

One Day in the Life of a City (21 July, 2006)

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Figure 1.

Stockholm: travelling

Arrive Stockholm Arlanda airport via Schipol interzone. During the course of the journey the photograph in my passport is checked against my face a total of seven times. It seems that to travel is to arrive at another location having your identity held firmly in place: you may travel but you must stay the same. What occupies the gap between photograph and face and then back to photograph? A process of encoding where subjectivity is written on and by the



Figure 2.

London: the set-up

We are in the middle of a heat wave, the hottest July on record. It's London-heat-death, with all life flowing slowly towards the stinking Thames. The previous day I had travelled all around the south and east of the city in a last minute gathering of materials. Starting in New Cross, with a work meeting at College, I had then crossed the river to Whitechapel to pick up cheap glasses and as many fat candles as I could carry. David had

face. The face is a strategy of containment in which to digress even by the animation of smiling is to become potentially subversive. Whatever the level of biometric information encoded it is always through the face that the stream of data must flow. Without the passport you cannot travel; the face serves as the portal through which you pass to emerge elsewhere. Rather than boarding the hermetically sealed high-speed Express train we opt for travel on local networks. Take the bus from Arlanda to Marsta to catch a train to Sollentuna. From there, another short bus-ride to Rinkeby, a suburb north of Stockholm where we will be staying. Rinkeby is 97% immigrants, mainly Turkish, Arab and African and gives its name to the form of Swedish used by immigrants throughout the country, *Rinkebysvenska*. Defined as a ‘multiethnollect’, it derives from the experience of segregation, high unemployment and a subculture that perceives itself as not valued by mainstream society. Quickly head off into the city-centre via underground metro system. Valid travel ticket passed to me as I enter the station by a man travelling with his family. Still 15 minutes left on the one-hour pass. Into the city. Ethnic make up of passengers becomes more uniformly Swedish (white) as we pass through outlying stations towards the centre and arrive at T-Centralen. Travel on to Slussen and catch a ferry across the water to the island of Skeppesholmen where the Museum of Modern Art is located and currently staging a retrospective of the American artist Paul McCarthy. McCarthy’s work is characterized by the use of the staples of Western consumer culture in grotesque and disturbingly visceral ways. At the gallery I enter a large room onto the wall of which is projected a film of masked characters smearing chocolate and tomato ketchup onto each other whilst making animal-like noises. Only two other people are sat watching the film. Other stand-alone sculptures occupy the cavernous space. I

already purchased the incense. From there it was back on the airless tube to Brixton, and to a copy-shop that had been recommended, to blow up the posters and placard texts we were going to need – and to pick up batteries. As David once remarked to me, you can find anything and everything in London-town; this is a city built for expression. As regards David himself – and our collaboration – another friend had once remarked, when I had first arrived here, that all you need to do is stay long enough in London and your people will find you. Finally it’s back to Brockley via London Bridge. It’s an early start on the Friday. I drive to Herne Hill to pick up David, and then it’s a trip back through the South East, into the Blackwell tunnel, and on to Mile End. We park at the studio and load the equipment. It fills the car. Then its back south, retracing our steps, to Dulwich and, finally, to the space. We unload in-between the market stalls, and begin assembling the platform, constructing the scene of the event to come. David has already been to the space the previous week and painted the ‘Starbucks Fukkee’ logo-face in the middle of the floor. We had both been there the week before that, measured things up – thought things through. David had been busy making some of the other props whilst I had been elsewhere, on other business. And then there had been a week in the studio, making more stuff, more talking, rehearsals. We begin with the first shrine – to Shadowface – screwing in the black shelf, sticking up the defaced vogue images, hanging on hooks the hats, veils, wigs and small placards we would be using later. Finally the candles, bundles of incense in glasses and sprinkled black glitter. Next it’s the Leigh Bowery shrine. We tape up the large photocopied poster of the Bowery’s

