* (Apple, Inc., 2005-2009)  
+ <http://da.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cairo>  
+ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cairo>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.elshaheed.co.uk/home-khaled-said-full-story-background-truth-what-happened-torture-in-egypt-by-egyptian-police/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.elshaheed.co.uk/home-khaled-said-full-story-background-truth-what-happened-torture-in-egypt-by-egyptian-police/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.elshaheed.co.uk/silent-stands/>

<sup>6</sup> Nadine Wahab: Flash Mob in Egypt: *Protesters find a way around Emergency Law*, huffingtonpost.com 19.06.2010, ([http://www.huffingtonpost.com/nadine-wahab/first-flash-mob-in-egypt\\_b\\_618412.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/nadine-wahab/first-flash-mob-in-egypt_b_618412.html))  
+ <http://www.elshaheed.co.uk/2010/07/02/flash-mob-in-egypt-protesters-find-a-way-around-emergency-law/>

<sup>7</sup> We are all Khaled Said: *FAQ Jul.22, 2010* (<http://www.elshaheed.co.uk/faq/>)

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.elshaheed.co.uk/silent-stands/>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.elshaheed.co.uk/home-khaled-said-full-story-background-truth-what-happened-torture-in-egypt-by-egyptian-police/>

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gxfMzHnFbh4&feature=channel\\_video\\_title](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gxfMzHnFbh4&feature=channel_video_title)  
+ <http://www.youtube.com/user/TheTruthArmy#p/u/4/gxfMzHnFbh4>

<sup>11</sup> Whael Ghonim interviewed on the CBS talkshow 60minutes:  
<http://www.cbsnews.com/video/watch/?id=7346812n>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.eroseffect.com/articles/eroseffectpaper.PDF> included here as Appendix

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.facebook.com/elshaheed.co.uk/posts/191307190893133>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/feb/11/full-text-hosni-mubarak-resignation?intcmp=239>

<sup>15</sup> DEFEND THE EGYPTIAN REVOLUTION on Facebook, 20.12.2011  
<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Defend-the-Egyptian-Revolution/213838755356454?fref=ts>

<sup>16</sup> Gilles Deleuze quoted in: Slavoj Zizek: *ROBESPIERRE, OR, THE DIVINE VIOLENCE OF TERROR* in *Robespierre: Virtue and Terror* (London: Verso, 2007), pp. xxxiv – xxxv

<sup>17</sup> End-sign in the performance:  
SILENT STAND a reading-piece for 2 voices & 7 performers by Frans Jacobi  
thanks to all involved + Susanne Jacobi, Boris Schiøler, Sarat Maharaj  
WE ARE ALL KHALED SAID: <http://www.elshaheed.co.uk>, <http://www.facebook.com/elshaheed.co.uk>