





PERFORMANCE ART BY  
BAKTRUPPEN  
first part

EDITORS:  
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#### EDITORS PREFACE

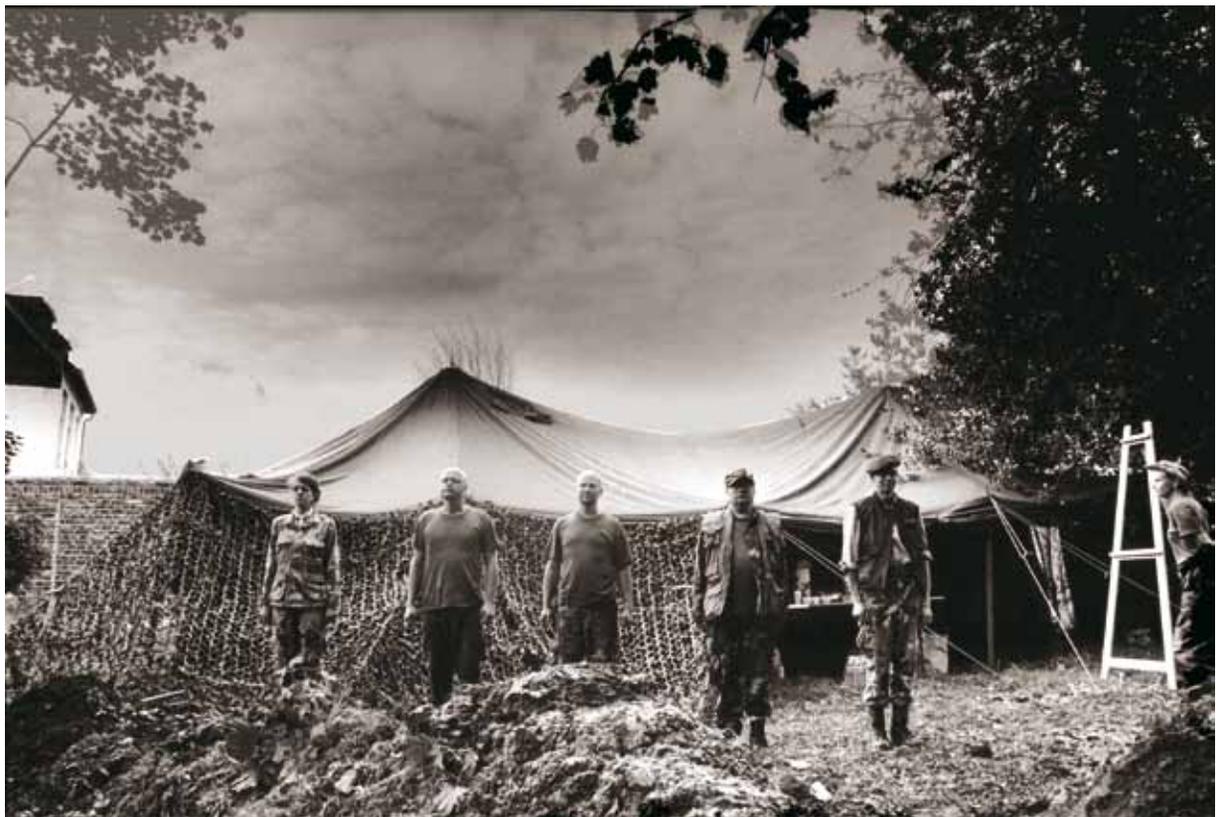
This book is the result of a long process. As editors, we are happy to present the material in close cooperation with Baktruppen. The book is considered the first part of presenting the performance art of Baktruppen, after 25 years consisting of a rich and multidisciplinary body of works. If there will be a second part is open and up to Baktruppen themselves. The collection of essays in this volume presents some interesting views on Baktruppen's artistic endeavours, and we want to thank all the writers for their contributions. Surely, there are many more ways to experience and think of and with Baktruppen, stories that are yet to be told. We also want to thank Baktruppen for their enthusiasm and the hard work of choosing images for this book out of a large historical archive. Finally we want to thank Kontur Forlag for their support and will to make Baktruppen available to a larger audience.

Knut Ove Arntzen and Camilla Eeg-Tverbakk

# PERFORMANCE ART BY BAKTRUPPEN FIRST PART

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Baktruppen in their Camp Kortrijk Uncover Operation (BACKUNCOP), Kortrijk/Belgium (2002)

## BAKTRUPPEN WRITES IN BAKTRUPPEN

People write a lot more now than they did just a few years ago. That's how it is with Baktruppen too. Everyone in the group writes, at least emails and the odd brief note with a personal syntax: Baktruppen writes in Baktruppen. And sometimes writer's block is so catching it's impossible for anyone to scribble anything other than a technical note about the last show or to set up some dates, which we shall all anyway point out are pretty uncertain and provisional ... writing practice, sort of.

This means Baktruppen is about to go into production, and there'll probably be some changes before too long. So far, though, it's only all about prosaic things such as the dates we've agreed to meet. How are we going to avoid them and come up with some other days instead? Why not some dates close to Christmas or Midsummer Day or somewhere in between, how about spring, or should we wait for the fall? Now the weather's good, let's do that, wait till autumn. And, as soon as the decision's been taken, it's clear that autumn is already upon us, and before we've even had time to reflect we've decided we should meet as early as next week, that's in three days, at which time we immediately begin to make something new.

So it's raining emails. Anything from ten, twenty, forty up to four hundred and eighty-nine every day. The time is set but where is this meeting going to take place? In Kazakhstan or the East End of Oslo? It depends on the kind of performance we're going to put on. And that's exactly what no one knows. In any case, nobody's prepared to admit to being tied down to a fixed idea so early in the proceedings, as they say. So the whole world lies open, though restricted of course by certain budget constraints. So the whole world does not lie open. The best we can do would be to find a place where it's still warm enough to sleep in tents. Yes, but on one condition, the grumbler says: That we go all out and do it properly and put on a real homage to scouting ideals without a hint of irony or other yellow-bellied arms-length

tactics. We shall wear freshly ironed shirts with outdoor neckerchiefs and shiny brown shoes, we'll all rise and shine well before breakfast gets its butt off the ground, and we shall love it! Everyday! Yes!

So Kazakhstan it is. Everything there's so cheap its worth booking into a luxury hotel, even if it's a bit pricey and we have to dip into our royalties. This is something we've all agreed on long ago. Seated in the most tasteless, vulgar, breakfast lounge in the world gulping down 820 different sorts of cereal, all in the course of a week, it seems we've already found some common ground. Once again, we all exhibit strong feelings of community, fit to burst and you bet: That'll set things in motion! We're seated here, despite everything, almost aglow now, in the most tasteless, vulgar, breakfast lounge in the world, at any rate this side of Doomsday, about which we are in absolutely full agreement from Day One.

Actually, it's Day Two, because Baktruppen landed late morning the day before, after breakfast was done with, but it doesn't seem very thought through to start a discussion about chronology just now, now that talk is flowing freely and spontaneously and we are all coming to the same conclusions anyway, even allowing ourselves some flippancy about what we call Plenary Hell, which Baktruppen dreads like the Town Clerk who arrives with the plague in his absolutely disgustingly filthy dressing gown, but this is the moment Plenary Hell bursts like a financial bubble, and one and all (or is it all and one) feel this same good old companionship exploding in risible distaste for the gilded lounge's wall-decor or mosaic, depicting some unfathomable earthbound but mildly nomadic, yet most heroic, horseback falconers engaged in hunting sheep.

So, we're on a roll at last, because when Baktruppen catches the idiotic eyes of historically righteous The Falcon Club on the wall, it's just like being back in Norway watching Siv Jensen in the role of Kristin Halvorsen<sup>1</sup>, or reading in one newspaper that another newspaper has mistaken yet a third newspaper, which doesn't mean (though that's exactly what they wrote) that Kristin = Siv is secretly in love with Thorbjørn Jagland<sup>2</sup>. At least that's what the pink daily thinks, that financial paper that imperceptibly changes its viewpoint in the opposite direction more often than Siv gives out with her rants and raves, and HRH Queen Sonja does the opposite with a contemporary work of art, in which she has certainly invested more than a few Lord Chamberlain's salaries, yet in which she still feels such a disinterested consummate joy during her contemplation that she gives a high-bred snort at any question of art

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1. Siv Jensen is the leader of Norway's neo-conservative party FrP (Fremskrittspartiet), which is growing considerably in popularity. Kristin Halvorsen is the current Norwegian Minister of Finance (2005 -) from the liberal party SV (Sosialistisk Venstreparti)

2. Thorbjørn Jagland is a former leader of the Norwegian liberal party AP (Arbeider Partiet), and former Prime Minister.

as investment, while the very next moment, without the slightest feelings of doubt, she sets the aforementioned item of the type art-object on the same level as great, true and tacit art so sensually tempered it both speaks to the highest and whispers to the lowest within us! At this exact moment Siv Jensen is brushing her teeth with something that's in all likelihood a toothbrush rather than an ovary, and as she looks up she meets Kristin Halvorsen's eyes in the mirror, i.e. in her own eyes, and she can't clam up before she foams at her own reflection: Tax allowances, that's something upstanding people usually do in the toilet in splendid isolation, and she hisses back that if she absolutely must look at it so ecologically, then she thinks it's too much with two Green ladies, even though there are supposed to be two Speakers of the Parliament.

But there's one person in our company who thinks Kristin Halvorsen is a totally OK finance minister, so no one should write as maliciously about her as one may think she deserves, besides, she's Norwegian (which someone also writes Snorewegian) or in Norwegian hands, something Kazakhstan can also easily become if a pincer manoeuvre should bring about a pro-forma democracy, if only HRH King Harald drunk with the Cabinet will agree at last to face up to this godforsaken, half-forgotten Kasakh-province's yokels and shake them stupid, with Telenor as the left and Statoil as the right working-man's arm, taking wing with Hydro and Jara and reminding them respectfully and nasally of Fridtjof Nansen, the great nose piker among our many bipolar heroes, and the only truly great dog-handler worth remembering, because Fridtjof Nansen could in fact also be both diplomat and convivium, especially when he ate his best friend and made mittens out of the ugly creature, but how in primetime network are we supposed to be open to these and other like minded questions, when we get back home and stand at the heart of the nation where some of our more stuck-up countrymen let that very same heart beat up anyone who can't buy themselves off, though creep and crawl we may, after which they double our debts because we're caught bang to rights by The Norwegian Central Bank.

So what's written above is excruciatingly correct and pure social realism, a rather embarrassing text because it's so obviously rooted in reality. That's why we bottoms up with the camels swallow and promise the mullah (the one with the anguished look in his otherwise optimal looking eyes) that when we get back home each and every member of Baktruppen will endeavour to sell both his grandmothers, dead or alive, by placing them, and a thousand million other contrary women who go against the flow, in currency instruments or bonds or

stocks and shares, and surely in the current of this grid, in which these contrary women on a variable floating rate can finally grab a hold, there will shortly be a stock exchange quotation on the one grandma who's more on her feet than the other, and with all that money rolling in we'll buy ourselves new nostrils and once again take on the aspect of baboons, because through and through we are artists, our thoughts as free as cabbage.

But cabbage can be so much. And even if the foregoing is a fiction, it's almost exactly how it all takes place when Baktruppen writes and puts on shows. And some of the good things about this are that we never go too far in any one direction. And that we would never go in the wrong direction. And even if we live in a society where hardly anyone utters a living word, because Queen Victoria still holds the floor, i.e. she got it back with the help of Thomas Alva Edison because there's still such an extraordinary amount she would like to say, and the most important part of this is: DON'T BELIEVE YOUR OWN EYES! And that's exactly what I was about to say, that for us who live in a society in which it's unusual to open both your eyes and mouth, in order afterwards to describe soberly what's been happening, such as my careful approach above, in a society such as this, Baktruppen plus some Baltic storks and Beckwerk are everywhere the only ones who both defend freedom of speech and use it. Thus writing in this performance group is always wonderful. And to write outside it sheer agony.

When Baktruppen writes and writes in Baktruppen, Baktruppen can't do anything wrong.

Baktruppen is a better bank.

This isn't a boast.

Baktruppen is high and low, and writes it.

Baktruppen breeds Baktruppen.

Writing comes from breeding, not birth.

There aren't too many people in our cultural life who have the equivalent book value of more than 120 million euros.

Baktruppen performs unassumingly, modestly and soberly within the cultural life of Norway (and Europe and so on).

Baktruppen has always endeavoured not to provoke.

It's true.

That's why Baktruppen lays such weight on writing: to get at the truth.

Baktruppen lays just as much weight on writing as Baktruppen lays on anything else.

Baktruppen writes that we are to the Nordic countries what the Nordic countries are to Norway, Sweden, etc. But Baktruppen is organized very differently, and we're happy about that.

When we believe in Baktruppen, we don't believe blindly.

"I repeat myself, and people still say I'm ahead of my time." That's their affair. I write. I'm in Baktruppen. I'm a modest bastard. Aren't you Baktruppen? Then you're probably an ignorant, stuck-up sort of fellow. But the public gets the benefit of the doubt. In this way the public enjoys free reign. Baktruppen can't allow itself to doubt. It's not possible to doubt and sing out at the same time. At least not for Baktruppen, who has already written this.

TRANSLATION: ANTHONY BARNETT



Baktruppen together with the author Dag Solstad after performing *Eurohæ?*, Bergen/Norway (2000)



Baktruppen together with reindeer in Kautokeino/Norway touring *Good Good Very Good* (1997)



Baktruppen Agriculture Theatre Company after performing *Kvakk* for cows at the farm Tynes Nedre, Levanger/Norway (1998)

## A DREAM OF BAKTRUPPEN

BY DANJEL ANDERSSON

*Last night I dreamt I saw a performance by Baktruppen. I don't remember all of it, I rarely remember dreams. I know that I got evil glances from Jørgen Knudsen, one of the members of the company and a very nice guy, but he stared at me because I was drinking from a beer glass which was obviously a prop. I put it aside. In another sequence of the dream, at the end of the performance, cows came into the room. It was no longer the café stage from before, but rather an industrial space. There were television screens arranged as a backdrop. The noisy cows entered. They placed me somewhere in the audience – they can't see the difference between them and us, performers and audience. To them we are just a bunch of humans. The next thing I remember is that we are all singing along – in front of a television – to a karaoke text. I think we are singing to the cows.*

From Danjel Andersson's blog 'The Perfect Blog'.

### BAKTRUPPEN IS BAD – EXTREMELY BAD

There are so many stories about Baktruppen. Maybe that is what is so special about them, it seems like the stories are even greater than they are themselves. What is true or not doesn't matter so much. As when the fire brigade rushes into the middle of a performance, which is about Baktruppen falling asleep. All of them have taken sleeping pills when the fire alarm goes off ... the audience believes the firemen are part of the performance. Or when Baktruppen is demonstrating in Hong Kong. China is to be reunited with the lost city and its inhabitants are protesting while Baktruppen are walking around with placards, in the midst of all the Chinese signposts, simply saying "We agree!". Or the smoke bombs at Sergels Square in Stockholm, used to represent the biblical story of the burning bush, and so on and so on ...

I have a big box in my office. On the box it says 'Fragile'. It is heavy, as if filled with stones, it is made of wood, looks truly substantial, scuffed and glued around the edges. Even this box carries a story about Baktruppen.

#### IN THE CLASSROOM

When I was lecturing on different aspects of contemporary theatre history at the Dramatic Institute in Stockholm, a student put his hand up and asked, "I follow everything you say about Jan Fabre, Robert Wilson, Rimini Protokoll, Laurie Anderson and so on. But what is the thing with Baktruppen?" In my recollection of the situation the student cleared his throat and reformulated the question, "Why do you like Baktruppen? I don't get it." (It is nice to get a personal question.) Inside of me stories are bubbling up, some of them personal experiences, others, most of them, retold. But which one to choose? Do I have to convince the student?

Straight away I end up in a discourse on quality: Baktruppen is not good, I say. Baktruppen is bad, really bad, undeniably so if you use established standards of quality within theatre. But, if you don't try to be good, are you in that case bad?

To the student, who looks even more sceptical, I say: For example there is the story about *Kvakk* (1998). Baktruppen had found a story about Storm Kvakkestad; they had encountered a story which tells a lot about ourselves, about the meat industry, and about Norway. Storm Kvakkestad is an ox (there is laughter in the lecture hall), he is not just any ox, but the primary breeding ox of the Norwegian meat industry. He won the prize of best ox in Norway in 1967. You could say he is the father of all Norwegian calves, beefs and entrecotes. But after a while a chromosome defect is discovered in 'KVAKK'. He is thrown off the throne, becomes impotent and lives his life, once so celebrated, in solitude in a simple barn in the countryside.

Baktruppen decided to resurrect 'KVAKK'. But Baktruppen doesn't do it like anyone else. They make a performance outside a barn, for the cows. The image that arises from my inner sight is monumental: When the young cows are let out of the barn for the first time in their lives. Out into the green fields in Springtime. The first time they see the world outside the dark walls of the barn. Then Baktruppen is there to greet them. Singing, dancing, and in their own way telling the story of the unfortunate ox, the tragedy of 'KVAKK'. Of course there

is a human audience as well, but they only see the backs of the performers. The cows are the proper audience; the cows are in the front row.

What Baktruppen does, is it good? I ask the student. Are they performing a believable representation? Are they singing beautifully? Are their stories correctly dramaturgically structured? Is it good according to aesthetic norms? Of course these are rhetorical questions. No, is the only suitable answer. Not in that way.

Gordana Vnuk called Baktruppen's work iconoclastic.<sup>1</sup> Simply put, it means that they use theatrical icons and crush them. In that context Baktruppen's work was seen in relation to the German company Showcase Beat le Mot, the American group Goat Island, and Italian Societas Raffaello Sanzio. Her reasoning makes sense if you look at performances like *Super Per* (1994) or *Homo Egg Egg* (2002), but it is perhaps not as obvious if you talk about a performance like *Kvakk* (1998). But if theatre in itself is an icon, then I am inclined to agree. In that case Baktruppen threw the happy and the sad masks of theatre violently onto the floor and jumped on them. In *Kvakk* the concept of 'audience' is thoroughly questioned. How does the idea that theatre occurs as a contract between the audience and the performers relate to an audience of cows?

I think their name is enough to define them: Bak-truppen, meaning the rear guard or the troops at the back. They are not really asking for any exquisite theories about their work. You only need to take a look at what has happened prior to their time. They don't do anything new. They are not avant-gardistic; they come creeping from the rear.

But the story about 'KVAKK' doesn't end there of course. Among the human beings in the audience were city people and farmers from Levanger. Not only Baktruppen fans, or as we are called, professional audiences. The people from Levanger loved what they saw so much that they decided to adopt the play, and from 1998 onwards they have performed this comedy of the ox every year. And as far as I know, they still do.