try to engage with the work but something feels wrong. Work that is concerned with mutating the familiar and disturbing the domestic/political through collapsing the divide between order and violence, by a carnivalesque focus on comic excreta and defecation, seems almost neutralized, if not sanitized. Although it can be defined as comic, McCarthy's practice has, for me, always disrupted those codes of socialization that work through the learned patterns of the acceptable defined by the repression of desire. The work has a childlike messiness to it and a randomness pointing to a lack of purpose (it is perhaps this I find most inspiring). 'Do not touch the art work' proclaim signs and roped off areas mark out the boundary for the spectator. I realize that my feeling of unease is partly generated by the fact that I am being closely and openly scrutinized by a uniformed security guard. The woman, probably in her twenties, closely monitors my every move before finally approaching and telling me to take off my rucksack and to wear it on my front. I comply with her order. Continue through to the permanent collection. Attempt once more to engage with collection of examples of twentieth-century artworks, a difficult enough task at the best of times given the reified nature of museum display, but still under constant and obvious supervision by security guards. I'm approached again and told in a very stern tone that my rucksack must be held closer to my body even though I have been no closer than three feet from any artwork. Has the rucksack become an object of universal threat? My attitude of irritation at such a demand is met by an uncompromising and almost aggressive response. Shuffle my rucksack to attempt to mollify the security guard and she retreats a short distance. By now any attempt to relate to the artworks feels impossible so pass through into lobby area and soon leave museum feeling resentful at the tension generated by, on the one hand, a potential

head, complete with mirror strips, then sellotape the red glitter hanging over the top. We screw on the pink shelf, hang the glitter balls on the hooks and then, either side of this shrine, add more hooks and hang the feathered animal masks with voice modifiers, feather boas and more wigs. Finally its red glitter – with some bronze – and the CD and candles are placed on the shelf. The last and easiest shrine is to the Virtual Criminals. A blue shelf with small candles, mirror face and two masks hanging. Blue glitter for this one. Next it's blocking out the windows with paper and taping up the large poster listing the protocols. The Bug house people arrive. They are in the back room with a whole bunch of monitors and they have a poster for their 'Control Script Edit Levels Four and Five' on the window also. The other performers, an insectoid-alien and blue-body-girl, arrive shortly after. Finishing touches now: more glitter, straw and candles on the floor, two plinths, one with the honey, bowls and Starbucks cartons of glitter, the other with the bell. The CD player is placed by the first plinth; the tambourine and drumstick hung on yet another hook in the wall. Emily's costume (mask, wig, stick, etc.) is ready. We lean the placards against the wall (there are two of them – to be hung around the neck – in day-glo colours and with dense text). We place the silver skull in the centre of the logo, and lean the skull stick with Princess Diana pictures and coloured feathers tied around it against the wall. Throughout the day people have come and gone, the curators and gallery owners watching as things progress. Now it's quieter. We hang up our two suits stuffed with straw, making sure the various kazoos and whistles are safely in the pockets. David paints his toenails pink. We light the candles and incense, and press play. Residue's Tara mantra begins. The space is ready. Emily arrives, gets changed. There is about an

for excitement and engagement with the work but which, on the other, is restricted and coerced into a passivity and muteness.

Digression

Whilst attempts to manage and control desire are ever present, the city always also includes multiple and diverse locations where the pressures of containment work to produce zones of intensity that escape any authoritarian regime. Put simply, there is a molecularity to the city that escapes molar capture. The cops can never work fast enough. There is a potential within diverse and multiple lifezones for desire to confront the state. Raoul Vaneigem once wrote 'People who talk about revolution and class struggle without referring explicitly to everyday life, without understanding what is subversive about love and what is positive in the refusal of constraints, such people have a corpse in their mouth.'¹ He was right. Within each instance of the suppression of desire the structures of servitude and social hierarchy become visible and express a moment of anxiety. So... force them to explain each time because it makes them nervous. You can resist the pull to internalize their strategies of law and order by refusing to just meekly oblige or walking past the scene of an arrest. Seek out those possibilities and places of disruption of the bland consensus and fill them to bursting point with spontaneous disorder. Paradoxically, it is under such conditions of containment of desire within this city that I glimpse the potential for a non-oedipal love – 'pretty hard work', according to Deleuze.² A chance encounter connects dissident singularities intrigued by their mutual otherness. This city like all others has those cheap hotels tucked away in residential areas and around the rail and bus terminus. Places were lovers (travellers) go to lose their selves. Temporal and physical restrictions produce an intensity that tips the body off the plane of the organism into the anorganic, an expanded and expansive love in a zone of constraint (a minor modality). In and also through bodies – transitory encounters in clubs – but never stabilizing around fixed co-ordinates, instead, a fluid form of becoming. An event as

hour to go before we begin the '24 Hour Plastique Fantastique Puja to the People-yet-to-come'.

