

This World We Must Leave

AN IDEA OF REVOLUTION

Århus Kunstbygning
J. M. Mørks Gade 13
DK – 8000 Århus C

Phone +45 86 20 60 50
Fax: +45 86 12 46 16
info@aarhuskb.dk
www.aarhuskunstbygning.dk

Tuesday-Sunday 10.00 – 17.00
Wednesday 10.00 – 21.00
Monday closed

THIS WORLD WE MUST LEAVE

An Idea of Revolution

The title of the exhibition is taken from the French left communist Jacques Camatte, who wrote a text in 1973 entitled “Ce monde qu’il faut quitter”, in which he gives an account of how capitalism tends to subjugate not only society and the economy, but also culture, everyday life and the human imagination. Camatte’s critical analysis of the despotism of capital emphasizes the need for a radical transformation of mankind with a view to the development of a non-capitalist life in harmony with everything living and with nature in general. With the exhibition *This World We Must Leave* we want to investigate and represent the desire for another world that is inherent in the rebellious or revolutionary rupture with the prevailing order: the revolutionary event which both articulates criticism of the existing order and presents a new perspective that reflects on how things could be organized in a different way. The exhibition consists of three short films which together thematize the process from alienation through rupture to a revolutionary situation. The three films thus constitute a kind of journey out of oppressive capitalist



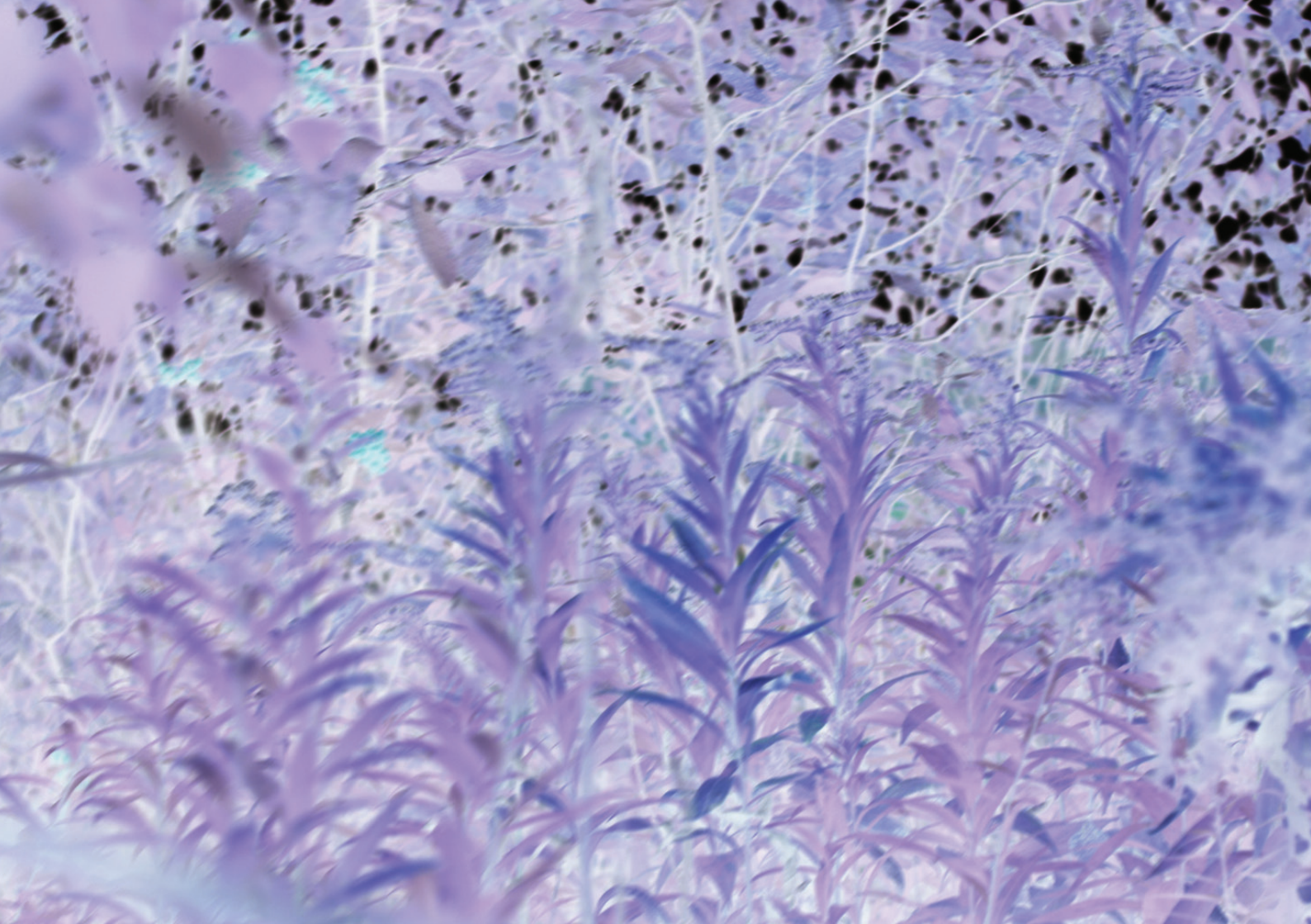
society into the revolutionary rupture, the moment when there occurs a break and things suddenly become the object of active transformation; the moment when it all at once becomes possible to do things in an entirely different way; when it becomes possible to share the sensual in other ways and modify the circumstances of life towards other kinds of desire than those that the spectacular commodity society produces and satisfies.