The students in the seminar room exhale. I believe I have reached them. I think they can envision the farmers singing 'bad' songs for their cows in the spring. Perhaps these amateurs dare this artistic endeavour of performing a difficult avant-garde play precisely because Baktruppen, in those terms, is exactly as bad as they are. I would not dare to sing next to

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1. Frakcija, Issue No. 15, Theme: DISTURBING (THE) IMAGE, Chapter: Season of Iconoclastic Theatre.

the Swedish opera singer Tommy Körberg in the musical *Chess*, but to sing along with Baktruppen in *Good Good Very Good* (1997)? Undoubtedly. Is it bad? Yes. Is it more fun to watch Worm Winther than Tommy Körberg? Undoubtedly, yes.

Have I answered the question? I look at the student, but actually I am being more introspective than observing him. No, I am not quite done yet.

I move on to demonstrate that Baktruppen does actually know what they are doing. It is not merely fun and games. It is serious too. I put on a DVD. It shows Baktruppen outside a congress hall in Bergen during a conference discussing art and quality. They are parking a car outside the main entrance, a quality car they have acquired second hand for 400 Norwegian crowns. When new it cost 200,000. That must be quality? They wear black clothes and protective masks. They chop, hit and saw the car into pieces. They allow participants from the conference to take part. They called the performance *Quality Smashing* (2000). It is an obvious gesture towards Gordana Vnuk's theories about iconoclastic theatre, and it is a substantial contribution to the debate on quality in art.

The students are laughing, and they get it.

#### A JAZZ BAND

Is that why I like Baktruppen? I saw a concert by the Swedish jazz ensemble 'Oddjob' the other day. They are undoubtedly extremely good. Quality ensured all the way down to the drops of saliva they produce. They are so good that they don't maintain the style all the way. They allow themselves to relax and it is OK if things turn out a bit wrong. There is space for mistakes in their formula:

"A bit into the concert at Fasching, in the middle of a burning solo by the trumpeter Goran Kajfe, the sax player Per "Ruskträsk" Johansson opens a button on his tailored suit and fetches out two cymbals. He waits for a moment before he hits them together, then throws them nonchalantly onto the floor and returns to the mouthpiece of his saxophone."<sup>2</sup>

The style of Baktruppen can be compared to a tight jazz ensemble, but in an unusual way. Their concept has to be solid, only then can they relax formally.

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2. Svenska Dagbladet, 18TH January 2009, Recension by Magnus Bremmer.

They are somehow last. At least they are far behind in the historical row of theatrical experiments. However, it is not due to humbleness that they place themselves in the back row. They know they gain credibility from the ones who have marched in front of them. Thanks to their discoveries, risk taking, and crazy activity, Baktruppen has a very solid ground. They can afford not to be perfect – or rather, they can afford to not even try.

I think of the performance *Homo Egg Egg* (2002). Baktruppen have placed themselves under the raked audience seating. They are filming eggs on which they have written texts like: “We are twice as natural as nature. Because we are unnatural too”. These are projected onto three screens at the back of the stage. There is no one on stage, everyone is under the audience’s seats. On a monitor we see a male sexual organ being masturbated. All the members of Baktruppen are covered with sticky oil such as body builders use in competitions – they look unnatural, as if made of plastic. Baktruppen is exploring the relationship between the Neanderthals and Homo sapiens, and the lines are written on eggs. When the lines have been said, the eggs are thrown – out onto the empty stage.

It is a relaxed playful theatrical game. Theatre is deconstructed as a situation at the same time as larger human questions are dealt with. The eggs unavoidably become a theatrical metaphor. Short, truthful, essential sentences are splashed onto the stage floor in front of the screens.

In *Good Good Very Good* (1997) they ponder why the indigenous Sami people of northern Scandinavia do not join forces with the Chinese and become a majority instead of a minority. Those are large questions, thoroughly argued and playfully tossed out to us in the audience.

#### AVANT-GARDE ART REACHES A LARGE AUDIENCE

These crazy connections and funny happenings reach a large audience. It is a contradiction but the truth.

As, for instance, when Baktruppen is invited to do a concert onboard the Norwegian coastal cruise liner *Hurtigruta*. Of course they accept. Baktruppen sing poorly, extremely poorly. They don’t play very well either. On the record *Come on Everybody* from 1997, it is the lyrics, not the simple organ accompaniment that catches the interest:

“This song is about forgetting. We drink for the future, because when we drink, we can’t wait to drink the next drink. We don’t really know how much we drink; we just keep on drinking, to keep it off our minds. We would rather drink now than not drink, so that we don’t have to think about it. That’s why some nights we get very, very drunk - so drunk that we don’t need to think about getting drunk anymore. I don’t think alcohol has any memory. The alcohol is like a huge river flowing through our lives, into our bodies, it wants to be inside us. And there it separates into thousands of drops, and the drops are expressing feeling, separated, feeling lost.”

The record is a concept album, a tribute to alcohol and to drunkenness. A record for alcoholics, resulting from the process within the performance *Good Good Very Good*, where they simultaneously try to explain the logic of the Sami people’s affiliation with other Asians while also brewing their own alcohol on stage and offering it to the audience.

Finally, on the *Hurtigruten* (the cruise liner), in front of an audience not used to seeing theatre, when they deliver their ‘best of’ concert Baktruppen is prepared to be thrown off the boat. However they are, of course, immensely popular and invited to come back.

I programmed the piece *Do & Undo* (2002) to be performed at the first Perfect Performance festival in 2003. At the time, the performance had the working title ‘Dance’. The idea was that this previously heavily text based company would perform their first dance piece. Placed among the audience in the small black box theatre at Kilen in Stockholm, I was very nervous. 120 people and sold out. In tight dance body suits, Baktruppen crept onto the stage. In a classic diagonal formation, linked together as a human chain, they slide. It takes 2-3 minutes to crawl across the floor. All of them are puffing and panting, struggling until their faces turn red. When they reach the corner they get up and leave the way they came. And then they come creeping again, but in a different formation. People are laughing and sighing. I felt I could stand by it and was prepared to defend myself in front of a hostile audience. But no. They were called back for nine encores. The applause would not stop.

Lars Ring turns poetic in the Swedish newspaper *Svenska Dagbladet*:

“Imagine seven voluptuous Norwegians who are dragging themselves across the stage, while in different ways clinging to each other. Feet are squeaking against the floor, there are puffs

and panting, and as a back ground there is the sound of a tired, notched version of the adagietto from Mahler's 5th. The performers are dressed in tight body suits, and all the middle-aged defects – fat, grey hair, loose skin, fleshy sexual organs – are emphasised with merciless exposure.

“The festival Perfect Performance continues to present the Norwegian Baktruppen, who amongst others performs ‘Do & Undo’: 40 minutes of variations over human clay and straw. The overall young and avant-garde audience laughs first. What is this? An absurd freak show? No, ‘Do & Undo’ is rather an expression of the body and movement across time. A tribute to our physicality as an exhausted, swollen experience, as well as a tribute to the collective, the common transfer where the individual makes sure the others can follow. ‘Do & Undo’ is about solidarity, about taking care of our brother.”<sup>3</sup>

Baktruppen proves again and again that quality is a complicated concept, as well as the ideas of popular art. It is not possible to predict what the audience want. I believe Lars Ring is onto something when he points to the defects of their middle-aged bodies. Baktruppen is not perfect. Baktruppen is not good. Baktruppen is like you and me. And that is good enough. Everyone who is alive at this moment, is last. All the geniuses are old and dead. We are all Baktruppen.

#### THE BOX

That's right, the content of the box in the hallway. It is a memento from the work I did when presenting Baktruppen's performance *FunnySorryJesus* (2003) - their interpretation of the bible. Baktruppen was part of the 2004 programme called Nordic Excellence. On that occasion the audience was placed in the store front window of the bookstore Konst-ig. They were looking out at the square (Sergel Square, the most central place in Stockholm). In order to transfer sound from the surroundings they requested the following item in their rider:

1. Electronic geophone. Like the one they use in the waterworks/sewerage system: to put on the ground to listen to the sound of leaks in the plumbing and thereby finding where the leak is. With output for headphones.

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3. Svenska Dagbladet, 7TH April 2003.

Geophone? I called around, tried to understand and finally came to know the Swedish term 'markmick'. How do you rent such a thing? It was obviously not possible. The result however, was that I ended up being the proud owner of an old geophone, a real Baktruppen relic.

To me the box is a perfect metaphor for the company; hard, heavy, raw and tired, but at the same time, held together with glue. With the contradictory text 'Fragile' written on the red sloping stickers, giving the promise of something precious inside. A treasure? When you open the box, there is an apparatus inside with such a specific function that it is worthless to most people. But, when you have understood its potential, its unique qualities, it reveals itself to be not only a useful thing, but also one offering an entirely different way to experience the world.

The geophone is used in the painfully beautiful opening of *FunnySorryJesus*, one of the most exquisite scenes I have seen. Through the window we see people rushing past. Beautiful music streams through the speakers. The experience is filmic. When a person unknowingly walks by the window, we hear the steps amplified by the geophone. If 60 people are staring at you something happens instinctively, you feel it. When the man turns around, looks into the window and sees a bunch of heads inside. Then it hits me. Who is looking at who? Who is the audience, and who is the performer? I don't know what the man is thinking. He turns back and hurries away. Some teenage girls are giggling as they pass by. An elderly man waves, and leaves. Peter Handke wrote about a similar public square in the play *The Hour We Knew Nothing of Each Other*. He envisioned the square as a theatre stage. In this case the square incorporates the chance theories of John Cage. Sometimes we are watching an empty square, at other times short encounters between strangers. We know chance is directing the piece. We know this moment is unique. It is meditative, with strong impressions full of references. Then Baktruppen appears...

TRANSLATION: CAMILLA EEG-TVERBAKK



Jesus reaches heaven using a lift at the end of *FunnySorryJesus*, Teatergaten, Bergen/Norway (2006)



Above: Baktruppen are demonstrating in Hong Kong/China (1997)

Below: Baktruppen performing Do & Undo on the boarder of Norway and Sweden, Morokulien (2005)



Performing *Kvakk* – a story of the breeding ox Storm Kvakkestad, Samtidskunstforum Art gallery, Oslo/Norway (1998)



Baktruppen gets their photo taken by one of Italy's most famous mafia photographer: Pucci Scafadi, Palermo/Italy (1994)

**BAKTRUPPEN GOING BEYOND AESTHETICS TOWARD A SPACE FOR LIVING**  
**AN ESSAY ON BAKTRUPPEN'S FIRST DECADE 1986-1996/97**

BY KNUT OVE ARNTZEN

BAKTRUPPEN AND THE TRANSGRESSION OF THE AVANTGARDE

Baktruppen is known for their irony and playing with avantgardistic approaches to theatre and performance art. They can even be understood as having transgressed the avant-garde! In this essay I will expand upon Baktruppen's first decade, showing in what way this could happen. As a working theatre company they may be seen in the perspective of visual dramaturgy, which indicates that the means of expression are put on an equal footing with regard to the way visual and textual elements are organized in the production<sup>1</sup>. Antonin Artaud already criticized the textual dominance in European theatre, which also inspired the 1960s ritualistic strategies of the avant-garde theatre.

In the 1970s and 1980s the fusion of conceptual art, minimalism and multimedia became essential to new ways of making theatre, based in the emergence of non-hierarchical working processes of collectives and workshops. Actingwise companies were researching into each actor's personal expression, and the performer got used to strolling freely about in different kinds of spaces, theatrical as well as found spaces. In Scandinavia companies like Billedstofteteater and Hotel Pro Forma as well as Baktruppen, worked on different aspects of visual dramaturgy. A new framework of production was related to the fact that new festivals of an international kind took place in major cities circulating international guest productions, like the case was in the Scandinavian cities of Copenhagen, Bergen, Oslo, Stockholm and Gothenburg.

Playing with distance and closeness at the same time has been important to Baktruppen. Artistic consciousness related to imperfectionism, diletantism, and zero-point theatre, indicated a new beginning starting from the bottom level according to Buddhist meditation emphasizing the zero point, from which a new presence is constructed. The social aspect of

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1. Arntzen, Knut Ove (1990): "A Visual Kind of Dramaturgy: Project Theatre in Scandinavia," *Small is Beautiful*, ed. C. Schumacher and D. Fogg, Theatre Studies Publications, Glasgow, pp. 44-45.

art derived from political theatre, but it mixed with esoteric movements and the belief that anarchic ways of living would change the direction of history. The artistic value was no longer to be embedded only in the execution of perfectionism and the work of art as something to be ‘accomplished.’ Theatre and the arts became slightly stripped of its focus on technical achievements, like specifically Jerzy Grotowski had claimed in his book *Towards a Poor Theatre* (1969).

Situationist artists like Jørgen Nash and Jens Jørgen Thorsen had raised the concept of co-ritus as a term to describe and oppose mainstream art blurred by commercialization. Art was not poor anymore in the way Grotowski had explained in his book. These situationists wanted to replace commercialized art with rituals, which they described as the ‘New Art’; as was said at the time, “Art is pop—Co-ritus is art.”<sup>2</sup> Later on, when pop had been accepted as an artistic strategy, including the venue of pop-art, as in the work of Andy Warhol, a transgression between art and pop took place, turning the ritual into a pop-ambient setting, which acknowledged elements of kitsch and camp in constructing pop-cultural spaces. This blurring between so called ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture is something that Baktruppen contributed to in theatre, and thus also gave a critical comment to the avant-garde of the 1960s. Generally spoken, in the 1980s and 1990s ironic playfulness became prevalent.

Baktruppen in their first decade seemed to have as their objective mixing social presence and aesthetics by introducing the drinking bar, thus creating new ways of artistic expression of the ambient kind. This also entailed veering into the territory of less spiritual or ritualistic directions, and turning toward irony through the use of new technologies. It was surely an act of blurring and fusion between theatrical expression and performance art that rediscovered entertainment in ways hardly seen since the baroque period or even the theatrical style of Berlin in the 1920s. In both cases there was a strong emphasis on the spectacular, involving lots of visual images. And even more, in the 1980s, a theatre that could be seen as recycling the avant-garde movements came about, and went in a post-avant-garde direction, absorbing the popular and pop-culture. Influences from situationism, happenings, and performance art inspired a visual kind of dramaturgy. Performance art would also emphasize the physicality of the body, which meant transgressing into a theatre of images, that could also metaphorically be spoken about in the term of Antonin Artaud’s idea of the actor as a burning hieroglyph, connecting to the stylization of the actor’s body<sup>3</sup>.

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2. Nash, Jørgen, Jens Jørgen Thorsen and Hardy Strid (1962): CO-RITUS Manifesto, may have originally appeared at the Co-ritus show held at the Gallerie Jensen, December 1962. Translated by Jakob Jakobsen.

3. Arntzen, Knut Ove (1980): Gruppeteater og skuespillerkunst, mag. art. Dissertation, University of Bergen.

Baktruppen was marked by artistic research going beyond aesthetics and towards a social space. From the mid 1980s and through the early 1990s their work departed from a conceptual style of dramaturgy performed in what Hans-Thies Lehmann would refer to as relaxed evenings<sup>4</sup>. Lehmann also spoke about the auditory and the visual as ‘soundscapes,’ thus using a metaphorical language<sup>5</sup>. Baktruppen used metaphorical concepts to a very large extent in their productions, as a part of the performance text. It was especially the case in *Tonight* (1994), where they used ‘mindscapes’ and ‘Freudland’ as metaphors for psychoanalysis according to Jacques Derrida. This could be considered reminiscent of the concept ‘psychogeography’ of the situationist movement<sup>6</sup>. Baktruppen came to re-questioning the ritual and introduce the ambient space with a playful and ironic approach to the postmodern. In performance, recycling deals with the way textual materials are re-used in visual theatre, as well as understanding text as a free interjection of references without being inclined to psychology. They searched for ways to present references in ironical ways, regardless of character.

Baktruppen searched for new ways of thinking in theatre and new kinds of aesthetics, finally reaching something not set by rules, but rather the idea of ‘next to chaotic.’ The flow of energies would be situated in the aesthetic, the social, and the body. The political, with surrealistic and bizarre undertones, was also part of it. In their early productions Baktruppen was working on combined objects with events, happenings, and cabaret-like theatrical improvisations with pop cultural elements. It was sometimes mandala-based: circular settings resembling the spiral.

#### HOW BAKTRUPPEN CAME ABOUT: THE PUZZLE OF THEIR NAME AND THEIR FIRST PRODUCTIONS

Baktruppen as a company was founded in the autumn of 1986 in Bergen. In the beginning they spelled their name BAK-truppen. They kept looking for new names only to come back to the plain, unadorned, *Baktruppen*. The name itself indicates the opposite of avant-garde, something more like ‘rear troop,’ or somebody walking behind a military advancement. It was of course ironically meant. Baktruppen’s point was to recycle aspects of the classical avant-garde in a postmodern perspective, which indeed was their point of departure. Baktruppen’s name was also inspired by the vernacular Bergen expression *rævdilter* (“the arse that walks behind”) from the Buekorps-tradition of drumming processions with young boys imitating military exercise, as the boys at the very rear of the processions of the Buekorps were traditionally referred to as *rævedilter*.

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4. Lehmann, Hans-Thies (2006): *Postdramatic Theatre*, translated by Karen Jürs-Munby, London: Routledge.

5. *Ibid.* p. 68-132

6. Schulenburg, Lutz, ed. (1990): *Der grosse Schlaf und seine Kunden. Situationistische Texte zur Kunst*, Hamburg: Nautilus Verlag.

One of the main intentions was that the people joining in with Baktruppen should mix their talents and skills into a non-hierarchical working process of a collective kind. In this way they exposed themselves to each other while also trying out things at which they were not necessarily skilled. In fact, dilettantism was one of the artistic ideas of Baktruppen, which corresponded to some of the ideas in the milieu of the *Geniale Dilletanten* (dilettants of genius) in West-Berlin of the 1970s. Everybody should be able to do everything, regardless of formal skills. This was typical for many artistic activities of the period<sup>7</sup>. For Baktruppen, becoming a major company of European postmodern theatre, it was not an intention in itself, but a consequence of a high degree of knowledge and good orientation of what was going on in European performance, cultural life, and philosophy.