Digression

There is a causal connection between the city and creativity, just as there is between capitalism and the new. One name for this connection is modernism. Another name is simply the Spectacle. Indeed, the relationship between capitalism's own axiomatics and creativity in general is a grey and complex area. And, the bigger the city the more new stuff, we might even say the more expression, not least because a very large city lets things slip through, allows dissent – almost as its own internal working logic. Smaller cities – towns – tend to have top-down, often left wing city 'councils' that zone the city, striate the space (you can drink/dance here, but not here, this place (always the centre of attention) is for shopping, this place for eating/sleeping... this is where you will go to die...). But in larger cities space is smooth; there is a certain freedom, at least on a certain level. Creativity if not always actively encouraged is at least tolerated (and this smooth space is at once global and local, the result of ever expanding markets and new technologies (world-wide organization in general), as well as of 'counterattack' to the latter, local strategies that combine the smooth with what Deleuze and Guattari call 'holey' space.⁹ Of course, it's not quite as simple as this: the same cities also produce abject deprivation – and stultifying boredom – as well as what Georg Simmel once called the ubiquitous 'blasé' attitude, the ambient blankness that arises simply from the speed and stimulus of the city, as well as from the 'blunting of discrimination' produced by the 'money economy'.¹⁰ Nevertheless, cities are, and always have been, a space of possibility, a scene of events. And to celebrate – affirm – this immanence, to really ask the question (and act on it): what is my body capable of doing? What am I capable of becoming? means to be involved in an art practice that is in part determined by the city. An expanded art practice in which life is also the work in progress. The Surrealists and

Badiou would say, a pure encounter of random trajectories that could never have been predicted and which changes everything.³ Love that has the potential to be disruptive: 'love that is material (not representational), social (not familial), and multiple (not personal).'⁴ Love causes flows to circulate in strange and creative ways ('a paradoxical circulation' that lead to adventures whose point of departure is, like it is for those repressive apparatus, the face (a system of surfaces and holes)).⁵ In the despotic regime it is the love between them that finally has to be re-oedipalized: 'Tear her face off!'⁶ But it is through his face (rats gnawing through flesh) that this action is compelled. Return to your face or lose it. But something has been created. Not yet appropriated it starts to shift the apparatus: 'every position of desire, no matter how small, is capable of calling into question the established order of a society.'⁷ Schizo love will always be at odds with repression for it is precisely an experiment in becoming multiple, of molecular collectivities, of unfolding. Make no mistake about it, schizo love is a war machine. It is not concerned with the object but with processes and a fidelity to the consequences of an encounter, a truth. Becoming a voluntary exile allows for an escape from the familial and the territorial. The unfamiliar is now reversed from being a source of anxiety to a potential for creativity, even if only temporarily. Exhilarating and, yes, at times frightening but a flow in a new unauthorized direction, an insubordination. Connecting these cities sets up a flow between them and creates a new circuit of desire. This city feels like one that is defined by a particular kind of social management that has produced a level of uniformity: social democracy, social welfare, social organization. There are a lot of cops in this city and most of them are not in uniform. This is one of a handful of countries in the world that had an active policy of forced sterilization of the deficient and undesirable, sometimes simply on the recommendation of a neighbour, right up until 1976. During this time, though, they always celebrated May Day (scream 'desire, not left-wing holidays!').⁸ At work across all levels are different strategies of capture and efforts to channel all forms of desire. Experimentation is difficult but

Situationists knew this (and the dandies and flâneurs before them). This is the creative practice of everyday life, the making of ones life into an aesthetic project, the 'use' of the city (of modernity in general) in new, and specifically different ways. It is in this sense that it is never a question of turning away from the city, or indeed of a 'withdrawal from the world market', but, as Deleuze and Guattari once remarked (following Nietzsche) of proceeding in the opposite direction, that is to say plugging into Capital's logics of invention and innovation, but pushing these further.¹¹ The point is precisely 'to accelerate the process'.¹² We need more expression, not less. More experimentation, and not the endless proliferation of controls and restraints we see today (indeed, how else are we to side step those subjectivities already prescribed to us?). As far as this goes, and as Deleuze and Guattari again remark, 'the truth is we haven't seen anything yet'.¹³ This expanded art practice might well involve the creative use of different spaces of the city (for example, the small artist-run initiatives that increasingly colonize the East End, or the psychogeography that still continues in London today), but it will also involve the deployment of different times. A utilization of those pasts that have themselves been passed by; the utilization of other futures, of possibilities yet-to-come. And then, as well as these different future-histories, also different temporalities, different durations. A performance, for example, is an event, a moving away from prescribed work/leisure linear time (with all the attendant hang ups about the past and anxieties about the future the latter implies). A performance also involves the movement of our own complex, perhaps altered, bodies within the larger city-body (that is to say, following Spinoza, the constitution of a specifically new body... and who knows what this body might be capable of?). In this performance we will invent new characters, avatars from other possible worlds – syncretic fictions that live alternative pasts and alternative futures. Within such a performance mistakes – glitches – indeed anything contingent will be embraced as an opening that allows for that which is truly singular to emerge (is this not after all what art has always involved?).

not impossible and there will always be those who try, who resist, who create. This city, like all others, is locked into global networks of exchange (desires) that mean it will mutate, become alien, begin to evade the strictures of the city fathers.