The films have been installed in the basement of Århus Kunstbygning, and have been dramatized as a descent into a black theatre that is kept completely in the dark. The space is only lit by the three videos, which are shown one at a time. The viewer is thus forced to find his or her way around the exhibition guided by the three film projections and to assume the role of a viewing member of the public observing a history of alienation and a coming revolutionary rupture. To the left of the stairs there is an archive that appears to have been smashed or set on fire. The archive seems to reproduce an attempt to account for earlier historical events from the Paris Commune until Genoa in 2001, with a special focus on the Situationist International, the postsurrealistic, explicitly Marxist avant-garde group which attempted, in the years 1957-1972, to transcend art and politics with the creation of revolutionary moments. History's unsuccessful rebellions and failed revolts form the background for the films' representation of a revolutionary rupture today.

Each of the three films takes its point of departure in concepts – alienation, the rupture and the revolutionary situation – which have historically been used to reflect the established capitalist world. This vocabulary may seem in many ways to address an older, now vanished historical period, but as will be evident from the films it has perhaps never been more relevant than now. Can we not all see that society does not cohere, that it is falling apart? That the bogged-down greed of capitalism rules unrestrained and produces an impenetrable dependence in which we are all caught, whether we live in Africa and are dying of hunger, or live in Denmark and have bought a new flat-screen TV. This shit isn't functioning, and it is time to get out. As a whole the installation revolves around the revolutionary rupture where there is a slide into the unknown, where the established order begins to break down and a field of possibilities arises where something else can happen.

The first film registers present-day separation and alienation via the camera's movement through an apartment that is both occupied and half-abandoned. The wretched situation that is evident inside the apartment and outside in the stereotyped, empty forms of the urban space is duplicated by the actor's voice, which describes in a monotone the colonization of everyday life and the paralysis of human consciousness. In the next film, on a chaotic street, a journalist interviews three people, each of whom reflects on whether





it is possible to do anything about all the misery, and if so what, and how it is possible today to question the established order and its 'naturalness'. The last video executes a movement out of this world into the unknown, beyond existing collectivities, identities and forms. Something has happened; the city is in flames, new forms arise, other collectivities emerge, and we are no longer the same as before.

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The Archive

An archive is normally understood as a place where one stores and classifies the traces of the already said to make them available to the memory of the future. An archive is in other words a way of making history. This is also the case with the archive that forms part of *This World We Must Leave*. It contains documents, all of which relate to various revolutionary projects and movements that were never accomplished and suffered defeat. In particular, the archive presents our personal documents relating to the Situationist movement which from the 1950s until the 1970s struggled against the powers of the established world with a view to creating a different society of a communist type, in which everyone went from being passive spectators of the life that passed over the screens to active creators of a new, collective life. The Situationists are thus one point in a longer history of resistance and revolt, which the archive tells and stages. It is an archive about the failed but brave revolutions and revolts of the past, all of which challenged capitalist civilization

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and its financial and state power, and not least its ability to forget, and to create a kind of eternal present where all past and present victims vanish from the picture.