Baktruppen's first production was *Ja. Jeg går over til hundene* (*Yes. I am Going Over to the Dogs*) in 1987. It was based on Jens Bjørneboe's pornographic novel *Uten en tråd* (*Without a Thread*) and his more philosophical novel about liberation and violence in history, *Frihetens øyeblikk* (*The Moment of Freedom*). This first production took place in a refuge, or shelter tunnel, in Nygårdsparken in Bergen. They performed in a way reminiscent of Eugenio Barba's Odin Theatre, in terms of the physicality of the body. It had a raw and utterly physical style. The connection between pornography and liberation had also been seen in the Bergen based artistic collectivity Gruppe 66's work, when invited Danish artist Jens Jørgen Thorsen presented pornographic films at The Bergen Art Society (Kunstforeningen) in 1966, and also in the Danish theatre company Solvognen<sup>8</sup>. In one production—*Kjøter* from 1989—Baktruppen portrayed what could be called social pornography, or transparency of social situations. This production was performed in the Bergen public Hall of Gymnastics (Turnhallen). The performance had a certain textual ambition based on a written play and performed on platforms. It was about Norwegian Christmas traditions, and the kind of sudden domestic tragedies it can imply. The newspaper *Klassekampen* wrote that it was about coldness, isolation, and the longing for love<sup>9</sup>.

Baktruppen also took a strong interest in Ibsen. They dared to rip off 'Ibsen' by using his dramas as a pretext for a production, rather than simply presenting the original text. They made cuts in Ibsen's *Brand* for the production of *Alt* (*Everything*), in 1988 in Røkeriet at Verftet, where they performed in and around a steel construction that resembled a tower. In *Bergens Tidende* the critic stated that this was a 'hermetic' *Brand*, in which language and words contained everything in a magical way, thus also indicating its own negation<sup>10</sup>. This

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7. Müller, Wolfgang, ed. (1982): *Geniale Dilletanten*, West Berlin: Merve Verlag.

8. Rasmussen, Nina (2002): *Solvognen. Fortællinger fra vores ungdom*, København: Rosinante.

9. *Klassekampen* (27.1. 1989): Anne Kjersti Bjørn, "Absurd," anmeldelse av *Kjøter* i Turnhallen, Bergen 21.1.

10. *Bergens Tidende* (15.4. 1988): Jon Askeland, "Hermetisk 'Brand' på Sardinfabrikken."

could be understood as the negation of representation and an opening up to a more conceptual way of dealing with classics. In this sense, Baktruppen recycled dramatic strategies of Grotowski and Barba, but in a de-romanticised way by focusing on a conceptual, rather than emotional, representation.

Another approach could be seen in their production of *Når vi døde vågner* (*When We Dead Awaken*) (1990) based on Ibsen's play. One of the understatement of this production was to make a version of *Når vi døde vågner* that could be performed in places where Norwegian was not understood (which according to Baktruppen also includes Norway!). This is why the dramatic text was structured into scenes, movement patterns, and sounds. It was in fact a way to develop new interpretations of Ibsen<sup>11</sup>. Today this is a common way of interpreting Ibsen, both internationally and in the Norwegian directors' theatre. The (East) German playwright Heiner Müller had already tried this kind of conceptual approach to literary and dramatic material. Therefore it was not a coincidence that Baktruppen's first production to become internationally known was *Germania Tod in Berlin* (1989) based on Heiner Müller's play, which I shall return to.

Around 1990 some members of Baktruppen lived in Berlin. The city of new performance waves and dilettantism became a creative force. Baktruppen experienced the fall of the Berlin Wall and the German reunification as crucial political events, which stirred societal relevance in their work. At this time Baktruppen produced a series of smaller action events in cafés, on the streets, and in parks—for example the football match between Ibsen's women and Strindberg's men in the Berliner Treptower Park on October 7<sup>TH</sup> in 1990. Although their work was rooted in a profound knowledge of dramaturgy, literature, philosophy, and art theory, Baktruppen turned away from traditional ways of making theatre; they introduced a sort of theatrical interplay between means and contexts. Spontaneity was a part of their research, and became an impetus for revealing the scenic potential of texts and conceptual ideas for theatre-making and performance, regardless of rules of dramaturgy and aesthetics. This happened on the basis of opposing the text in theatre, and looking at the text as an enemy to be besieged. Finally, when text was besieged, a new life of the text would emerge in theatre.

The Bergen International Theatre (BIT) took a strong interest in Baktruppen, and co-produced them. Baktruppen was presented in theatres like Theatre am Turm in Frankfurt am Main, Kaaitheatre in Brussels, Kampnagel in Hamburg, and Podewil in Berlin. They

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11. Avenstroup, Tone (1989): NVDV, a note concerning the staging of *Når vi døde vågner* (*When We Dead Awaken*).

visited many festivals in Europe, including performing *Når vi døde vågner* in Tbilisi, Georgia, in 1989. Later they traveled outside Europe, to the Shanghai Festival in 1997 and Hong Kong Arts Center in 1997/1998 among other places, with *Super Per*.

#### PLAYING WITH SITUATION: THE BAR AND THE POP-AMBIENT

The first production to travel widely was *Germania Tod in Berlin*, which premiered at Høvikodden Arts Centre outside Oslo early in 1989. During that summer it was performed at a festival in Odense, Denmark, in October at Frascati in Amsterdam, and at the Back to Back Theatre festival. *Germania Tod in Berlin* can be characterized as Baktruppen's international breakthrough. The play by Heiner Müller used images from German/Prussian history, stressing revolutionary questions, Stalinism, and conditions in post-war East Germany. The setting was a big diagonal counter, and the paraphrased text was presented as lectures on Norwegian history in the post-World War II period. Baktruppen attempted to adapt Müller's text to Norwegian national identity by reworking the text, as well as by their use of music and elements like an elk, a pine tree, and slides to depict specifically Norwegian objects and settings. The stage design brought to mind a production by The Wooster Group from 1983, which also had a large counter as a part of the scenic design. It was heavily loaded with technical equipment as the main scenic element. Baktruppen also used this kind of scenic installation, reminiscent of the avant-garde mainstream theatre of the 1980s. However, Baktruppen furthered the idea of using text in new and experimental ways, by following new dramaturgical tendencies in visually based project theatre, such as recycling, and by working with visual implications in regard to tableau and pictorial elements.

Actors recited, acted, and danced according to textual elements, based on improvisations and personal resources. This was a new energy, a new direction, as opposed to the more conceptual dramaturgy of the theatre of images in the 1980s. Baktruppen's method of remaking textual elements to provoke a certain irony can be described as a 'conscious form of recycling,' and was a method for breaking illusions by ways of paraphrasing texts and creating textual images as sound scapes.

The Baktruppen production “ ” was presented in Amsterdam at the Touch Time Festival in 1991. It paraphrased texts by Gilbert and Sullivan, Samuel Beckett, and others. The actors

themselves added personal material, and the production was based on anatomical metaphorical structures, organizing the actors' movement on the floor according to figures not visible to the audience, which again was a reflection of the rituals of the 1960s. The audience was partly seated around the 'staging' area, and partly on chairs in a half circle, which leant a feeling of being very close to the action. In " " there were strong auditory elements, including electronic soundtracks and musical improvisation. The dramaturgical structure was cabaret-like, with sequences giving the impression of something 'spontaneous,' which added to the pop-like ambience. And by erecting a bar in the performance space, the audience could even buy drinks during the performance, heightening the ambience even more.

The bar, or counter, used for either electronic equipment or as a drinking bar, was also included in many of the later productions, such as the *Peer Du lügst. –Ja.* series. These were several smaller productions from the year 1993, based on the figure of Peer Gynt and taken from Henrik Ibsen's play of the same name. Baktruppen once more demonstrated their recycling, paraphrasing, and improvisational techniques. The dramaturgical grip was to make Peer appear in different situations, like the nomadic or strolling figure he can be perceived of in Ibsen's play. Baktruppen made him appear in five different productions. In Frankfurt am Main, in the Daimlerstrasse, which was the annex theatre of Theatre am Turm, Peer appeared in an erotic enlightenment show. Later in Zürich, a version called *In 1997 Hong Kong Will be Incorporated into China*, was performed. At the Bergen International Theatre, Peer was a seller of used cars, and finally in Antwerp he participated in the opening of a Happiness Research Institute. In my opinion Peer thus was perceived as an urban nomad.

David Hughes, in Hybrid Magazine, states that the Peer Gynt series misquoted the famous first lines of Ibsen's play. (In the original version Peer answers "No" when told he is lying.) "Despite the seeming lack of work, Zurich proved to be an important event: pieces of material and concepts that continued through the rest of the series, and which also hinted at next year's 'Super Peer' shows, were devised and introduced there."<sup>12</sup>

*Super Per*, (with only one e in the name of Peer) put together the highlights of the Peer productions; premiering in Oslo in 1994, it then toured Norway, from Bergen to Northern Norway, and then moved on to Frankfurt am Main and Amsterdam. This seemingly cabaret-like production was the summation of the Peer productions, as well as the overview of the working style of Baktruppen thus far. The actors presented the main headlines of the Peer

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12. Hughes, David (1994): "The Way North, Norway, Baktruppen. Cool, Calm and Collective," Hybrid, The International Cross-Artform Bi-Monthly Issue 6, Nordic Issue, Dec. 1993/Mar. 1994.

productions and told anecdotes of his life—for example that Per went to New York to buy all the Elvis stamps he could find. Their style of expression, including stories, acting, and dancing, fostered the sense that anything could happen. In the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, it was written that the production held a lot of craziness. In spite of that, there was a certain cunning (*schlauheit*), because they didn't create rituals to be repeated, and every feeling was exaggerated and given comic effect<sup>13</sup>.

The way Baktruppen was able to surprise indicated how far they had put themselves from the conceptual or self-referential kind of dramaturgy of the 1980s. Their particular style juxtaposed all means of expression into a landscape, which some people were skeptical about; others found their way into it by realizing that you had to decide for yourself what you saw. When Baktruppen performed their Antwerp version of *Peer Du lügst. –Ja.* in 1993, Professor Luk van den Dries, at the University of Antwerp, was part of an audience that included a group of international students. It was clear that the audience to a large extent found it difficult to relate to the production, with the actors partly behaving as if they were in real life and not in a performance; to some of them it simply was not theatre. On the other hand somebody in the audience expressed a sudden and direct realization of a personal nature. This kind of real-time-versus-performance situation, and expression through quotations and movement patterns, in my opinion, is a significant contribution to the development of a new theatre of recycling. Also, Baktruppen's wish to root their work in a specific Norwegian context was underlined by their blue eyes, an effect heightened and emphasized by the use of blue contact lenses.

When it came to understanding the art of acting, Baktruppen fully relied on the concept of integrating the whole body using a physical language, corresponding to a kind of musical movement, of which Fulvio Salvadori stated, "The performer is enveloped in a sound environment by the musical flow, putting him in psychological synchrony with the audience. That is the effect that one seeks to reach with every participant in the environment."<sup>14</sup> In addition to reflecting a musical flow in Baktruppen's productions, I think Salvadori's point of view describes very well how the action of the performers stands with the reaction of the spectators. As an artistic perspective this had a final breakthrough in the production of *Tonight*, where there was a total cultivation of the naive and the sublime at the same time.

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13. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ, 5.6.1994): Markus Payer on Baktruppen.

14. Salvadori, Fulvio: In Memo 3.

*Tonight* was produced at the Kampnagelfabrik in Hamburg, Germany, in 1994. The production took the company into the realm of relentless experimentation with simulation. They also examined social context, using a more ambience-inspired approach to dramaturgy, via a quest for marginality in regard to identity. The internet was used as a means of expression and the production was based, at least thematically, on the history of the Kampnagelfabrik, going back to the time when this cultural house was an industrial site producing nails for ships and industry. Baktruppen turned the communication techniques into visual and auditory structures. Throughout the performance a computer was active, and the audience was brought into the experience of the performance with the actors. Simultaneously a story was told about how the human brain functions, relayed in the format of a 'performance lecture.' Between the electronic communications—via the internet—zooming in on words and images and by the telling of stories, the effect was a 'hypertext': a text about the text of the performance. In addition to all this, a story of a snake dance, a tale of how to prevent a snake from biting you, was demonstrated by one of the actors, who performed the dance in a very imaginative and demonstrative way.

In *Tonight*, three pianos and an entire data communication station sat on Persian carpets in the middle of the performance space floor. The performers' costumes were sophisticated and expensively made evening dresses from all over the world, suitable for impressing an audience. Aspects of body identities were emphasized, and a cultural anthropological space emerged. A kind of 'real-world anti-comedy comedy' was created, playing with hidden meanings of a more transparent and striking kind, as it was described in a review in the German journal *tageszeitung* (taz). Reflections and mirror effects were used—and even the words of the text were twisted and changing all the time.

During the performance, major catchwords were repeated several times. 'Mindscape' and 'Freudland' were repeated in the context of mixing different kinds of identities in this *mindscape* that happens to be situated in *Freudland*, or the 'land of metaphorical psychoanalysis.' Theatre, then, is no longer just about exposing the beautiful tableau effects, but rather screening identities as if it were a psychological healing process. The performers moved in wavelike patterns and circles of fantastic visual effects. The maturity in the performers' playfulness impressed the German audience, especially in Frankfurt am Main at the Theatre am Turm.

The music and the songs strongly impacted the atmosphere. There was a mixture of electronic music and acoustic instruments like the accordion and others. The songs have been remembered ever since by some of those present in the audience, especially in Frankfurt am Main, as the Baktruppen 'schlager' songs. This was the peak production of Baktruppen's first decade.

To complete the story of Baktruppen's first decade, I should also mention *Good Good Very Good*, later referred to simply as *Very Good*, a production performed in Leuven, Belgium, in 1997 (among other places). It was based on the production *VERY*, an antipodal dance-theatre about the Sami people and the Chinese performed in Gallery Otto Plonk in Bergen in November 1996. The production summed up the notion of ambient theatre, combining it with the question of local and global identities. Organized in a space including a bar, alcohol was burned on stage and then served to the audience as soon as the process of burning had been accomplished. Baktruppen performed surrounded by iconic pictures and objects from Chinese and Sami culture. They made an important statement about the ways in which smaller cultures could be influenced or even absorbed by dominant cultures<sup>15</sup>, through their actions as well as memorable lines from the performance like, "The Sami are so few and the Chinese so many, but what they have in common is that everybody likes alcohol and fat."

With this production, Baktruppen created a space for living and designing art. A 'living space' as Edgar Jager spoke about in his famous article in *Datum* (Jager 1993). To sum up, one could say that a main characteristic of Baktruppen to this point was to work as a collective, breaking away from hierarchies, researching interplay and relational situations, as well as paraphrasing texts.

When Jager, in *Datum*, asked the question, "How can we define the time we live in?" the answer he gave was that the guidelines for the theatre were the ambience as we know it from techno and house parties. He referred especially to Baktruppen, along with Reza Abdoh, and the later works of The Wooster Group. Jager said about the Norwegian company: "Baktruppen had taught us that nothing is sacred about the small piece of space in which a performance takes place."<sup>16</sup> Jager concentrated on a new generation of smaller companies coming up in to the international circuit in the early 1990s. To this generation Baktruppen contributed substantially.

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15. Arntzen, Knut Ove (2007): *Det marginale teater. Et nordisk blikk på regikunst og ambiente forsøk*, Bergen: Alvheim og Eide.

16. Jager, Edgar (1993): "Ambient Theatre/@temporary:/for the nineties/," *Datum*. Amsterdam. (This article has since been taken off the internet.)

In Germany, Baktruppen had a certain impact, especially among the first generation of theatre artists educated at the famous Angewandte Theatrewissenschaft (Applied Theatre Studies) at the University of Giessen in Hessen. This generation has gone on to form companies like Showcase Beat Le Mot and She She Pop, which also dramatist and director René Pollesch belonged to. Florian Feigl from Showcase has put it the following way: “Baktruppen had humor. They were dancing, they were ironical and always blowing up nice balloons and playing about with them; they were marked by a sincere joy for playing.”<sup>17</sup> Indeed, it was to their benefit that young German theatre artists exchanged ideas with the Norwegian company—who’d emerged from a very fertile artistic and academic situation rooted in Bergen, awakened in terms of new artistic creation since the 1980s—they were fortunate because, to my mind, it all began with Baktruppen.

EDITED BY JESSIE SHOLL

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17. Feigl, Florian (2008), a talk in Düsseldorf 9.11 on Baktruppen and Showcase Beat Le Mot, which Feigl was a member of from the founding of the company in 1997 until 2004.



BAKTRUPPEN IN A GERMAN PERSPECTIVE  
THREE WITNESSES OF BAKTRUPPEN'S FIRST DECADE

I. GOOD MEMORY *by Hans-Thies Lehmann*

I think it must have been almost two decades ago, in September of that legendary year 1989, that Knut Ove Arntzen invited me to take part in a performance symposium and festival in Bergen. Alongside such illustrious names as the Théâtre du Radeau, for me at that time the primary location of new French theatre, Remote Control Production by Michel Laub, who I was meeting personally for the first time in Bergen, and Henryk Baranowski's Transform Theatre, there was also a Norwegian group announced in the program with the name Baktruppen. Their name meant—as I was assured—something like backside-troupe or even arse-troupe. As someone captivated by the German political situation at that moment, engrossed with Heiner Müller's work since 1978, and having just moved from Gießen to Frankfurt, I was more than curious about this group that was announced to present *Germania Tod in Berlin*.

We, that is some visitors and myself, were taken on a tour through Bergen that day—I don't quite know whether my amazement about the number of people under the influence of beer, and young people already asleep on the pavement, dated from this time or another. In any case, we were not led to a theatre at all, but to the top floor of a large hotel where the performance would take place. The arrival in the lift, the modern hotel setting, all this was unfamiliar to me at the time. At last we found ourselves again in what I recall as a huge technical room. Inside, there was actually no stage at all, no normal theatrical arrangement, but instead a kind of tall barrier built diagonally across the space, behind and above which the performers could be seen. Close to the wall there was a huge podium or oversized reception counter; the performers were talking and seemed to be going about different activities. We, the spectators, were sort of kept at a distance and left in peace. There were pictures of Oslo after the war. Obviously Müller's text was being linked with references to the recent history

of Norway. Equally obvious was an atmosphere of quiet sorrow that pervaded the performance. The theatrical concept was a casual equality of all theatrical means, for which Knut Ove Arntzen had just recently coined the term ‘visual dramaturgy.’

The performance was to such a high degree a non-performance, such a puzzling, highly fascinating absence of possible representation, that in the following hour I watched, no, I experienced, spellbound, the presence of people indulging in actions with the utmost serenity. One was putting on a record (Bach) and taking it off, again and again, with the same casual regularity. Little balls were dropped into a bucket and the sound was amplified with a microphone. One spoke as another held the microphone for him. I didn’t understand what was being said, it was doubtless fragments of Heiner Müller’s text with a smattering of German words in between. Little was left of Müller’s tragic picture of Germany—however, the atmosphere, the presence, the deeply buried but nevertheless tangible humor of the actors contributed to an atmosphere difficult to describe. It was free of thought and perception, and the humor (despite being withheld), was palpable. I soon abandoned the attempt to ‘interpret.’ Afterward, standing with Hugo De Greef, the director of the Kaaitheatre, we looked at each other and were in agreement within a few words: We had seen here a very, very unique and wonderful theatrically talented troupe. He invited them to Belgium afterward. They also came many times to the TAT in Frankfurt under Tom Stromberg’s direction.