Endings

Stockholm, a city that is also a psychological condition. Stockholm Syndrome: a psychological response seen in a hostage, in which the hostage exhibits loyalty to the hostage-taker (named after a bank raid on Norrmalmstorg in the city centre from the 1970's). It is not the lack of liberty at work here that is disturbing, rather, it is the development in the captive of a form of identification that sees them become complicit in their own captivity. Repression and confinement of the body and its desires is one thing but the level of social conformity amongst people in general that sustains this is shocking. Difference might well be frightening to a subject conditioned to embrace the same – but the process of creating oneself begins with a need to engage with that which *is* different and to go against the limits of the identities sanctioned by the state. By now it is approaching early evening. We decide to buy some wine on the way home. In Sweden alcohol is available to buy only in state-owned shops called the *Systembolaget*. No such thing as off-licenses or supermarkets with wine or regular beer on shelves. The *Systembolaget* closes at 7 on a weekday and 3 in the afternoon on Saturday. If you are going to want to drink at home it needs to be planned (it is a uniquely depressing experience to look at your watch on a Saturday and see it is 3.15 pm and you have forgotten to shop). Inside the shop bottles of wine, beer and spirits are displayed behind protective and secure glass. I pick up a numbered ticket on entry and peruse the shelves then wait in the queue to be served, much

We will always stutter and stammer the dominant – shriek like animals at precisely that point when meaning is demanded. A puja to the city and its future inhabitants then. If you are looking for anything to understand, you will not find it here...

The Puja

The air is thick with incense and mantra, with only candlelight to see by. People sit on the floor, stand by the walls – waiting, sweating. A bell rings. A girl (is it a girl?) in blue-black wig, grotesque plastic mask and glitter cowboy hat announces: '*Plastique Fantastique Chant to Summon forth Shadowface*'. In walk two shambling figures, barefoot, 1980's suits and painted toenails, shedding bits of straw as they enter. Their faces are veiled in black shadow, long straggly hair, one dirty blond, matted, the other black, dreadlocked – with feathers and twigs entwined. Each wears a hat – the first a bashed up Bowler, the second a black Stetson. Each hat with a mass of feathers stuck in the band. They go to one of the shrine like assemblages and each takes a set of placards before sitting cross-legged opposite one another on the painted logo in the centre of the room - a candle and silver skull between them. A bell rings and one of the two picks up a placard from the pile of five or so by him, turns it face up, shows it to his companion. There's some shuffling, some reaction – and then, an almost comic, but still unnerving squealing – as Shadowface reads, or responds to the text on the placard (*Remove All Prosthesis; Refuse Communication!*) A bell rings and it's the others turn. A different voice, more gruff – angry perhaps, certainly excited (*Starbucks Fukkee is Your Enemy!*) This is repeated ten times, ten different 'messages', each time becoming louder, more extreme. A bell rings. The girl, using a stick to keep the crowd in check, announces: '*Plastique Fantastique Whisper to Summon forth Crazy-in-love-disco-Bowery-beings*'. The two figures get up, remove their wigs, veils, and hats, hang

as in a chemist's dispensary (similar to alcohol all drugs right down to an aspirin can only be purchased through a state-run shop). About 10 minutes later I get to the till. Order specific items and the assistant disappears into the stock room to bring them back. The motive for such a system seems not to be primarily profit. Even though this is a state run monopoly the alcohol is not really any more expensive than in the UK. Rather, it is a form of social management where access to something as potentially disruptive as alcohol is closely controlled. My expression of utter astonishment at such a system is met with a lecture on how it is in the best interests of people in general to have such controls in place and indeed there is a consensus across the political spectrum, including the 'communists', on this issue. However, it seems to me to be a basic human right to be able to buy a bottle of wine at 8 o'clock in the evening from wherever you please. We should make a new Stockholm Syndrome: a range of strategies of refusal of conformity and repression of desires. They need our help. We must descend upon the city in large numbers and occupy the empty spaces and fill them with noise, action, drinking, dancing. Refuse to wear the ear-plugs they offer you on the way into the gig. Head off later for a club in Sodermalm and an area popularly described as SoFo because it has a relatively bohemian reputation. Entry to bars and clubs is strictly managed. Several security officers wearing police-like numbered badges control entry. ID's are demanded of anyone who looks even vaguely likely to be in their twenties but is really about the sadistic pleasure derived from the assertion of power (these cops have never known joy). Jackets are not allowed to be worn into the bar and you are required to pay to place them into the cloakroom that is run by the security guards. Drinks are expensive and