It is an archive, but a counter- or anti-archive, where the constantly circulated and repeated narrative of the 'naturalness' of capitalism is challenged and rejected. For there is rarely space in the archives for the revolts and revolutions of the past, and if there is, they are always relegated to 'history' and severed from any kind of contact with the present. "Nope, nothing wrong here...", as we are so often told. We can assure ourselves of this by looking in the official archives, which show that things always go wrong when anyone wants something different. This is the story the official archives always tell. As the Situationists pointed out, the archive's staging of historical memory is in other words an aspect of 'the spectacle's' reification of everyday life, where lived experiences are reduced to pixels on a screen.

In other words, the archive is an instrument of power, it is a place where history is made and staged with a view to legitimizing the prevailing state of affairs. That is why the archive is characterized by order, efficiency and completeness; and even pretends to be the neutral preservation of the objects. That is what history is. But

in reality the archive is a way of reducing social relations to fixed images. As Walter Benjamin wrote on several occasions, the archive has the function of perpetuating the ruling values and naturalizing the existing order. An archive is thus never neutral.

The anti-archive is an attempt to create a more fluid type of memory, where what is remembered is not reduced to a dead counterpart of the present, but is remembered in a new way, where it surfaces as an eruptive force today. It has therefore been necessary to burn down the archive. The archive has been set on fire as an echo of the communards who, during the Paris Commune, wanted to set fire to Notre-Dame during the bloody struggles against the advancing government forces in 1871, when the citizens of Paris had thrown the government out of the city and governed for themselves. During these struggles, according to the most determined revolutionaries, there was no reason to spare the monuments of the oppressive society, even if they possessed an aesthetic value. Everything was to be swept away. The important thing was to ensure the revolution and make sure that the old order and its monuments perished.

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Film script

Scene 1

"We were not able to chose the mess we have to live in – this collapse of a whole society – but we can choose our way out."

- C. L. R. James

There is nothing outside. There is nothing outside this world. Once, society said that this was as good as it can get. Now it just says that this is what there is. It can be good or bad, but there is nothing else. Capitalist society is what there is. It is endless. Capitalist society is endless. There is nothing else. Nothing but the huge body of capitalism, of which we are a tiny part. Which we reproduce every day. Again and again. Every day we recreate this enormous, indisputable, impenetrable body of control, oppression and dominance, from which it is impossible to distance ourselves. We are the body, it is us. Now and tomorrow. It is within us, we cannot get away from it, it has penetrated into us. There is no 'us' outside, there is no 'me' separate from capital. I am the image, the image is me.

Every day we recreate a totality that we cannot understand. We are all quite aware that the totality to which we are subjected only exists because we create it, and yet it appears to be beyond our reach, as if we were not helping to recreate it every single day. We have lost perspective.

I see myself lying flat on my belly, closing my eyes and falling asleep. And waking up and opening my mouth, and my tongue comes out. But I don't wake up. I can't wake up again. We all sleep the same sleep, from which we cannot wake up. We lie moving back and forth in the bed, but our bodies get more and more tired and slowly decompose, decay and wither. For sleep gives us no rest, we only become more afraid and completely desperate in order to

finally fall asleep properly; sleeping and on our way to somewhere else. But there is nothing outside. The bad dream of modernism has become reality. Any kind of outside has been swallowed up and folded into the flicker of the spectacle.

Scene 2

"Not only has universal anarchy broken out among the reformers, but also every individual must admit to himself that he has no precise idea about what ought to happen. However, this very defect turns to the advantage of the new movement, for it means that we do not anticipate the world with our dogmas, but instead attempt to discover the new world through the critique of the old."