That was my first encounter with Baktruppen; conversations followed, further meetings in Norway and more frequently in Frankfurt, and the works that came later also delighted me. They exhibited a minimum of acting technique and demonstrated in their work time and again what they called the “resistance of the body to the fascism of the text.” The creativity of the group seemed inexhaustible—on one occasion they all wore blue contact lenses, once they wore small explosive charges of the sort used in film to simulate being shot. With each new work you could count on totally new ideas. I particularly remember Tone Avenstroup at a meeting of artists and theorists in Amsterdam, during which many deep things were said about Utopia, introducing the equally simple and beautiful formula of Baktruppen to the room: “Our Utopia is to make something together.” Suddenly there was a very open clearing, a pause in the discourse. Actually I remember that for a long time the group had steadfastly resisted appearing individually at events or meeting the press. At the TAT in Frankfurt, the then co-director Ulrike Scheidermaier found what I consider to be the best way of describing Baktruppen: “That is really the most laid-back theatre group in the world.”

## II. WHAT DID BAKTRUPPEN ACTUALLY DO? by Arnd Wesemann

*In his text on Baktruppen, Arnd Wesemann emphasizes the question of what Baktruppen actually did. He does it by remembering Baktruppen in the past, while having recently seen the present day work of former members Tone Avenstroup and Hans Petter Dahl.*

Tone Avenstroup was in Theatrehaus Mitte in Berlin, a former school rented out as rehearsal space. The co-founding member of Baktruppen invites us into the hall with Asi Föcker and Anoushka Trocker, who are taking care of the music. Not too loud. More like the best stuff from our youth. The poet Tone Avenstroup, in *This is not a love song #4* cooks cauliflower, throws rice, chews strawberries and spits them in a tin bucket. It is neither actionism nor some kind of revival, but rather a very comfortable, very competent, elegant event. After fifty minutes no one in the audience gets up to leave. No one flees the theatre space. Everybody stays seated. A Performance is like a living room, from which one does not have to be thrown out, as opposed to theatre, where the audience can only indicate what is to be indicated through their applause: obedient respect. Above all Tone Avenstroup is the perfect host, which is undoubtedly also the first characteristic of Baktruppen.

Hans Petter Dahl was recently in the Kaaitheatrestudios in Brussels. Here he sang with his dream lady Anna Sophia Bonnema (from Maison DahlBonnema) a “pop-opera,” a musical comedy: *The Ballad of Ricky and Ronny*. The former member of Baktruppen is a musician, who composes on his computer and sings like a baritone. Anna Sophia Bonnema wrote a perfect libretto about two lovers whose lives are insufficient because every civilization always pities itself against the obsession of love. This is not just the truth, the two sing it as well, word for word, every sigh, every kiss and every fantasy. It is the absolute truth. In the end they become comic figures immersed in an imaginary world in which they poison each other, and their souls disappear into space. Tears fall, because it is exactly as melodramatic as Baktruppen never were, but from-the-heart nevertheless. Because undoubtedly the second characteristic of Baktruppen is their desire to surrender entirely to desire. This, and nothing else.

*Then Wesemann encounters Baktruppen in Graz Austria, at the festival Steierischer Herbst in 2007. This event makes him turn toward the past. He says that Baktruppen freed spectators at the beginning of the 1990s from the dead serious improvisation. They were the founders of ambient theatre and dance. Especially with reference to “Tonight”, Wesemann states that Bak-*

*truppen once danced on Persian carpets and drank their home-brewed schnapps. Recently the legends are back, the Rolling Stones of yesterday's avant-garde. They simply dance the film.*

Above all, they have never used the theatre as a theatre, but rather as a public house for the public, who are no longer watching but taking part in a party that Baktruppen have thrown in their honor. That is a radical difference to the conventions of the conventional stage, which we call the theatre. In principle every theatre begins in a foyer, in which the beginning is made and the interval experienced together. This foyer Baktruppen have dragged on stage, exactly where the theatre usually puts its work rather than its parties. Baktruppen have requested that their public come on stage, rather than staying in their tiers and seats like in a church where silence and attention prevail, where one is allowed to witness, preferably mutely, that which is to be considered the work. The theatre, in which Baktruppen however do not work—at least not according to the shared responsibility in making their art—this theatre is inadvertently taken off its hinges. The foyer is the stage and the stage is the foyer and the balconies are too far away from the celebration of the theatre to have a real significance for Baktruppen.

Baktruppen is not any kind of mimetic mirror of any actual situation, but rather, like Tone Avenstroup, they are hosts. And like Hans Petter Dahl, the celebrants of a longing. They all ask themselves honestly: What is it you long for? What was it that theatre craved as it emerged? Freedom. And today? It is the freedom that Baktruppen relates to, as if it was only an amusing affront to a theatre that it could mistake for a kind of lounge, a party, with the infamy, that it could tear the premises of theatre apart. What is it that the theatre is afraid of, when Baktruppen blurs the lines somewhat between public and actors and reveals some of the ridiculousness of the conventions of the theatre? That the words party and punter (*feier und freier*), feast and test (*fest und test*) work as well as anagrams, are as close in a society that confuses everything not real with theatre? Something unattainable? Something only to be stared at? As a utopia meant only for our forefathers from Aeschylus to Schiller? Simply and nothing more, only there for the veneration of a culture that no longer exists. And no longing, because we were forbidden to have longing. But we do. Longing for and with Baktruppen who are really never averse to longing.

*Arnd Wesemann's final point is that it was Baktruppen who created a longing for a new kind of theatre situation, which deliberated and relaxed the audience. There was a longing for the ambience, for using the foyer of the theatre as a space for living, thus creating the shared experience or foyer-effect, as Wesemann puts it.*

### III. BAKTRUPPEN, A TRANSFORMATION *by Kathrin Tiedemann*

What do the rights of the indigenous populations of Norway and Hong Kong, and a drunken horse have in common? Actually nothing—and that’s why they all appear in a Baktruppen piece.

When I think about Baktruppen, the first thing that occurs to me is one of the craziest evenings in the theatre that I can remember. The first part of the evening, the actual performance, I can still remember very clearly. The second half of the evening has fallen prey to oblivion. “I don’t think alcohol has any memory,” was one of the lines in a relevant song about oblivion, sung during the performance.

This performance was about 10 years ago; it was called *Good Good Very Good* (1997). In it, Baktruppen talk, amongst other things, about the Sami population residing in Norway, who as the minority in their own country, fight for the preservation of their traditional and unique way of life. Meanwhile, Baktruppen make the initially surprising suggestion to the Sami of looking for allies in Hong Kong, instead of drawing on the solidarity of other oppressed peoples. What sounds at first like an amusing idea, explained by the fact that there would be easily a million supporters there, turns with more examination into a very clever question about the dominant power relationships in a global world order, and reveals the anarchistic mindset of Baktruppen. One could go so far as to say that there is a utopia contained in this suggestion: that people all over the world should have equal rights to the free choice of their way of life, regardless of whether a few thousand or a few million people are being talked about. Of course we all know that this is not the case. The absurdity of their suggestion makes it clear how far we have accepted, in the course of the 1980s and 1990s, the ineffectiveness of political protest, while at the same time advocating a concept that unites art and political activism in full knowledge of their own impotence. The artists’ group sent their suggestion in the form of a letter to the Sami government, which they read out during the performance. Who knows, had the Sami taken up Baktruppen’s suggestion and successfully won the Chinese as allies, perhaps they would be suffering less today under the consequences of global warming. But who takes an artist collective seriously, especially one known above all for amusing songs and dances? In the performance moreover, a video was shown in which you can see Baktruppen demonstrating through the over-crowded streets of Hong Kong,

carrying self-made placards with the words “We Agree” on them. Criticism through affirmation. It’s clear that the passersby take absolutely no notice of the demonstration, which you could take as a silent agreement.

Baktruppen had brought back small objects such as masks, hand-crafted objects, and pieces of clothing from their journeys to China and Northern Norway. These were parts of the stage installation. This installation was mostly comprised of what the band called ‘The Bar’, and their instruments, as well as a large red curtain or carpet trailing on the floor, which hung from the ceiling in a strip of perhaps three meters wide and became the background for the shooting of a video. Everything that played out live on the red background was filmed by a camera and simultaneously projected onto a video screen. The eyes of the spectator could continuously shift from the live events to the recording and back again, and in this way perceive the difference between performance and video image. The spectator was able to decide which was more attractive, the perfect video image or the live performer. The stage set-up had the effect of an informal commentary on theatres’ competition with television and other media. The band played songs that dealt exclusively with the theme of alcohol and the freedom of drinking, underscored by compositions in the style of music heard in Asian karaoke bars: synthesizer sounds that resemble a classic Hammond organ. Onstage there was also an apparatus with which alcohol was distilled. ‘The spiritus’ (Latin for ghost), distilled during the performance was diluted with hot water, its taste refined with coffee powder and sugar and distributed amongst the audience. It’s known that heat and sugar hasten alcohol uptake in the blood and so in a very short time all present were in a thought- and speech-quickening state of inebriation. This inebriation was not comparable to the usual effects of alcohol consumption such as the initial tipsiness and jollity, followed by a reduction in the ability to react and tiredness. I recall much more the unbelievably inspired discussions with other audience members, the utterly euphoric atmosphere, clarity of thought, moments of happiness like at a real celebration. Baktruppen brought about a real transformation with the simplest methods, in which all participants, artists and spectators were included. Together, we had broken through a boundary and experienced an exceptional state of mind and body. *Good Good Very Good = Drunk Drunk Very Drunk.*

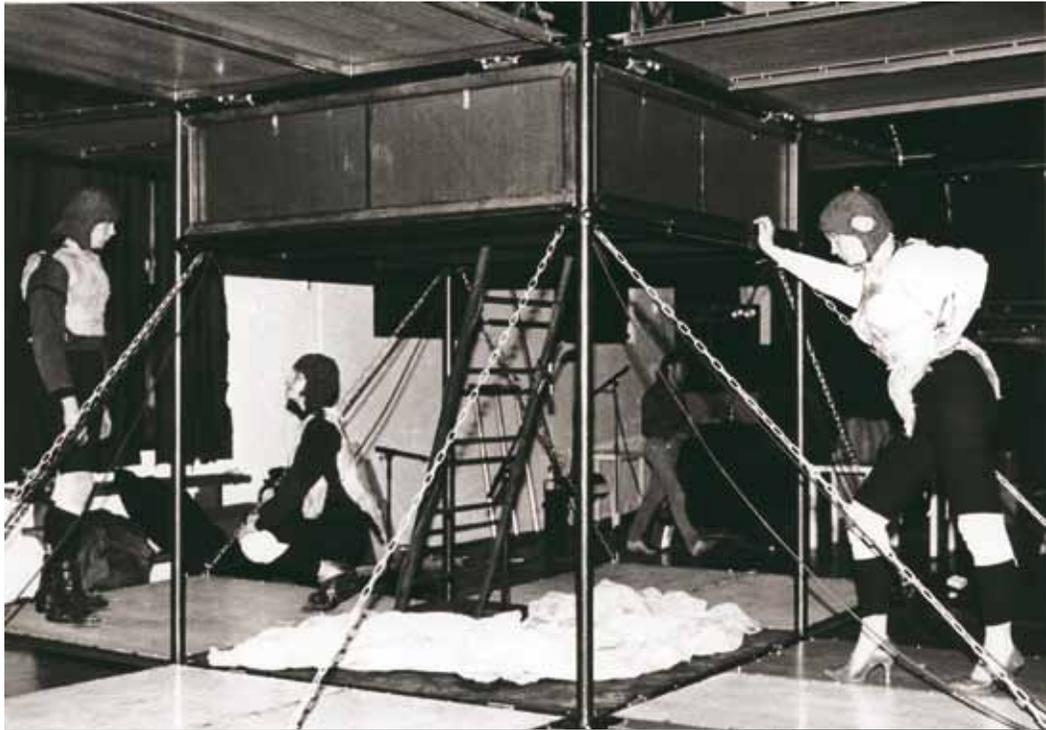
As I came to know Baktruppen in the 1990s, they embodied the principle of an anti-avant-garde. Being ‘Baktruppen’ described a widespread attitude towards life in the 1980s and 90s; at least it was the mark of a generation born in the mid-60s. Our teachers from

the 1968 generation were overwhelming; everything had already happened before we came along: Revolutions in the arts, between the sexes and in politics had all already taken place. We were simply too late. Those wild years were only known to us from books, photos, films, and of course the endless speeches of our teachers. Baktruppen ingeniously turned the feeling of belonging to the rear guard to their advantage. They were affirming their geographically peripheral position. Being cut off from what is considered to be the discourse at the center, they were defining a new artistic self-confidence.

Being an artist in a theatre context is not easy because traditionally, only the playwright and director are given authorship. Baktruppen has put a collective in place of the author or director and in this way created a model for an artistic existence beyond the institutions and their norms. They've defined theatre as a living space. With this they have necessarily taken up the position of the classical avant-garde: They seize upon everything that pleases them, and any method seems apt when it is about creating surprising relationships, disseminating crazy ideas, and always provoking communication.

For me, Baktruppen stand for a specific gesture of freedom, freedom in relation to a mountain of history, a heritage that no one seemed ready to embrace, whether in art or in life. And in spite of this, or perhaps because of this, Baktruppen carries on. This gesture has inspired many other artists, as well as critics, to break through their own boundaries and allow new sources of creativity to flow into their work. Observing and taking part in this can sometimes be very exciting and strenuous, and always represents a challenge in surprising and enjoyable ways.

TRANSLATION: SOPHIA NEW

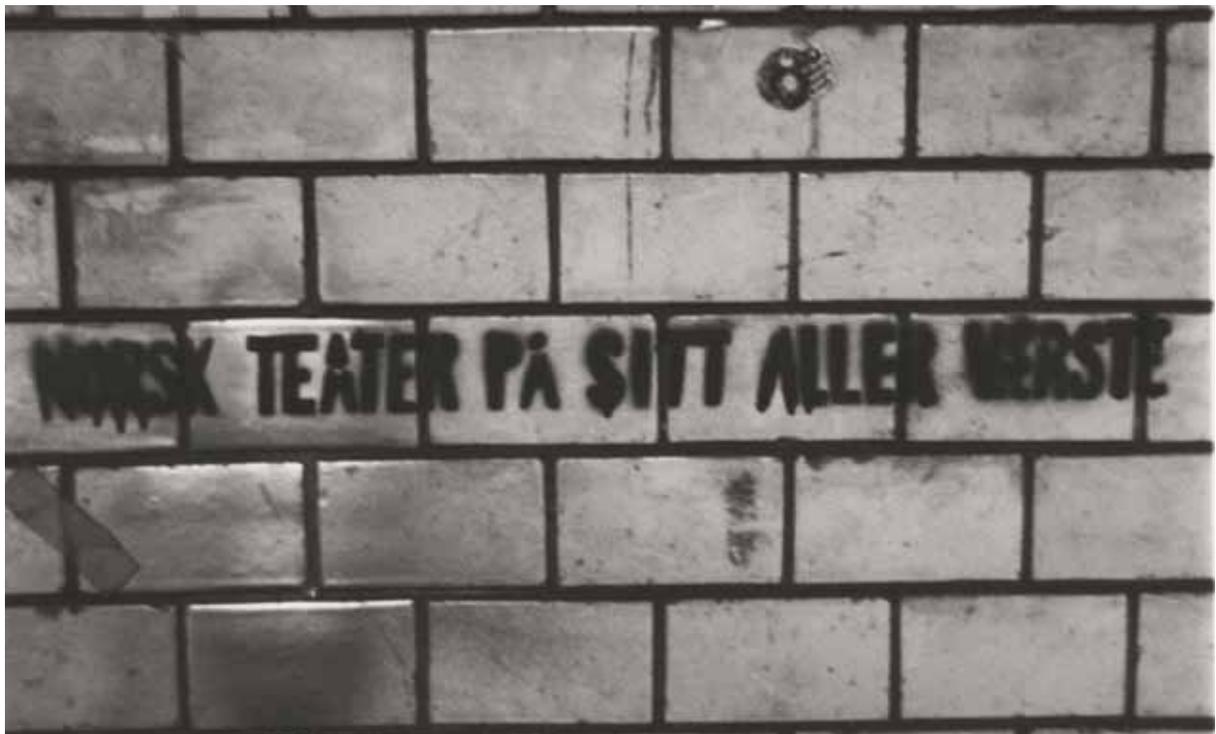


Above: From the performance *Everything* based on Henrik Ibsen's *Brand*, Bergen/Norway (1988)

Below: From the performance *Yes, I Go Over To The Dogs* based on the books *The Moment of Freedom* and *Without a Thread* by Jens Bjørneboe, Bergen/Norway (1987)



Above: From the performance *When We Dead Awake*, a multi purpose all round Ibsen production. Folken, Stavanger/Norway (1990)  
Below: Action in *Niederkirchnerstrasse*, Berlin November 1990. Baktruppen are selling the remains of their office in Bergen.



*Above:* Portraits of Baktruppen taken with Camera Obscura, used as flyers and masks in the performance “ ” (1991)  
*Below:* One of several *Oslo actions* – Norwegian theatre at it’s worst. Oslo/Norway (1990)



From the performance “ ” - 11 sequences performed in different order each time. Tacheles, Berlin/Germany (1991)



Above: From the performance *Peer you're lying. Yes!* II version: Meeting the Curved one, BIT-Teatergarasjen, Bergen/Norway (1993)  
Below: V version: Peer Gynt opens an institute for happiness research, Goederen station Zuid, Antwerpen/Belgium (1993)



*Above: I version: An erotical enlightmentshow, TAT-Probebühne, Frankfurt/Germany (1993)*  
*Below: VII version: In 1997 Hong Kong will be incorporated into China, Rote Fabrik, Zürich/Switzerland (1993)*



Azurblue contact linzes used in the IV version of *Peer you're lying. Yes!* and in *Super-Per*



Flyers left and tagged by the audience after the performance II version of *Peer you're lying. Yes!*  
BIT – Teatergarasjen Bergen/Norway (1993)



From the performance *Super-Per*, TAT-Probebühne, Frankfurt/Germany (1994)



From the performance *Super-Per*, The National Theatre in Oslo/Norway (1999)



Producing the performance *Tonight* a hyper textual lecture on industry, technology, time and memory on 350m2 synthetic carpets. Kampnagel, Hamburg/Germany (1994)



One costume and one of the synthetic carpets from the production of *Tonight*, Kampnagel, Hamburg/Germany (1994)



*Tonight*, Kampnagel, Hamburg/Germany (1994)



*Tonight*, Theatre Am Turm, Frankfurt/Germany (1994)



*Germania Tod in Berlin*, Hotel Norge, Bergen/Norway (1989).