them on hooks beneath the first shrine, then move to the next. They put on the animal feathered-masks, feather boas and blue and red wigs. The mantra CD is swapped with the one from the shrine. Holding glitter balls the two disco-animals shuffle back to the centre of the logo and stand motionless opposite one another. As the music begins, they whisper electronically to one another (are they in love?) for the duration of the song. The bell rings. Another announcement: '*Plastique Fantastique Virtual Criminals Transmit the Third Communique Stuttering and Stammering the People-yet-to-come*'. Masks, etc. are removed and it's over to the third shrine. Foam masks depicting the third of blank adolescents are put on. One of the figures takes a large placard and places it around his neck, standing opposite the other. The other begins to read in a strange adolescent and strangled voice a speech about meaning and emotionals: '*I declare all-out war on meaning. Be prepared for a deployment of force...*' The declaration lasts perhaps four minutes. The bell rings. '*Plastique Fantastique Starbucks Fukkee Defacialization Ritual*'. Masks are removed. One figure goes back to the Shadowface shrine, the other to the Bowery shrine. Each puts on the appropriate masks and wigs. The figure in the animal mask takes a tambourine and drum stick from a hook on the wall and begins banging a rhythm. Shadowface moves towards the plinth, takes a Starbucks paper carton of black glitter back to the centre, and, as the beat gets faster, sprinkles the glitter over the face-logo in a ritualized defacialization. This is repeated three times. The beat gets louder, faster. Shadowface goes back to the plinth, takes a bowl, fills it with blue glitter and places it in the centre of the face-logo. He then gets another bowl, and places it next to the first. Honey is slowly poured into this second bowl. The drumming stops. The bell rings. '*Plastique Fantastique ceremony of the Starbucks Fukkee latte materialization of the People-yet-to-come*'. The two

music is pretty bad. Occasionally get a good night but few and far between. People dancing but a very strict no drugs policy is operated throughout the city. To even be suspected of having taken anything can get you arrested, forcibly tested by the Police and charged if found positive. Having said that many of the young people here will have been or still are on prescribed anti-depressants (inevitably in such an environment). So just a different kind of drug really. Any display of over-exuberance sees the instant appearance of security. Boisterous behaviour and lack of respect for authority sees you forcibly hauled out, handcuffed and on the kerb. Cops with guns arrive and drive you a few miles away from the club before kicking you out onto the street. You head for home.

figures stand opposite each other. The one in the animal mask removes his mask and kneels, and with his hands spreads honey all over his head – and then puts his face in the bowl of blue glitter. Shadowface kneels and sprinkles silver glitter over the back of the same head. Glitterhead stands – blue and silver sparkling in the candlelight – dripping glitter from forehead and mouth. Shadowface places the second large placard around his own neck. The girl hands Glitterhead his Diana-Skull stick. A bell rings. ‘*Plastique Fantastique Transmission of the Fourth Communique you live in Clowd-di-cook-coo-land*’. Things pause. The atmosphere is thick with incense and candle smoke. And then Glitterhead, in a loud and strange voice begins to scream: ‘*Lay-deez and gentil-man, you all live in cloud-di-cook-coo land...*’

Notes

¹ Raoul Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life* [1967], trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (London: Left Bank Books and Rebel Press, 1983), p.15.

² Gilles Deleuze, *Negotiations, 1972–1990* [1990], trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), p.10.

³ Alain Badiou, *On Beckett*, ed. Alberto Toscano, trans. Alberto Toscano and Nina Power (Manchester: Clinamen Press, 2003), p.64.

⁴ John Protevi, ‘Love’, in *Between Deleuze and Derrida*, eds. Paul Patton and John L. Protevi (London: Continuum, 2003), p.188.

⁵ Alain Badiou, *On Beckett*, p.67.

⁶ George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* [1949] (London: Penguin, 1990), p.247.

⁷ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* [1972], trans. Robert

Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane (London: Athlone Press, 1984), p.116.

⁸ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p.116.

⁹ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* [1980], trans. Brian Massumi (London: Athlone Press, 1988), p.481.

¹⁰ Georg Simmel, ‘The Metropolis and Mental Life’ [1903], in *Art in Theory 1900–1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, eds. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), p.132.

¹¹ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p.239.

¹² Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p.239.

¹³ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p.240.

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