- Karl Marx

A: There is no peaceful revolt. There is no reason to glorify the use of violence; but violence is necessarily an essential ingredient in the foundation of a new society. It is therefore stupid and naive to imagine politics without violence, and there is undoubtedly always a need to answer back, to defend oneself and ensure the new. As when the Black Panthers armed themselves, or the Communards in Paris refused to be disarmed by the Government soldiers who tried to seize the city guns. The power monopoly of the state must be broken, and that is that! The French writer Alfred Jarry, who was often armed when he walked around in Paris at the beginning of the 20th century, understood this. It didn't mean that he fired his revolver, but he was armed and refused to accept the power of the police and the army. He understood that terror is the health of the state. When the conflicts only simmer under the surface, state annexation is less visible, but once the revolt comes and we are on the street together, then the army is brought in, and the state shows its terrorist nature.

B: But there's no longer any so-called revolutionary movement here. There was once a movement that called itself revolutionary, but it disappeared and collapsed when it turned out that it was only a capitalist movement that helped to reorganize capitalist society, to optimize it. The European proletariat existed as a class from 1848 until 1968, when it definitively emerged that it was unable to handle the social conflicts of the modern world. At no time has the proletariat acted to abolish the monetary and state order. Instead they voted in Social Democrat fashion for worker's consumption and are today hand-in-glove with the

national democracies. Today it is the huge human masses in China, South East Asia, Africa and South America who are most active. If there is any subversive world-subject that can exert pressure, rebel against the prevailing supremacy and abolish work, money and the state, it is the 'wretched of the earth'.

C: I don't know where to begin. Here? Now? Where now? When now? Call it now. It's now it's happening! But what if it turns out that it wasn't now after all, if we should have waited a little, were too quick off the mark? That we don't have the energy for anything. No more questions. Now it's happening. What will happen? What is to be done? No more analyses and deliberations. Time for action. Interpretation must be replaced by action. But is it conceivable that, after you've been active, after the action, when you have done something, you've just done the same, that nothing has happened. What if it turns out that I've just stayed where I was? Remained what I was. But nothing at all has happened. Maybe the only thing I have done is confirmed the way things are.

A: But the wretchedness is so comprehensive that the shit is falling apart. We are helping it on its way. Making it collapse. The goal is to make it all break down. To struggle against the existing order must mean to destroy it all and block communication, traffic and exchanges. The cybernetic network of the spectacle must be short-circuited. Its lines of communication must be smashed. That is where we begin.

B: But what is to be done? Do we actually know that? Is it clear? Vladimir Lenin's solution – the creation of a small avant-garde of aware men who seize power and control the revolution – is surely no longer a solution? The Russian Revolution has to be the proof of the failure of that model. That much must be clear. It makes no sense to claim that you are building up the party of the proletariat. But what do we do then? Can we at all ask the question 'What is to be done'?? Do we know what it means? And who is asking the question, or for that matter answering it? Isn't it just a short-circuit that ensures that nothing at all happens? Maybe it would be better not to ask the question at all, to retract it, to cancel it. Withdraw it, slide away, evaporate.

A: There's always a certain amount of passion in the revolutionary struggle for communism. Always. Killing is of course not the same as communizing, the communist revolution undermines more than it eliminates. But to reject the use of violence, that is to renounce revolution.

C: All these questions and all these answers – or are they all questions? What can I do in the situation I am in? How should I move forward? Where do I go from here? Is it me? Is there anyone at all? Any me? Are there more of us? Any 'we'? It's enough to drive you to despair. I don't even know what 'we' means. At any rate I'm not sure. Not of 'I' either. The truth seems to be that I am talking about things I know nothing about, that I'm not sure of very much, but that I am ... No, I'm not sure of that either. Or else I've forgotten it. Yet I won't stop talking, I won't shut up. I can't. Not now. Now.

B: The thing is, there's no revolutionary identity. In the society of biopolitical control it is the active renunciation of identity that is revolutionary. We throw out the predicates and stay well away from the so-called revolutionary subjects that only have a function in relation to power as the mirror-image of the police. It's exactly what biopolitical power wants – to tie any resistance to so-called society, to paste the revolutionaries into the insane scrapbook of the 'one society' that power is always busy creating. It is absolutely necessary not to affirm any new identity; we are neither one thing nor the other, neither anarchists nor reactionaries, 'Black Bloc' nor hooligans. We can justifiably proclaim "We do not exist". And you'll never catch us. The bombs are already in place, and they blew everything up five minutes ago.

Scene 3

"2nd August 1914. Germany declares war on Russia.