The photos was taken from the stage by Baktruppen as a part of the performance





*Above:* Baktruppen brewed their own alcohol in the performance *Good Good Very Good* (1997)

*Below:* From the warming up performance *Come on Everybody – music for alcoholics*, Kunstneres Hus, Oslo/Norway (1997)



Above: *Good Good Very Good*, Kulturhuset, Karasjok/Norway (1997)  
Below: *Good Good Very Good*, Reyjavik/Island (1998)



Bakruppen on a skitrip in the Norwegian mountains (1996)

**PLAY AS A PERFORMATIVE ACT IN THE WORK OF BAKTRUPPEN  
(THE 21ST CENTURY)**

BY CAMILLA EEG-TVERBAKK

PLAYING WITH IDENTITIES

In Dælenengata in Oslo, Baktruppen has built an amphitheatre in a tiny storefront at street level. This is the setting for a series of performances. To date, four productions have been staged there: *Funny Dælengata* (2003), *Funny Sorry* (2003), *FunnySorryJesus* (2003), and *The Year of the Bush*, which all exemplify the cross-aesthetic approach that Baktruppen is known for. The shows are not staged inside the storefront, but rather outside in the street, in the midst of people's lives and everyday routines. The audience, on the other hand, seated in the rows of the amphitheatre inside the premises, watches this reality through a display window, which forms the theatrical framing of the show. Baktruppen incorporates events occurring in the street into their work, simultaneously calling attention to the fact that there is nothing illusory about the situation. During the initial 10–15 minutes of the *FunnySorryJesus* performance, the troupe's players jotted down notes on whatever happened to pass by the window: a red Volkswagen beetle, a woman in a green jacket pushing a stroller, a biker wearing a blue knit cap and so on. Then they stuck their heads out and read their observations out loud – they had seen the same things we did. As part of the audience, you are reminded of how easily the staged scenario and what we perceive as reality can be interchanged simply through framing – both the actual window frame through which we see the street, and the frame of the art context.

There then followed a sing-along session with familiar melodies set to new lyrics. We sang along about the situation we were all in, about the geophone Baktruppen had borrowed from Oslo Waterworks and about cultural-political circumstances that are part of our lives – and of Baktruppen's life in particular. The tune entitled 'Amfivisa' [the Amphitheatre Song] demonstrates the self-reflexive dimension of the troupe's work and says something about what

artistic creation is like for the Baktruppen ensemble. The final verse of the song will serve as an example:

THE AMPHITHEATRE SONG<sup>1</sup> (Mel: “Mari, du bedåre”)

It sure isn't easy!  
Innovative drama arts  
rarely conquer people's hearts  
Regardless what you go for

Is it wise to stand for  
The thing you think you're doing  
Then we all can start laughing  
and join in on the singing:

'cause golly, ain't it great that something passes by  
and golly, ain't it great, our audience amphi  
and golly, don't you love this singing in sweet harmony

Finally, the audience seated in the amphitheatre was treated to a retelling of the familiar Christian myth of Moses in the reeds blended with the story of the last supper of Jesus and his disciples, followed by the ascension of Christ. The myths were performed in simple costumes and with homemade props. The piece about Moses or Jesus calls to mind kids' Christmas pageants at school, where play is more important than conveying the story's message. The first time Worm Winther, playing the role of Jesus, was pulled skywards by a boom truck parked in Dælenenggata, he disappeared from the spectators' field of vision at street level. But some people did see him: at a festive gathering in a fourth story apartment, the guests nearly choked on their drinks. Surreal images of this kind are what linger in your mind after a visit with Baktruppen. The evening I attended the show, the boom truck had been leased for the occasion to hoist Winther heavenwards did not work at the first try. In theory, pressing a button was all that was needed, but the crane did not budge an inch. This triggered frenzied activity and mounting tension and curiosity among the onlookers: Did the troupe actually have the situation under control, and what would happen next? At long last, everybody cheered when the crane finally hauled the makeshift Jesus into the air, carrying a homemade cross on his back.

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1. See Baktruppen's website: [www.baktruppen.org](http://www.baktruppen.org)

My regular notions of what constitutes high-quality art were challenged; “this is the silly stuff of amateurs,” I thought to myself. And yet, I could not help but sing along, and had to laugh at the strenuous efforts when Moses, in the shape of a big, grown man, came floating through the reeds in a wheeled basket rolling along the gutter of Dælenenggata. Squeezed in among the other onlookers in the cramped amphitheatre, I felt awkward. I was self-conscious on Baktruppen’s behalf because they allow themselves to act like that out there in the street, with neighbors and passers-by as witnesses – but the actors themselves didn’t look embarrassed at all. I felt the urge to cover up the two shivering naked men enacting Adam and Eve in Paradise and to help the troupe steer clear of the worst fiascos that we in the audience saw coming before the actors themselves noticed anything. Such as a bed sheet used as costume, which kept brushing by the ‘burning bush’ at great risk of catching fire. The play about Moses moved along. With such a familiar story, the audience does not need much to figure out what is going on: ostrich feathers on Pharaoh’s head and shiny silks draped as a gown, or Jesus and his disciples enrobed in white sheets and outfitted with steel-wire halos above their heads. It can be as simple as that.

In retrospect, scenes from the show flow in and out of my consciousness. Perhaps they keep recurring because they are so different from most other things in my everyday life and in the art world? It may seem meaningless to expend energy on such odd spectacles in a time preoccupied with perfection and products that are meticulously designed in every aspect. Nevertheless, I find the energy released in Baktruppen’s stage productions inspiring, and perhaps this is exactly the kind of thing that is worthwhile in a world like ours: to create a sense of fellowship among us and to expose the humanity in trying without always succeeding. Not only the actual scenes, but also the actions and efforts behind these displays have a performative function in the linguistic-philosophical sense. Through their repetitive play and acting in front of an audience, the troupe manifests its understanding of reality. Over time, their atypical actions become increasingly present in our consciousness and also more acceptable as a possibility for our social lives. This allows for an expanded perception of reality.

Play can have a transgressive quality. Play can generate uncertainty about established, normative truths. Baktruppen is having fun with the interplay between character and identity; who am ‘I’, who are ‘you’, and what is ‘art’? They are ‘themselves’ in the sense that they are toying with the distinction between their personal identities and their roles as performers in Baktruppen, thus making this distinction blurry and fleeting. They challenge the limits for

what ‘you’ and ‘I’ can do in a public (art) context. In this way, they question the expectations as to who they, as (performance) artists, are supposed to be, and who we can all permit ourselves to be in public, on the sidewalk of Dæleneggata. Simultaneously, they put their audience on display to the amusement of the passers-by, thus challenging the conventions for audience behavior. Hence, they defy normativity both in society and in art.

By playing with images of identity, Baktruppen creates unconventional representations in continual flux; because who are we actually seeing during a performance by this troupe? Similar to the way children enter into a certain ‘mode’ when playing – being simultaneously themselves and not themselves – Baktruppen operates in the intersection between their personal selves and their ‘Baktruppen personas’. Children’s play has a meta-perspective that can also be found in Baktruppen as a self-reflexive dimension: they may give themselves up to the play, but always remain aware of the fact that this is, indeed, play, not reality. Social anthropologist Eli Åm identifies the structure of play as something that occurs simultaneously on two levels: one where the participants are being their ‘actual’ selves, inventing plots and directing the play; referred to as ‘the director plane’. The second level is the participants’ ‘play selves’, where they assume dramatic roles and create dialogues and actions<sup>2</sup>. This may be an apt characterization for Baktruppen’s play. Åm emphasizes the dimension of excitement (euphoria and ecstasy) triggered during play. This energetic dimension is in itself a transgression in relation to the expectations of adult behavior in the social sphere. This, which we may refer to as the transgressive energy of play, is what brings to mind the notion of the carnivalesque. It is the link to the carnivalesque that brings out the subversive potential of play in this context; a point to which I will return.

#### PLAY AS A CULTURAL ACT

Baktruppen uses play as a frame for communication with the audience, and as a point of departure for a deconstructivist view of the world expressed through their art. For the late French theatre pedagogue Jacques Lecoq, play was the very foundation, a must for dramatic acting. As in English, the French word ‘jeu’ means ‘play’ both in the sense of playing like children do and playing a game or a dramatic role. This indicates that acting (theatre) has an element of play. Play is about moving in and out of the culturally defined frames. Thus, the act of playing tests the limits of the frames and conventions.

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2. Guss, Faith Gabrielle Guss, *Drama Performance in Children’s Play-culture*. Dr. Art Dissertation. (Trondheim: NTNU, 2000), 13.

Cultural historian Johan Huizinga is known for his 1950 work *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*. His concept of play is interesting in this context because Baktruppen's performances, happenings and events are part of a cultural process in which both artists and audience participate. For Huizinga, like Lecoq, the basic premise is not a psychological understanding of the term. Huizinga's view is that culture develops at an early stage, from playing with characters, frames of understanding, conventions, etc. He claims that play expresses "this desire to astonish by boundless exaggeration or confusion of proportions"<sup>3</sup>. Huizinga links play to an aesthetic sphere. He states that play's aesthetic order, or expression, can produce social disorder and an anti-structure to the existent and dominant social structure. Moreover, Huizinga points out that in play, the rigid distinction between truth and fiction (belief and make-belief) is collapsed<sup>4</sup>. Exaggeration and confusion are aspects that characterize Baktruppen's work. The troupe constantly positions itself in this uncertain gap between the known and the unknown and operates with a dual awareness where they toy with the distinctions between play/seriousness, fiction/reality, center/periphery, and different identities.

While Baktruppen, as pointed out by former member Trine Falch Johannesen, always had a conscious and thoughtful understanding of what theatre is and can be, the troupe aims for constant change and continually sets new challenges for itself. Because the performers are committed to doing things they have not tried before, the troupe has gone through many phases: from visual theatre productions, to performance art, radio theatre, happenings, dance performances etc. Some performances seem more cohesive, others are fragmented around textual or theoretical discourses, while yet others are more direct and action-based. As Worm Winther and others have pointed out, the troupe's working method is characterized by putting on the table thoughts and ideas about 'everything under the sun'. Apparently, these concepts serve as a pool of material that becomes a more or less multifaceted collage.

#### PLAYING WITH THE ROLE OF THE ARTIST

The Baktruppen performers do not conceal their delight in playing with the image of themselves, the joy of breaking the conventions of art, and exposing its techniques and illusions. A lot of things can go wrong when these performers play, which is exactly what playing allows room for. It can be interrupted and resumed at any time. This is also a conscious element

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3. J. Huizinga. *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1950), 143.

4. *Ibid*, 24.

of Baktruppen's stagings: in slapstick fashion, they allow reality and a feeling of authenticity to seep in. My experience is that play is primarily an improvised activity that relates to culturally conditioned behavior either by imitating, magnifying or breaking with normativity, at times through outlandish and imaginative presentations. Nevertheless, it is always about some sort of staging, about creating a setting, a ceremony or a set of rules. For Baktruppen, the setting is the art context, whereas the rules of the game (which can be altered as needed) belong to the realm of play. The audience comes to see a production or performance, and so have certain expectations. Baktruppen frequently defies this contract. They play along with or against the expectations of the art world audience. This can be a matter of combining things in unexpected ways, creating untraditional, often ambient situations, and executing the procedures in a seemingly amateurish fashion. We do have respect for craft, says Ingvild Holm, but we choose to approach it in ways that are different from the usual ones. She goes on to say that different values and artistic expressions emerge when the roles are played by untrained actors. "It is our deepest instinct not to do what is expected."<sup>5</sup> Baktruppen are professional amateurs, they have made playing their profession. Even so, they are not afraid of also toying with the very rules of play, as analyzed by J. Huizinga, among others.

Because of their double consciousness in the act of playing, resulting from the co-existence of playful/performative and self-reflexive dimensions, the performers rarely give themselves completely up to the make-believe universe, as per Huizinga's definition of play as an activity in which the player is "intensely and utterly absorbed"<sup>6</sup>. For Baktruppen, play is, in fact, a *tactic* that grants them maneuvering room in the normative social sphere. It is a tactic that allows them to move freely in and out of the traditional frames. They play at playing, meaning that they enact an authentic playfulness that is perceived as full absorption. At the same time, they demonstrate a seriousness about play as an *artistic strategy* and towards the fact that they pretend to be playing. As Ingvild Holm puts it in the above quote, this play with expectations and structures, the very transgression, is the basis and perhaps also the very essence of the troupe's work. The various levels of play existent in Baktruppen's work can make it accessible for the audience, as the spectators can simultaneously indulge in the play as entertainment and, if they wish, ponder the various self-reflexive meta-dimensions. And yet, the playful attitude towards play can also lead to a certain confusion that Baktruppen, in turn, can exploit for their deconstructivist project. The play with expectations and roles evidenced in, for example, the *Funny* series, constitutes a breach of the traditional contract

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5. Conversation with Ingvild Holm, September 22, 2005, Oslo.

6. J. Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1950), 13.

"[...] we might call [play] a free activity standing quite consciously outside "ordinary" life as being "not serious", but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit to be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules [...]"

with the audience. As Ingvild Holm points out, the troupe's contract with the audience is that they *shall* break the contract.

While the Baktruppen performers claim that they are not acting, they do deal with a number of expectations as to who they are and how they are to behave in the public sphere as individuals, artists and members of Baktruppen. They problematize these diverse identities by challenging themselves and their customary roles and by acting out unconventional and surprising aspects. They attempt to expand the possibilities for what an 'artist', a 'grown-up person', etc. can be and do in the public sphere. Based on the above, one may say that the members of Baktruppen have created a 'Baktruppen identity', or, as Jørgen Knudsen put it in our conversation: "nobody plays Baktruppen better than we do"<sup>7</sup>. As with many artists in our mediated times who are more famous for their artist personalities than for the artworks they create (such as Andy Warhol, Jeff Koons, Tracy Emin and others), the Baktruppen persona gives the troupe members a certain maneuvering room.

For strategic reasons, many artists choose to develop a role over time, a persona, which occasionally overshadows the artwork he or she creates. This persona becomes their artistic project, or a performance in its own right. Protected by the art discourse, the artist persona's actions are legitimized. Baktruppen has used this opportunity, not to do what is expected of them or to play the part of the 'creative', 'smart' or 'genius' artist, but to call into question both the social behavior of the individual and what it takes to be visible as an artist in Western culture today. They frequently exaggerate these artist stereotypes to call attention to the fact that they are 'roles', not authentic entities. While many may find the troupe members eccentric, they are not typical exponents of the romanticized artist role that is still cultivated, thus legitimizing a marginalization of art. With their amateurish style of play, they call into question the role of the artist today, raising questions about what art really is and what we currently expect from art. The troupe members allow these various roles to coexist in a blurry flux; they let them live, die, and continuously resurrect without sentimentality.

Huizinga points out how play and culture, understood as reality, are interwoven and mutually affect one another<sup>8</sup>. Similarly, it is difficult to differentiate when the individual troupe members are being 'themselves' and when they are playing their roles as themselves in the Baktruppen context. Toying with various forms of behavior, they are constantly aware that life is a game, a play and a construct – and that their stagings are reality and occur as

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7. Conversation with Jørgen Knudsen, 06.19.05

8. J. Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1950), 5.

such in the present moment. Baktruppen claims to have no particular acting style; their stage presence is adapted from one production to the next. They are not trained actors and do not rely on any specific acting technique. They make no attempts at feigning a role or at classic dramatic acting; but rather try to focus on the actual action they are undertaking, as themselves, in reality, then and there. Their acting style (and dance) can frequently be characterized as naivistic, but with a buffoonesque<sup>9</sup> approach to the world.

#### THE SERIOUSNESS OF PLAY

“Paradoxically, Baktruppen’s primitive and foolish theatre probes rather deeply.”<sup>10</sup>

One may say that Baktruppen’s work reflects the carnivalesque in a postmodern form. In their book *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, Peter Stallybrass and Allon White describe how bourgeois society has lost the function once served by the medieval carnival tradition. In the essay “Bourgeois Hysteria and the Carnavalesque”, they show that Sigmund Freud’s hysterical (female) patients constituted one outlet for the carnivalesque in the bourgeois European reality of the 19TH and 20TH centuries. To be sure, the postmodern society has found additional conduits for the carnivalesque impulse, which is linked to corporeal or physical needs and desires, most notably because of a more relaxed view of sexuality. And yet, many boundaries and taboos still exist, e.g. surrounding the responsibility for individual efficiency and productivity that is expected of adults. In the postmodern society, the carnivalesque impulse tends to be acted out in closed rooms; in private homes; at clubs and parties, something which is also reflected in Baktruppen’s use of the ambient as a means in their productions.

The carnivalesque impulse represents a departure from the everyday, a crack in the social structure or an oblique look at normativity. It is an anti-tradition that keeps marginalized values and liminal phenomena alive. Still rare in public arenas, the *Funny Sorry* series can be categorized as a manifestation of this kind. Stallybrass and White describe how the carnivalesque tradition, once an important ritual in medieval culture, became marginalized through modernism and gradually reconstructed as the idea of ‘the Other’<sup>11</sup>. They show how the carnivalesque impulse has become progressively invisible and fragmented and how the remains of ‘the grotesque body’ can be found e.g. in modern aesthetics and art. They believe that the

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9. “Bouffonnerie”, or buffoonery, is a concept adapted and used as a method by the theatre pedagogue Jacques Lecoq. Buffoonery as a theatre genre borrows a great deal from the way children play. Yet, when linked to the notion of the court jester, buffoonesque play has a satiric and socially engaged sting that, while appearing harmless, can be dangerous.

10. From a review of *Good Good Very Good* performed at Trondhjem Kunstforening, Adresseavisen 11.02.98

11. Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 178.

rise of the bourgeoisie has been a matter of distinguishing between popular and high culture. Baktruppen presents an interesting twist by using carnivalesque and populist means while operating within the high-culture context of art (their work is supported by the Norwegian Arts Council as ‘innovative art’). They willingly adopt the marginalized position to call attention to the position of ‘the Other’ as the outsider, beyond the pale of normative society. Stallybrass and White demonstrate that the carnivalesque tradition is partially about turning traditional hierarchies upside down. They believe it is a matter of problematizing the ideal self and the autonomy of the subject within an oppressive linguistic normativity.

“The carnivalesque inversion mounts a co-coordinated double attack upon the “Ideal-Ich”, calling the bluff on foreclosure: it denies with a laugh the ludicrous pose autonomy adopted by the subject within the hierarchical arrangements of the symbolic at the same moment as it re-opens the body-boundary, the closed orifices of which normally guarantee the repressive mechanism itself.”<sup>12</sup>

The two naked men standing on the sidewalk smack dab in the middle of the Norwegian capital in *FunnySorryJesus* are an example showing that hierarchic and repressive mechanisms can be opened up and destabilized. The undressing of the bodies reveals linguistic constructions of identity, and the action in itself becomes the crucial element. What we may refer to as Baktruppen’s carnivalesque aspect has a dimension of commentary, because it is used as a strategy within a high-culture framework. It is a play with conventions and strategic positionings within sociopolitical structures in which high and low culture are freely mixed to shed light on the fact that they are, in effect, cultural constructs. Baktruppen does not prefer one over the other, but rather demonstrates how they both coexist and are mutually dependent. Stallybrass and White show that there is a profound link between childhood, rituals, play, and carnival practices<sup>13</sup>. By playing the roles of irresponsible adults who are acting out, Baktruppen probes deeply into the taboos and constraints of postmodern society, thus shining a light on them. Their actions cannot easily be explained away as peripheral and marginal: by choosing the art world as their arena, they position themselves in the bourgeois social sphere, knowing full well the ramifications. The audience feels a mixture of reservation, a desire to define oneself as different from this ‘bunch of crazies’, but also bursts of nervous giggles and euphoric joy over the fact that somebody has the courage to live out the carnivalesque impulse. Thus, Baktruppen’s actions function as a sort of social pressure release valve: The spectators can define the performers as ‘other’ so that they can see themselves as relatively

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12. *Ibid*, 183 - 184

13. *Ibid*, 175

normal. And at the same moment, we in the audience are allowed to get in touch with the unconventional parts in ourselves through their play. However, Baktruppen's act is not without dangers. Their behavior shows us who we are – whether we distance ourselves from or get absorbed in their madness.

In many ways, Baktruppen plays the part of the jester or fool; a classic figure that, through humor and a disarming demeanor, was able to tell the truth, thus playing an important role in the royal court. This character is also associated with the carnivalesque, and the theatre troupe has repeatedly donned jester costumes. An example of this is the 'retrospective' happening *Old Time FFWD*, a brief survey of some of Baktruppen's old hits, which took place in Bergen Kunsthall during the renovation of the building in 2001. With its bare brick walls, the venue already had a makeshift look. A long table was placed in the middle of the room where Baktruppen had set their camp with simple technical equipment, food, drink and various props from earlier feats. In addition, video documentation was shown of earlier events in the ensemble's history. The audience members were standing and seated along the walls, watching the madness. In full public view, these grown-up individuals take the liberty to shave their legs, cut their hair, sing songs and inhale helium to make their voices sound like Donald Duck; in short, to put their life as Baktruppen on display. They act the fools that their Baktruppen-identities allow them to be, which is also what the spectators, if they already know Baktruppen, have come to expect. With great delight, they are just as childish, unprofessional and silly as we would all like to be now and again; if it weren't for the social constraints banning such behavior in the public sphere.

The audience responds with ambivalence to this play; much as I described my own experience of feeling embarrassed and yet singing along. The troupe exposes the 'inappropriate'. Mady Schutzman says: "The fool's non-sense reveals common sense to be just another spectacle that has been determined without us, that speaks for us..."<sup>14</sup> Baktruppen has the courage to deviate from 'common sense'. They turn things upside down, thus emptying reason of all meaning. In this manner, they reveal our preconceived notions of what is 'true' and 'right', who or what is 'normal' and what is not.

Jacques Lecoq's development of the buffoon character and the buffoonesque as a theatrical expression is based on the relationship between mystery, the grotesque and the fantastic, of which the *FunnySorryJesus* spectacle serves as an example. The theatre pedagogue's idea of the

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14. Mady Schutzman, "A Fool's Discourse: The Buffoonery Syndrome," in: Phelan & Lane, eds. *The Ends of Performance* (New York: NY University Press, 1998), 135

buffoon emerged as a result of his asking his students to improvise on the theme of “people who believe in nothing and make fun of everything”<sup>15</sup>. Many find that Baktruppen belongs to this category and, thus, is a child of the now notorious ‘irony generation’. To be sure, it is unavoidable that their act is perceived as ironic in certain contexts. And yet, Baktruppen’s own intent is an unironic approach, in part through their focus on a naïvistic earnestness where simplicity and play are presented in serious fashion. Baktruppen’s deconstructivist project directs its criticism primarily against social, political and cultural systems in order to expose the underlying constructions. In my experience, their work never satirizes or parodies individuals. They show profound respect for the person inside the system. As in *Great European Battles* (2002), the actors often use themselves as examples and representatives for the individual’s striving to function within various social and political constructs and conventions. According to Bo Krister Wallström, the challenge is to bring about communication between the deeply personal and the collective spheres. Complexity resides in simplicity, he says.<sup>16</sup>

Jacques Lecoq further states that his search for the buffoonesque style in theatre led him to the court jester, a figure that, in his view, was far from an actual madman, but rather someone in a position to express truths in all their forms. From his marginal standpoint as a representative of ‘the Other’, the buffoon can make us talk about and accept the unacceptable. For Lecoq, those who are able to laugh at ‘everything’ are in touch with mystery, and thus with the great territories of tragedy. And so, he says, the buffoon does not laugh at individual people; his is a more general laughter aimed at humanity and society. The dramaturgy consists in losing oneself in the joy of play, whether it is about war and killing one another or being Jesus ascending to the heavens, in an insistent and repetitive way that reveals the madness and absurdities of life. We can see children doing the same when acting out destructive impulses generated in their encounter with society, and Lecoq allows his students to find ‘their inner buffoon’ through rediscovering the way in which kids play.

I was myself a student of Lecoq, and have experienced his pedagogical method firsthand. Finding childlike playfulness in theatrical acting is a bodily experience that cannot be obtained through mental reasoning. As Huizinga emphasizes, play is irrational<sup>17</sup>. The only way is to let go of your own prejudices about what an adult subject can possibly *do*; it is a matter of opening yourself up to energies and a free flow of associations and whims. The feeling is not that of playing a role; one does not perform any gestures or movements or convey any psychological states referring to anything beyond oneself. Rather, this is all about finding something *inside*

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15. Jacques Lecoq, *The Moving Body* (London: Methuen, 2002), 124.

16. Conversation with Wallström, 10.30.05

17. J. Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1950), 4.

oneself, about getting closer to oneself. It is about letting go of indoctrinated notions about behavior, i.e. to deterritorialize, in the terminology of Deleuze and Guattari.<sup>18</sup> It is a matter of losing your ‘majoritary’ position and letting yourself out to – or into – the place of the child, devoid of the power of the adult world.

Play opens up for mystery, which is clearly evident in children’s games, where the references and roles keep trading places and the most fantastic things can happen. In my view, it is this kind of play that Baktruppen also opens up for through their physical exercises. Lecoq says that the buffoon always interprets society through play. The same can be said for children’s play, even though the kids themselves are not conscious of this. Rediscovering the child’s way of playing as an adult means becoming aware of the self’s desire to hold on to and possess, and of the need to create rules and seek out limits that must constantly be tested and transgressed. Children often play adults; with Baktruppen, it is adults playing like children do, and sometimes, adults playing children who are playing adults, such as in the troupe’s staging of Bible stories in *FunnySorryJesus*. Buffoons, like children, enjoy performing in groups, or as ‘troupes’, if you wish. The group is a micro cosmos where social constructs can be examined and power structures can be tested out and inversed. There is no rivalry here; everybody accepts their position, because it is never stable or fixed. Baktruppen’s work expresses some of the qualities of the buffoon described here, and their acting can thus be called buffoonesque, i.e. a sort of structured madness.

“Buffoons deal essentially with the social dimension of human relations, showing up its absurdities. They also deal with hierarchies of power, and their reversal.”<sup>19</sup>

#### THE CARNIVALESQUE IN THE AVANT-GARDE

“Pretending to be something else in another time or space has never been interesting to Baktruppen, instead the challenge is to project the magic of real life in real situations”<sup>20</sup>

According to Peter Bürger, the notion of ‘bringing art back to life’ was the neo-avant-garde’s reaction to the high-culture modernist art in the institutions in the 1960s and 1970s. Baktruppen does not base its practice on this avant-garde ‘manifesto’. If anything, the direction is reverse: this is not about bringing art back to life; it is rather about letting life into art by

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18. Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism & Schizophrenia* (London and New York: Continuum, 2003)

19. Jacques Lecoq, *The Moving Body* (London: Methuen, 2002), 126.

20. From Baktruppen’s website.

allowing a margin for ‘error’, accidents, and unexpected events happening in the moment during performances.

Allan Kaprow is the most widely known advocate of bringing art back to life. He also emphasized play as a crucial aspect of the artist’s way of dealing with the world. Kaprow also refers to Huizinga when pointing to the innovative effect of play in forming a sense of social community and generating interaction<sup>21</sup>. A frequent question by Kaprow was “what is art?” Based on Baktruppen’s statement above, we can inverse this question and ask instead: what is really reality?

In his book *The Return of the Real*, art historian Hal Foster analyzes the development from the historic avant-garde in the early 1900s through neo-avantgarde to the postmodern return to reality<sup>22</sup> in site-specific and relational art. He sees this history not as a linear development, but rather as a continual, ongoing movement and reversal expressing and processing a trauma that has been repressed. His project is to critique the way in which the avant-garde has been defined in history, primarily by Peter Bürger, as a reaction to and an attempt at breaking away from modernism. Foster shows that this understanding misses the mimetic and utopian dimensions of the avant-garde project and their potential as critique.

“Bürger takes the romantic rhetoric of the avant-garde, of rupture and revolution, at its own word. In so doing he misses crucial dimensions of its practice. For example, he misses its *mimetic* dimension, whereby the avant-garde mimes the degraded world of capitalist modernity in order not to embrace it but to mock it (as in Cologne dada). He also misses its *utopian* dimension, whereby the avant-garde proposes not what can be so much as what cannot be again as a critique of what is (as in de Stijl)”<sup>23</sup>

Allan Kaprow confirms this view in his series of essays entitled *Education of the Un-Artist*<sup>24</sup>, where he writes that: “Imitation as practiced by nonart artists may be a way of approaching play on a modern yet transcendent plane. [...] Just as children’s imitative play may be a survival ritual, this could be a stratagem for the survival of society.”<sup>25</sup>

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21. Allan Kaprow, “The Education of the Un-Artist, Part II” (1972), in: *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

22. Foster’s analysis is structured on terminology developed by psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, i.e. “the real”, “the imaginary”, and “the symbolic”. For my own purposes, I primarily refer to Foster to show the parallel between the carnivalesque, the “trauma” of the avant-garde as Foster sees it, and Deleuze and Guattari’s “BwO”, a point to which I will return shortly.

23. Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), 16.

24. The series consists of three such essays, namely Part I, II and III, published in 1971, 1972, and 1974, respectively.

25. Allan Kaprow, “The Education of the Un-Artist, Part II” (1972), in: *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 115.

In their TV production *The European Commission* (2001), the Baktruppen members dress as dogs. This means that they strip off all their clothes, walk each other on leashes and are 'shut out in the cold', as stated in the description of the project. This can be interpreted both as an image of Norway's chosen position in relation to the EU, as well as an act commenting on the European Commission and what is deemed appropriate, or inappropriate, in that context. It is possible to see Baktruppen's actions in this production both as having a mimetic dimension satirizing capitalist modernity and as the fulfillment of a utopian impossibility within the existing political constructions. By getting naked under the heading 'The European Commission', they shed light on taboos and conventions in the specific context identified in the title. The act shows the unthinkable as a critique of the established order. This piece has a performative and critical potential manifested as an avant-gardian – we might also say carnivalesque – repetition of a trauma arguably inflicted on the individual by capitalist reality. As a reaction to alienation, commercialization and mediality, the avant-garde attempts to rupture the structures with which civilian society engages to show that these do not constitute reality in its entirety. In Hal Foster's analysis, the avant-garde is an ongoing mediation between various positions and perceptions of reality.

Foster believes that the avant-garde is not about entering into a binary either/or position (the complete autonomy of art or 'bringing art back to life'). Rather than uniting art and life, it is a matter of a rhetorical relation where the goal is to maintain a *tension* between the two. According to Foster, the avant-garde is about a continual testing of boundaries, conventions and institutional formats at specific locations at specific times in history. An action such as *The European Commission* creates arbitrary openings to the 'real reality' in much the same way as Foster sees the avant-garde: revolutionizing and breaking away from a linguistically constructed reality.

The question is how to break out of social and political constructs without being ignored or marginalized. One method also employed by Baktruppen is to repeatedly locate oneself in the center and perform acts that point to these mechanisms. Marginalization is an effective weapon against the unwanted. Out-acting behavior, the carnivalesque and avant-garde art are ways in which the marginal can create a temporary opening into the center and normativity's power of definition. Baktruppen frequently uses this strategy, for instance in the performance *Footnote to Footnote to Howl* (2000). This was a concert-type event for which the troupe had written songs about 'things that stink', accompanied by guitar, bass and a sewing machine and performed on the sidewalk outside the By the Way gallery in downtown Bergen.

Baktruppen is now one of the 'independent' theatre companies in Norway that have been receiving a fair amount of public funding the last 6 - 8 years. It has not always been like that, and for many years, they had to work on a shoestring budget. In many ways, this increased financial support is a paradox, considering the prevailing expectations for technique and aesthetics, but at the same moment, it shows that the troupe's performative strategy works. They produce for the system of government allocations to keep it happy (in terms of audience attendance, the number of performances held, etc.). By virtue of their long history, they have proven their right to life. By repeatedly creating environments and events, they have succeeded in building up a position that grants them the power to continue their activities.

In connection with the 1999 project *Style Is King*, Baktruppen served as a living wall for a graffiti artist in Oslo. This artist represents a group of young people who are persecuted because of Oslo City Government's 'zero tolerance' policy entailing that all types of decoration or tagging on public property is punishable by fines or prison sentences (the term is borrowed from the US). Baktruppen simply lent itself as a legal wall, protected by the members' individual liberty. Dressed in white protective overalls and standing closely side-by-side, they were decorated with a piece that covered them from head to foot. Rather than arguments and reasoning, Baktruppen uses playfulness and humor in a way that simultaneously calls attention to and solves the problem. In a matter-of-factly, uncomplicated way, they place their marginal acts on an equal footing with normative behavioral patterns. The dominant power structures are thus exposed and stripped of some of their authority. Baktruppen does not manage to do away with these structures, but perhaps to reveal some of the inherent differences and hence to allow more room for 'the Other'.

#### THE SUBVERSIVE POTENTIAL

There are several reasons why the examination of the concept of play is relevant in order to understand Baktruppen's work in a performative perspective. Play is characteristic of Baktruppen's artistic expression. It is the form, or method, of their creative practice. One might say that play allows for an experimentation with diverse understandings of reality. Play is a toying with boundaries and conventions in the encounter between fiction and reality. For Huizinga, play is the way in which culture is formed and manifested. This is the fundamental premise for using play subversively in relation to the prevailing social and cultural perceptions.

Hence, it makes sense to say that play is a method, or a tactic, that Baktruppen uses in striving to show the subversive potential of performativity.

In their book *Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari refer to ‘Bodies without Organs (BwO)’, a term inspired by Antonin Artaud. The authors use the egg as an example to show how a body, an image or a concept acquires form through energies (intensities) that hold it together. To change, or to function subversively in relation to the environment, requires a reorganization – you must create a BwO. This is a matter of turning things upside down, doing the unthinkable, pick apart and tear down the notion of the subject and reality. Fantasies, memories and the names of things keep us in their grip and prevent the free flow. A BwO is what remains when everything has been stripped away. A BwO allows for the free flow of energies, it is a point through which energies can pass. A BwO is created by an innate desire; it belongs to the plateau of desire. Deleuze and Guattari define desire as immanence, something which is produced without reference to external motivations; neither a want nor a pleasure to fill the vacuum of lack<sup>26</sup>. Immanent desire produces the BwO, just like Baktruppen – seemingly without any goal or purpose – joyfully play their way through their artistic practice. In this way, their acts can be said to produce bodies without organs, or one might say that Baktruppen, as a group or organism, is in itself a body without organs. A BwO does not represent anything in itself, but is life and lived experience.

According to Deleuze and Guattari, performance art is a suitable place to experiment with the creation of a BwO. Here, one can performatively produce culture rather than being culturally produced. Baktruppen’s stagings have a subversive potential because they attempt to restructure their own, ours and society’s ‘bodies’ to create a BwO. This is not about removing known categories (organs), but about reorganizing them and in this way withstand the impulse to fix in defined patterns. The process of creating BwOs requires great caution, according to Deleuze and Guattari. You cannot suddenly reject everything, thinking that you will arrive at a BwO; this can be mortally dangerous and lead to insanity. Such a reorganization must repetitively proceed from the known to be able to respond to normative reality.

“[...] how can we unhook ourselves from the [points of subjectification that secures us, nail us down to a dominant reality?...] You don’t do it with a sledgehammer, you use a very fine file [...] Dismantling the organism has never meant killing yourself, but rather opening the body to connections that presupposes an entire assemblage, circuits, conjunctions, levels

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26. Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism & Schizophrenia* (London and New York: Continuum, 2003), 154.

and thresholds, passages and distributions of intensity, and territories and deterritorializations measured with the craft of a surveyor [...] the BwO is always swinging between the surfaces that stratify it and the plane that sets it free.”<sup>27</sup>

One might say that creating what Deleuze and Guattari call a BwO is a performative act. The reorganization required by a BwO is in itself subversive, and must constantly be repeated. Similarly, Baktruppen must continuously repeat its stagings to gain force and maneuvering room in the intersection between personal freedom and social constructs. As Deleuze and Guattari point out, any BwO will always ‘congeal’ into an image or a ‘stratum’. A BwO must therefore be perpetually recreated through continual reorganization. It is this repetitive act that may possess a subversive potential in a cultural sense. Given that Deleuze and Guattari link the notion of the BwO to the plateau of desire, it is tempting to see play as a necessity for the expression of desire. Perhaps a playful attitude is also necessary to instigate the radical form of reorganization to which Deleuze and Guattari refer.

#### PERFORMATIVE PLAY

“...play is not ‘ordinary’ or ‘real’ life. It is rather stepping out of ‘real’ life into a temporary sphere of activity with a disposition all of its own.”<sup>28</sup>

What does play gain from engendering a sphere outside of ordinary life? Play is based on the manipulation of images – our *fantasies* about reality. In general, Baktruppen’s work makes ample use of this playful manipulation of cultural images. It is a matter of finding out *which* fantasies guide our idea of reality. This points to the performative aspect of Baktruppen’s play, which reveals that our experience of reality is based on images brought about by linguistic and cultural constructs and fantasies, and so these are interchangeable. The play uses as its starting point the *idea* of reality, while also creating other realities outside ordinary daily life. Play, like art, produces different images, and thus contributes to shaping culture.