In the afternoon, to the swimming baths."

- Franz Kafka

People stand talking together, discussing, gesticulating, many are laughing, some stand bowed over the groceries they have dragged from the supermarket out on to the road, while others try to set fire to a cash register that has been put in a supermarket trolley. A couple of dead policemen are floating around in the city lake. Yet another stretch of motorway has been ploughed up and planted with bushes and trees. Others have been filled with landmines. More and more soldiers are deserting. The director of Jyske Bank has changed sides and has blown up his bank. The banknotes are burning. The city streets are full of chaos and orgies.

THIS WORLD WE MUST LEAVE

Credits

Århus Kunstbygning

19.11.2010 - 9.1.2011

Concept · Mikkel Bolt and Jakob Jakobsen

Director · Jakob Jakobsen

Script · Mikkel Bolt

Actors · Misja Thirslund Krenchel,
Greta Jiménez, Bendt Ulrich Sørensen,
Ellen Nyman, Jan Stricker

Cinematographer · Fredrik Sundbye

B-Cinematographer · Mads Hoppe

Sound · Kjetil Mørk

Music · Snøleoparden

Production · Maria Kristensen

Graphic design · Tina Helen and
Jakob Jakobsen

Stage design · Raphael Solholm

Archive design · Thomas Bo Østergaard

Assistance · Henriette Heise, Andreas
Johansen, Valdemar Silverstein Markussen

Snøleoparden musicians · Snø (hanhao),
Henning Frimann (percussion, saw), Tais
(guitar), Elisabetta (shakers, windpipe),
Natacha (guitar), Hjalte (sound recording)

Thanks to · The Camel Collective

(Anthony Graves, Robert M. Ochshorn, Carla
Herrera-Prats, Lasse Lau), Louis F. Jensen,
Kim Borch, Nis Rømer, Solvej Heise, Dansk
El-Forbund København, Red Rental and the
employees at Århus Kunstbygning.

More info at thisworldwemustleave.dk

MIKKEL BOLT RASMUSSEN is an art historian and writer. He teaches at the Department of Arts and Cultural Studies, Copenhagen University. He has published a number of books most recently *Avantgardens selvmord* (2009) and has published numerous articles on activism, the avant-garde, contemporary philosophy, the revolutionary tradition and totalitarianism in books and journals like *Multitudes*, *Rethinking Marxism* and *Third Text*. He is an editor of *K&K* and *Øjeblikket* and has edited several books including *Totalitarian Art and Modernity* (2010). Together with Jakob Jakobsen he has organised a series of seminars about Situationism, militancy and image politics in the People's House in Copenhagen.

JAKOB JAKOBSEN is a politically engaged artist, teacher and activist. He ran the Copenhagen Free University from 2001 to 2007 (copenhagenfreeuniversity.dk), cofounded the artist run TV station tv-tv in 2004, and has participated in exhibitions all over the world including at Wattis Institute, San Francisco; Stedhalle, Zürich; Insa Art Space, Seoul; Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore; Whitechapel Art Gallery, London; München Kunstverein, Munich; Wiener Secession, Vienna; Louisiana, Humlebæk, et al. In 2010 he made the exhibition *Billed Politik at Overgaden* - Institute of Contemporary Art in Copenhagen (billedpolitik.dk).

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THIS WORLD WE MUST LEAVE

An Idea of Revolution

This World We Must Leave – An Idea of Revolution investigates the desire for a different world inherent in the rebellious or revolutionary rupture with the prevailing order. The revolutionary event in which both criticism of the established and new perspectives for a different world are articulated. The exhibition is a total installation and presents three short films that describe stages on the path from alienation to the chaotic collapse of the prevailing order. The three films thus constitute a kind of journey out of the oppressive capitalist society into the revolutionary rupture and the moment when a shift takes place and the situation suddenly opens up and becomes the object of active transformation. In the revolutionary rupture the senses and the sensory are organized in new ways and the circumstances of life are redirected towards other forms of desire than those produced and satisfied by the society of the spectacle. The exhibition also presents a burning archive with material from a handful of history's unfinished revolutions from the Paris Commune to the Situationist movement.

Mikkel Bolt and Jakob Jakobsen