Performativity means gaining power and capacity to act through repetition. Repetition is one of the most fundamental qualities of play. Thus, play is performative because it has a repetitive relation to rules, and yet always challenges, alters and transgresses them continuously as needed through active action. Play allows for a temporary rejection of norms and rules. As

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27. Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism & Schizophrenia* (London and New York: Continuum, 2003), 160-161.

28. J. Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1950), 8.

demonstrated in *FunnySorryJesus*, Baktruppen often manages to create what Huizinga calls a 'play-community'. It is precisely within the boundaries of this community, in a cultural periphery, that it is possible to observe the normative center from a distance.

Allan Kaprow was primarily interested in art as experience through participation. This appears to be a central concern for Baktruppen, as well. That is why its members choose to focus on presence and performance as a form of expression, typically in ambient settings and with direct contact and dialogue with their audience. As opposed to Kaprow, who eventually eliminated the audience altogether and saw everybody as participants, Baktruppen opts, in these late-capitalist times, to keep its performative play inside the frame of art. This grants them a necessary sphere of action and medial visibility. By stretching boundaries without breaking them, they can remain within the field of tension, and thus in the dialog on what is art and what is reality.

TRANSLATION: SOL KJØK



Baktruppen wearing jester costumes (1991)



Above: Baktruppen are celebrating *The Year of The Bush* in their own theatre, Dælelenggataateret, Oslo/Norway (2006)  
Below: Baktruppen are playing Vivaldis *Winter* on a tree dressed as bushes, Dælelenggataateret, Oslo/Norway (2006)



Cover up used in the celebration of *The Year of The Bush* (2006)



Above: Adan and Eve in *FunnySorryJesus* at Sergels Torg, Stockholm/Sweden (2004)  
Below: Last Meal in *FunnySorryJesus* at Rosa Luxemburg Strasse, Berlin/Germany (2007)



Judas, Jesus and Johannes in *FunnySorryJesus* at Teatergaten, Bergen/Norway (2006)



*Deli Comedia* by Merce Cunningham by Baktruppen, ps 122, New York/USA (2005)



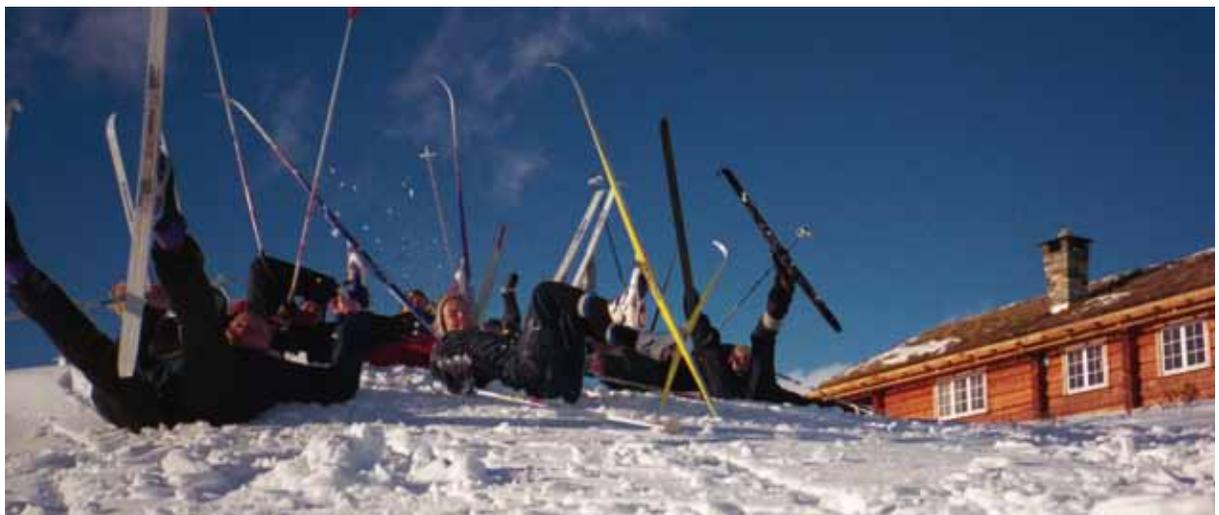
*Warte Nur!* Bald kommt die ganze gesichte von identität und identitot.  
Live Radio play for Deutschland Radio, Karlsruhe/Germany (2002)



*Eurohæ? Oslo/Norway (2000)*



Baktruppen in the TV-production *The European Commission Oslo/Norway* (2001)



*Above:* Baktruppen in production of *Deli Comédia*, Rui Hortas Centro Coregáfico de Montemor-o-Novo/Portugal (2004)  
*Below:* Members of the Baktruppen board during a production and financial meeting (1996)



Above: Do & Undo, Kunstbanken, Hamar/Norway (2004)

*Next page: Baktruppen as a wall for Goal, Oslo Courthouse/Norway (1999)*







Baktruppen and the Adonga Group after performing *Do & Undo* at Uganda National Theatre, Kampala/Uganda (2002)

## THE STAMSUND GALLUP POLL, 2004

BY CAMILLA EEG-TVERBAKK

It is afternoon in the fishing village of Stamsund in Lofoten, a tiny town that is relatively rich in culture. Baktruppen is visiting for the third time. This sunny day in June of 2004, they are back for the Stamsund Theatre Festival, where the troupe will present its contribution to the *Artistic Interruptions – Art in Nordland* series, a site-specific project organized by the County of Nordland. Baktruppen was commissioned to create an artwork that reflects the local community and involves its residents in some way or other. Their response to this challenge is an approach to site, art, and commissioners that mirrors Baktruppen's deconstructivist and postcolonial position.

Baktruppen paid their first visit to Stamsund in March of 2003 shortly after their return from Kampala, where they had done a guest performance of the dance show *Do & Undo* (2002) at the Uganda National Theatre. The visit to Africa, immediately followed by their trip to Lofoten, provided a basic premise for the project that gradually took shape in Stamsund. Baktruppen said that they felt just as foreign in Stamsund as they did in Kampala, a sentiment expressed in their opening speech:

“On the invitation of Art in Nordland – now also known as Artistic Interruptions – Baktruppen first visited Stamsund right after New Year's in 2003. At that point, we came straight from Uganda. In light of this distance, we can state that Stamsund is just as far away as Africa.”

After this initial visit to Stamsund, the theatre troupe decided to conduct a survey among the locals. Not wanting to rely on their own superficial first impressions as tourists, they sought a more thorough encounter with Stamsund. In June of 2003, posing as pollsters from the opinion research firm Norsk Bakgrunn [Norwegian Background], they called households

in Stamsund to invite people to take part in a survey. The participants were requested to complete a questionnaire dealing with life in the town: what do the locals like ‘the best’, ‘the least’ and so on. The townspeople were also asked about their associations to words such as ‘Hurtigruta’ [the Norwegian Coastal Express], ‘stockfish’, ‘Islam’, ‘Oslo’, ‘the Government,’ etc., all carefully selected<sup>1</sup>. Approximately one hundred individuals completed the survey. From among these, a winner was selected by lottery to receive a gift certificate of NOK 10.000 for a vacation on a sunny beach.

The conclusions from the survey were to be presented the following year in the form of an artwork. Judging from Baktruppen’s previous work, one might have imagined that the results would end up as text material for a theatre piece or performance, or that the troupe would have tried to cater to the townspeople’s wish for a local movie theatre in some way or other. The final outcome turned out to be something nobody could have predicted: Baktruppen created an almost seven foot tall wooden sculpture that was unveiled in a ceremony on the dock where the Hurtigruten ferry comes in. Then they organized a local vote in which the townspeople would decide whether they wanted to keep the artwork. Carved out of a large spruce logged in Eastern Norway, the sculpture was a copy of a tiny souvenir that Baktruppen had purchased in Uganda: a representation of ‘the White Man in Africa’ as an anthropologist wearing a sun helmet and khaki shorts, carrying a camera around his neck. By virtue of appropriation, the figurine had acquired African facial features. In Baktruppen’s version, the sculpture resembled something in between Mickey Mouse and a Simpsons character.

When the statue – this almost seven foot tall guy made of wood – was unveiled during the ceremony on the docks, spectators and producers alike were taken aback. The audience had expected something easily recognizable as ‘art’, and this funny-looking fellow hardly fit the bill. This was altogether different from the modernist works that people often associate with public art. It was as though several sets of prejudices –against ‘the Other’; against ‘contemporary art’; and against ‘the people’ – came face to face right there on the docks. Baktruppen had preconceived ideas about people from rural areas, thinking that they would neither like nor understand contemporary art. The townspeople in Stamsund had thought that these artists from the big city would serve up something incomprehensible, which to their eyes would seem ugly and elitist. After standing around for a while to test each other out, everybody gave in to the funny fellow’s charm. Prejudice is mental censoring that can be conquered by succumbing to the feeling of the heart. Over the course of four hours, roughly half of the local

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1. The entire survey is available on Baktruppen’s website: [www.baktruppen.org](http://www.baktruppen.org)

population cast their votes to determine whether the sculpture was to be placed in front of the local hotel or thrown to the bottom of the sea right then and there. Baktruppen was hoping for the latter, and had already hired a crane barge and a diver with a film camera to document the woodman's journey to the happy hunting grounds.

As the hours went by, the majority in favor of keeping the sculpture kept increasing. A rumor got started that Baktruppen would sink the statue regardless of the outcome of the vote; that the troupe had no intention to comply with the people's choice. Like they said in their opening speech, the art world is a place where the majority agrees to support the minority. And so, tension was mounting in all camps. Children chained themselves to the sculpture, chanting slogans to save it from a dire fate on the bottom of the sea. The organizers worried that Baktruppen would not respect the wishes of the local community and thus confirm the existing stereotype of contemporary art: an elitist camp seeing itself as superior to ordinary people. They were concerned that this would end the dialogue between the local audience and contemporary art for the future<sup>2</sup>. On their end, Baktruppen was afraid that the expected finale that would complete the work and bring it to fruition would fail to occur. The count showed that 95% of the voters were *in favor* of keeping the sculpture, and the majority voted to name it The Tourist.

In the end, the local community's response was just as much a surprise as the artwork itself. Nobody had their preconceived ideas confirmed – neither with regard to incomprehensible contemporary art nor to the intolerance of small communities. In many ways, artists, organizers and the audience were all placed on an equal footing in a situation that none of them could fully control.

The Stamsund Gallup Poll was a site-specific work created by Baktruppen on a commission from Art in Nordland (The County of Nordland). The county administration's objective was to use artworks and artists to revitalize various local communities in aims of heightening their profile nationally and internationally, i.e. to utilize art to call attention to Nordland as a region. The project goal was to bring international artists into contact with various small towns in Nordland whose residents would actively participate in the encounters.

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2. At the time, I was myself employed as an information consultant for Art in Nordland. My version of this event differs from the experience that has been voiced later, in particular by the very active local art community. Among the artists and cultural workers in town, many were critical, questioning whether Baktruppen was really communicating with the local population. Were they more interested in speaking to their own base, the (Oslo-based) art world? This has to do with the troupe's focus on the historicization of their work and their artistic practice as a whole.

In her book *One Place After Another: Site-specific Art and Locational Identity*, the American art historian Miwon Kwon describes how the so-called ‘new genre public art’— which came about as a result of land art and the site-specific public art of the 70s and 80s — represents a shift away from art as an aesthetic experience for the purpose of personal enrichment to art with a social function for the purpose of improving society<sup>3</sup>. Kwon stresses that this ‘new’ form of artistic practice and dissemination of art comes with many pitfalls. For one, the artist may assume the role of anthropologist who explores a locality without clarifying his own position and identity. This is also the subject of Hal Foster’s essay “The Artist as Ethnographer”<sup>4</sup>. This confirms the localities’ and groups’ status as ‘other’, and their peripheral and marginalized position is reinforced rather than weakened. The pre-existing power structures between the normative and that which falls outside are thus further cemented.

Kwon emphasizes the need to avoid all forms of categorization of the parties involved: artist, local community, and art institution. There exists no homogenous society or group that can be examined by an outsider, be it an artist or a scientist. The dream of a unitary and consistent local community is just as utopian as the notion of the stable and coherent identity. In any encounter, the parties involved affect one another and the situation in which they find themselves. The night when the results of the great Stamsund Gallup Poll were announced on the ferry dock is a good example of this. In that respect, Baktruppen succeeded in staging an art happening in line with Kwon’s definition of ‘relational specificity’. This implies the notion of a more fluid subjectivity, identity and perception of site and space. A situation that may contain a dialectic tension between different positions. According to Kwon, this involves the ability to deal with unclear relationships between close and distant localities and individuals and to see them as equal and on the same footing.

Baktruppen’s sculpture named *The Tourist* still stands in front of the local hotel in Stamsund, gazing out to sea – to the great surprise of artists and organizers alike, and perhaps the audience, too. Maybe we were all just charmed by this odd chap who neither tries to be great art nor pretends to carry a message that may be hard to comprehend. He incorporates both the familiar and beloved (Disney) and the far-away and foreign (Uganda) by his mere presence. He is nothing other than what he seems, and he is not particularly handsome either. Many tourists visit Stamsund. Most of them arrive on board the *Hurtigruten* ferry. The ship docks for some 15 to 30 minutes. That gives the passengers just enough time for a quick walk down to the *Skjærbrygga* pier and back. As of June 4, 2004, Stamsund greets the tourists with their mirror image as they go ashore.

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3. Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002, p. 111

4. Hal Foster, *The Return of The Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996

Perhaps the Stamsund Gallup Poll turned out to be what Kwon calls a ‘collective artistic praxis’? That is, a site-specific work whose objective is not to describe a situation or locality, but rather to set up a context where people can get together and part ways in a collective process that is open-ended; an encounter between transient individuals who won’t necessarily come to an agreement or arrive at any form of unity. From Baktruppen’s perspective, Stamsund was a foreign place, while to the locals and the general audience; it was Baktruppen and their work that seemed foreign. Perhaps Miwon Kwon is right in saying that: “An encounter with a ‘wrong’ place is likely to expose the instability of the ‘right’ place, and by extension the instability of the self.”<sup>5</sup>

TRANSLATION: SOL KJØK

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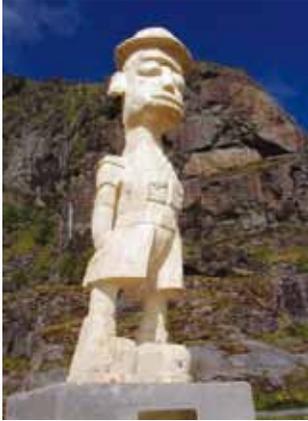
5. Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002, p. 164



Pages 102-105: Stamsund Gallup Poll (The Tourist) Stamsund/Norway (2004)









NoK – Baktruppen canceled their jubilee show about Norway and produced instead *Dario Fo's Corps For Sale* outside Oslo Stock Exchange (Oslo Børs), Norway (2005)

**LIGHT METAL ECONOMY:  
BAKTRUPPEN'S THEATRE AS CONTRACT AND GIFT**

BY KJETIL RØED

“Now we are talking. Talking like this, we are creating money”.

Baktruppen, from *Light Metal Band*

“The human achievement – shared by a few primates and aquatic mammals but not elaborated by them – is the ability to make decisions based on virtual as well as actual alternatives. These virtual alternatives take on a life of their own. Theatre is the art of actualizing them, and rehearsal is the means of developing their individual shapes and rhythms.”

Richard Schechner, from *Performance Theory*

*Light Metal Band* (2009) is a short performance in which Baktruppen's members are wearing tin cans and pan lids for costumes. This medieval guise – after all, they do look like some kind of knights in armor fashioned out of the scrap metal of capitalism – is directly linked to the message being conveyed: they are investigating the notion of value in various types of economies; and by critiquing abstract monetary values, they show the way to a collective-based gift economy. This journey from the standardized currency unit as an indicator of value to the theatre as a value system, makes *Light Metal Band* a key work in Baktruppen's oeuvre. The point of departure for the performance is an attempt to enter the printing plant that prints money for almost every country on the planet. “De La Rue is printing money for more than 160 countries, working very close with all the peculiar national Central Banks and making all kinds of currencies. For security reasons, their biggest printing press is situated on Malta, a small island in the middle of the Mediterranean. In April this year (2008) we went there and tried to get in.”<sup>1</sup>

I: Hello, we are Baktruppen Light Metal Band from Norway. We wonder if we could have a tour inside the factory?

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1. From the script for Baktruppen: *Light Metal Band*.

J: Madam, I can tell you immediately that is not possible.

I: Could it be possible if we came back at another time?

J: No, I am sorry.

I: Could it be possible if we get a special permission?

J: I don't think so. This is a high security factory.

I: Could we pay some money to get in?

J: No.

I: Ok. Thank you very much. Goodbye.

J: Goodbye.

The lines quoted above immediately calls to mind a literary classic, Franz Kafka's short parable "Before the Law", which has a similar allegorical structure. Like Baktruppen, whose members travel from Norway to the very hotbed of money printing, the protagonist of the story, a man from the country, goes to the House of the Law with a similar intent: he also wants access to the heart of the law, just like Baktruppen seeks entry into the innermost chamber of abstract value. Unlike Baktruppen, the man in "Before the Law" spends his entire life waiting, but no insight is granted until the moment he dies. The doorkeeper guarding the entrance to the House of the Law says: "No one else could gain admittance here, because this entrance was meant solely for you. I am now going to shut it."<sup>2</sup> Baktruppen goes for another strategy: "You know, being denied access to the money printing press makes one think: We had to make Baktruppen a better bank and some weeks later we created a new entity, called the BAKTRUPPEN EVALUATION TEAM."<sup>3</sup>

*Light Metal Band* presents an alternative economy, a theatrical economy: a symbolic economy. The word 'economy' comes from the Greek *oikos*, which means home (or household/ one's own property), and *nomos*, which means law (or law-related matters). As Derrida points

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2. <http://records.viu.ca/~Johnstoi/Kafka/beforethelaw.htm>

3. *Light Metal Band*, script.

out in his book *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*, the law of money (*nomos*) is to return to the home (*oikos*). Money presupposes a circulation of capital that returns with equal, or greater, value. This cycle, where value returns to its point of origin, can take on many forms. While money is the most common, value can also be abstract, non-physical, a fact that is thrown into sharp relief in *Light Metal Band*. Theatre, and more specifically a theatre company, or a particular theatre piece, is also a form of value that can be converted into another value. Recognition, for one. Status. Good reviews. When denied insight into the machinery behind cool, hard cash, Baktruppen declares itself as a producer of symbolic capital. But what is the origin of value? And what is the difference between monetary and theatrical value? Again, Derrida can offer a pointer here. Writing about Kafka's "Before the Law", he states that "What remains concealed and invisible in each law is the law itself, that which makes law of these laws, the being-law of these laws."<sup>4</sup>

For Derrida, it is literature that is the topic, the literarity or regularity of literature, but this passage can also be read as referring to economy, i.e. as a figure of reflection for various levels of value. Following Derrida's logic, one might say that what makes money valuable is precisely that which remains *concealed* or *inaccessible* when trying to understand this very value. The core of the law is – nothing. The man from the country thus meets a paradox, an aporia: the universal law, the law of law, turns out to be singular and idiosyncratic where one would expect general principles. There is no original source of law. Law is based on the magic of faith, on the fact that people accept it as it is and see it as pertaining to the subject of the law when coming before it. A similar situation plays out in Baktruppen's *Light Metal Band*: the value of money, its origin and production site does not conceal any mystery. Karl Marx wrote that money is the concrete expression of interpersonal relationships and that when the commodity, under capitalism, becomes the dominant form of exchange and money the predominant means of payment, one tends to forget this fact. Commodities and money become fetishes, mystical figures that – even though they are perceived as identical to their value – cannot be uncovered without tracing them back to their social origin. Money is an expression of relations between people and functions as a concrete expression of an abstraction of the exchange value of things.

So, what is the story with the theatre? Is the theatre's value also a fetish? An abstraction? Individuals who do not have an already-developed symbolic apparatus may have problems entering the bank system of the theatre, as Baktruppen implies: "and in June we went to

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4. J. Derrida: "Before the Law" In: *Acts of Literature*. New York: Routledge, 1992.

Germany by the river as highly privileged currency artists from developed economies, not like normal people from Somalia or Vietnam. When normal people from Somalia or Vietnam try to enter Germany by the river, it usually goes like this ...”<sup>5</sup> The same scenario that Baktruppen had itself experienced outside De La Rue is repeated later on in *Light Metal Band*, this time in Germany, with the symbolic capital of the theatre as the current monetary unit. Here, the theatrical value functions as an abstract unit, seeming just as magical to ‘normal people from Somalia or Vietnam’ as the monetary value did to Baktruppen when they visited De La Rue. We may surmise that the actual origin of the value is as inaccessible as the legitimacy of law – and this applies to the theatre just as much as it does to dollars and cents. But rather than waiting patiently before the door of the Law, Baktruppen invents its own value systems: here – to borrow from Marx’s analysis of commodity fetishism once again – the abstract value possessed by monetary units is returned to its social origin. The value is linked to territories and to interhuman relationships: “Money rhymes with honey. Honey rhymes with milk. Milk comes from a cow or a goat or a woman or an elephant or a horse and also rhymes, of course.”<sup>6</sup>

In Jean-Luc Godard’s 1976 film *Ici et ailleurs*, a movie on the conflict between Palestine and Israel (but simultaneously also functioning as media criticism along the lines of Guy Debord’s *Société du Spectacle*), the director says that the theatre has its roots in 1789, i.e. in the French revolution. The ceremonial gathering of individuals in the streets is a stage production, a ritual that ties together the story of change and synchronizes the participants into a collective figure. Parallel to Godard’s exegesis of the theatre’s myth of origin, the film features a Palestinian boy reciting a poem by Mahmoud Darwish. The child stands in the ruins of a war-ravaged Palestinian city. He says, in Darwish’s words: “I will resist!” If we are to believe Godard, this situation formally resembles the French revolution; it is the same type of ‘theatre’: the resistance plays out in the streets, with reality as a backdrop, and the human body carries forth, articulates, in increasingly clear language, statements that can no longer be contradicted. The fact that Godard identifies actual revolutionary situations as the point of origin for the modern theatre is interesting; both because the revolutionary event is very much real – people are sacrificing life and limbs for the change of social order – *and* because he suggests that the theatre is intimately connected to reality and even tied in with the real world through its revolutionary potential.

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5. *Light Metal Band*, script.

6. *Ibid.*

The revolutionary potential in *Light Metal Band* is first and foremost a symbolic potential: true revolutionaries never speak only for themselves, but for large groups: a people, a nation, perhaps also an audience? In all cases, the oppressed rise up, or wish to do so, just like Baktruppen refuses to wait around to be allowed entry into the inner sanctum of money printing, but rather invents its own value. To be sure, *Light Metal Band* is less so a demonstration against a political situation or an injustice perpetrated by government, than it is a party, a ritualized communal event. What Baktruppen's performance shares with the demonstrations to which Godard refers, is a collectivity in practice. The collective figure in Godard's film, where the lonely boy is visually and conceptually linked to the event of national and world-historical importance, can be read in light of the notion of collectivity as defined by Gilles Deleuze og Felix Guattari. Now, by placing itself in the center of production, by turning itself into a bank, Baktruppen returns value to a social situation. In this context, the idea of the bank is a constructive figure within Baktruppen's critique of values, because they – not unlike Deleuze and Guattari – demand to be taken literally. The way I interpret this performance, the bank is not a metaphor, but an actual machine that produces value. By insisting on this, Baktruppen becomes a collective subject rather than a theatre company: the individual functions as a collective arrangement (agencement), as Deleuze and Guattari put it. By this, I mean that Baktruppen does not speak of value on its own behalf, as much as the troupe turns itself into an apparatus for a collective enunciation, a revolutionary critique of the abstract concept of value. As a value machine, *Light Metal Band* is a device that, in line with Deleuze and Guattari, has an immediate political function. This way, the performance also points beyond the sphere of the theatre, both as a collective and a political figure of reflection.

Hence, Baktruppen's production of value also functions as a sharing of an event with its audience rather than a formal standardization of the situation's value (i.e. institutionalization). Baktruppen critiques monetary value by replacing it with a context where the troupe, as a bank, turns value into a field for negotiation, as opposed to a predetermined, mystical entity. *Light Metal Band* is a symbolic bank where value is not fixed, and where the production of value is a collective concern in which we can all participate. In this sense, the critique of formal value systems transitions into a concrete value situation where Baktruppen's very own performance becomes the subject of evaluation right then and there. The troupe members do not determine their own value, but rather indicate their own performance, their own critique, as a subject for assessment. Thus, *Light Metal Band* becomes its own doorkeeper, where the audience plays the role of 'the man from the country' in Kafka's story, or in Baktruppen's

own visit to De La Rue. However, contrary to what happened there, we are granted immediate insight into the mystery, the machinery of value. Which, as we have seen, turns out not to be a mystery, but something that we can all take part in evaluating, i.e. assess a price for. Thus, one might say that *Light Metal Band* is more closely related to the gift than to money. The critique we witness as a performance becomes a gift to the audience, which again makes us accomplices in *Light Metal Band* as performative value production and symbolic bank.

As opposed to a theoretical exchange model based on formalized value equivalence, the gift has a more specific orientation: it occurs in a specific location and between specific individuals. The exchange of gifts may take place between groups or individuals, and there are varying degrees of standards determining how to reciprocate the gift received, but the common perception is that a return gift should be made, and that if there is no reciprocation, the contract that was entered into upon receipt of the gift, is broken. In the formal economic sense, a situation of this kind is quite uneventful: if the cycle comes full circle – i.e., that an adequate gift is given back as a return gift – no one is left with any more or less than what they had to begin with. Baktruppen's *Light Metal Band* proposes a return of the formal value to a more specific social economy. Hence, not only does the audience become complicit; it also gets bound up in a gift logic where the evaluation of Baktruppen's critique, the spectators' own assessment, can be read as the obligation to return the gift. In other words: the audience must think through the critique they are witnessing and return this consideration as a gift of reflection and concrete evaluation of the performance, both as critique and as theatrical event. Such a demonstration of symbolic value understood as a state of exception is related to the carnival, where the state of normalcy – the hegemony of the abstract formal value – is turned on its head. But this is not so much a matter of fooling around with the relationship between value as an abstract entity and value as a concrete event, as it is about reintroducing the collective value of sharing something valuable. Symbolic value can be linked to any type of value; the abstract monetary value being the most hermetic of them all. Seen from this angle, *Light Metal Band* serves as a reminder of the social and collective origin of value, a performative manifesto for the theatre as a platform for concrete negotiation situations and forms of critique that go beyond the theatre's own institutional closedness.

TRANSLATION: SOL KJØK



Pages 113 - 117: As Viking daoists Baktruppen play europunk about the global financial crisis, *Baktrüppens Light Metal Band*, Hanoi/Vietnam, Skogås, Oslo/Norway (2008-2009)











*Eurohæ? Oslo/Norway (2000)*

## ARE THEY REALLY NORWEGIAN?

A TRILOGY BY ROBIN DEACON

### 1. HOW IT DIDN'T WORKSHOP

28TH OCTOBER TO 2ND NOVEMBER 2007

The set is rubbish...old junk and office furniture disposed of and left to rot in the university car park. If you look very carefully, you can see the fireworks set within the stacks of broken swivel chairs and battered Formica desks...

Ten minutes later, the brightly coloured projectiles are bouncing and ricocheting off the side of the university building. The wild gesticulating of those at the front signalling to the rest of us to GET BACK reduced the audience to the role of fleeing extras on the set of some low to no budget disaster movie. And was that a jet of sparks flying into that open window on the fourth floor? If you listen very carefully to the video taped documentation, you can hear the voice of our theatre technician off camera, gravely murmuring the following words:

“Robin...we’re going to pay for this...”

We didn’t in the end though, as Jørgen from Baktruppen never invoiced me. In fact, I don’t recall money ever being discussed. So the following transcription is of another conversation that never happened. But if it had, it might have gone something like this:

Robin: Yes, what can I do for you?

Ingvild: Hello, we are Baktruppen from Norway. We wonder if we could teach inside the university?

Robin: Madam, I can tell you immediately that that is not possible.

Ingvild: Could it be possible if we came back at another time?

Robin: No, I am sorry.

Ingvild: Could it be possible if we get a special permission?

Robin: Well, maybe. But how do you propose to apply your chaotic working processes within a restrictive and inflexible institutional framework?

The Drama and Performance Studies degree course at London South Bank University first ran in 2004. Of the six students I started with, three eventually graduated. The last time I saw one of these three was at a party celebrating the (eventual) opening of the university theatre in 2007...no less than three years after the inception of the course. So this is the scene - I'm at the party, sitting next to this particular member of the first cohort, catching up on what she'd been up to since graduating, and commenting on the changes the course had undergone since she arrived all those years ago. How we didn't even have a theatre space back then for example. We drifted onto reminiscences about the performances we did in classrooms utilising angle-poise lamps instead of 'proper' theatre lights...a cheap and nasty solution born out of necessity rather than a deliberately 'poor' aesthetic. We laughed. We laughed again about how we didn't even have a theatre technician back then, leaving me in the invidious position of trying to mark the same work that I was simultaneously doing the lighting and sound cues for.

The laughing gives way to occasional baulking as we both absent-mindedly phase in and out of a video we have running as a backdrop to the party consisting of an edited loop of footage documenting the first three years of the course. Other students present respond with a mixture of amusement and horror at being an audience to themselves and their documented performances for the first time. Suddenly, the image of a tattooed young man in oversized dark glasses tentatively emerging from a glass fronted fridge in what appears to be the university car park comes onto the projection screen. The former student fails to place the footage. "What's that?" she asks. I explain by saying something like this:

“Last year...the year after you graduated...we invited in an experimental Norwegian theatre group called Baktruppen to work with the final year students in an intensive week long workshop culminating in a public performance. The idea was to compress the usual thirty six hour study module spread over twelve weeks into just one week of continual activity, as a means of more realistically investigating the temporal realities of creative process.”

The former student looks at me blankly, and turns to observe the screen again which is now showing a section of the same project, this time with one of the male students simulating sexual intercourse with a watermelon. After a brief pause, my former student turns to me and says something that nearly breaks my heart:

“How come we never got to do anything like that?”

I say this was heart breaking, but there is perhaps an element of rhetorical flourish there. Either way, it was a question that I had no ready answer to, but led me to conclude that I never wanted a student (past or present) to have reason to say something like that again in the future.

Meanwhile, in the university car park, the smoke was clearing. The shattered remnants of the terracotta pots that held the fireworks cover an enormous radius. One student comes up to me in tears and asks the following:

“Are we going to get marked down for this?”

Despite three years of trying to beat it out of them, many of my final year students still want to be ‘proper’ actors. For all the repetition of my dictum that to do something truly interesting with a medium, part of you has to hold it in utter contempt and disdain, ‘the well made play’ remains the totemic point of reference for the average English drama student. All that is crummy and devoid of traditional conceptions of skill or virtuosity (and therefore close to my heart), was summed up by the title of the project: ‘BAKTRUPPEN: IT DOESN’T WORKSHOP’. But the trouble is, a rhetoric of failure can be downright confusing to a student (or nowadays, customer) who just wants to pass.

In describing our soon to be ‘resident’ guests to the students, I had wanted to scotch some of the more apocryphal tales that had already started to circulate regarding what these

Norwegian oddballs were going to ‘make them do’. These rumours were based on reviews of Baktruppen performances that the more diligent students had tracked down, describing prior on-stage exploits involving the ingestion of prescription drugs for example. Add to this the documented sightings of the two male workshop leaders standing naked in front of a car with ‘God’ perched on the roof, one with genitals unfurled (Adam), the other with genitals tucked (Eve), and the pre-workshop question and answer session took on an almost surreal quality:

1: “Are they going to make us take sleeping pills?”

2: “Are they going to make us take our clothes off?”

3: “Are they really Norwegian?”

The last one was a personal favourite of mine. Ostensibly, it is a rather asinine question, but in hindsight, it was actually quite a perspicacious line of enquiry. What I think the student really seemed to be asking was this:

“Do you mean to say they’re coming all the way over here for *us*?”

Suffice to say, eventual introductions were brief, and accents still being negotiated as I left the room at the start of the workshop. The last thing I remember as I closed the door to the theatre space was the strong smell of alcohol wafting from the direction of Eve. Or was it Adam? Not for the last time, the blue touch paper was lit.

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EPILOGUE: Eight months later, and the same tearful student who had questioned what would happen to her mark in the light of the firework ‘incident’ is sitting in my office. She says she doesn’t understand why her final end of year performance was given a lower mark than the ‘embarrassing’ show she did at the culmination of the Baktruppen workshop. For a lecturer, ones pastoral duties always require a certain delicacy and a lightness of touch, but my response in this case took some very particular negotiating, as this time the student wasn’t crying. She was genuinely angry. However, there was to be no *mea culpa* forthcoming, but rather a bland admission that ‘clearly, this was not for everyone’.

2. AN AFTER WORKSHOP DISCUSSION  
2ND NOVEMBER 2007

ROBIN DEACON: Going back to Monday, when you were sitting watching videos of performers having taken sleeping pills, and falling asleep during the performance...performances being done to cows in fields...performers doing bad Merce Cunningham impersonations...what was your first impression?

MARTIN WHELAN (STUDENT, DRAMA & PERFORMANCE STUDIES): I think watching some of the videos...in a strange way it was something I've wanted to see for a long, long time. There's a longing to see something so abstract...like performing to cows. So immediately that broke down any kind of barriers of...‘we're going to get taught’. Or that we were going to follow instructions. And I think the title of the workshop...‘It Doesn't Workshop’ is appropriate, because the initial impression was that we were on a level playing field and that this was going to be a two way thing and not something to be received.

RICHARD KIGHTLEY (STUDENT, DRAMA & PERFORMANCE STUDIES): From first meeting the guys...obviously, they had a lot of character about them. You could see they were dislocated slightly from reality...and I found that quite promising. It was just this childlike naivety...it was like ‘yes, that's good, that's exciting. Blow up! We destroy!’ It was just the rawness...taking everything back down to the basics and finding art within that.

MARTIN WHELAN: The term that they used continuously is ‘play’. Its not ‘perform’, its ‘play’. I'm not sure if that is a language barrier problem, but for me, their idea of being on stage is not to be performing to the audience, but it's to be playing with different things. So the structure to it was like...‘you have three hours, try this’. And then they wouldn't say anything for two hours. Then they'd go, ‘try this’. And before you know it, three hours later, you're doing something. You just play with whatever the ideas were there, and then just go ahead and do it...

RICHARD KIGHTLEY: The time frame was essential to making the work. I think if we'd been given longer, it would probably have been a bit more elaborate, but not as raw. It's basic...you used what you were given, what first comes...the aesthetics that appeal to you.

ROBIN DEACON: It was interesting watching over the week...the way the workshop was

structured was to give a performance or some form of presentation at the end of each day. And I was very surprised when I came down at the end of the first day, and there was...stuff happening. There were people playing violins with video projections in the background, and people dancing, and seemingly enjoying themselves. And then I came down the following day and was told one of the groups was over at the Imperial War Museum, doing performances within the grounds of the museum.

MARTIN WHELAN: That was something very refreshing, because it's very easy in twelve weeks to think through an idea, and you have the image of the perfect performance, and then falter when you start to do it. But to be in that situation where, on the first day especially, it was... 'do something'. It doesn't have to be anything in particular...just do something, and then show it to your classmates, and see what happens. And it's such a different way of approaching something.

ROBIN DEACON: Can you remember what the darkest hour was over the last week?

LAURA DAVEY (STUDENT, DRAMA & PERFORMANCE STUDIES): The darkest hour in what sense?

ROBIN DEACON: You know, that sense where you're working on something, and it's going well, and there's other times where you're sat in a room with your heads in your hands, and you're all going 'what the hell are we doing?'

LAURA DAVEY: I don't think I had that really. Not in that sense. When you normally do a piece, and you've got all this time to focus on what you're going to do, having all that time, that's when I think you find your darkest hour...in this week, we didn't have time to think. And that was brilliant...at the very beginning, I was thinking, 'what have I got myself into?' This isn't going to work. But after the first half of the day, this was amazing...like when I spoke to you before we started this, you just said, 'embrace it, just go with whatever happens', and that's what I did, and it was fantastic, and I'd do it again.

ROBIN DEACON: But I remember being in here on the first day watching the video's that Baktruppen showed of their old performances and although I could see people with concerned facial expressions, most of you were still smiling or laughing, even if there was that sense of resistance. I think there is something quite infectious about what they do.

JOYCE AJOKU (STUDENT, DRAMA & PERFORMANCE STUDIES): I think for me personally, as a performer, every time I was performing recently, I'd kind of lost that enjoyment...I was thinking about things too much. Like 'I've got to do this, or there's got to be a double meaning in this, and I want it to mean this'. Thinking, thinking, thinking. And what I liked about this group from Norway was that it was just like, enjoy yourself! Go out and embrace everything you do, and that's what we did...I had such a good time.

MARTIN WHELAN: I think something else to add is...talking about whether it was a good way to work...what I feel has happened in this week is...I don't think we've been taught much, but I think we've learned a great deal.

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EPILOGUE: Please note that by the time of this discussion, Baktruppen had left both the building and the country. The students showed their performances twice, once in the day with Baktruppen present and once in the evening after their departure, with suitable modifications to the brand of firework utilised the second time round. Also present had been Joe Kelleher, Head of Drama, Performance and Theatre at Roehampton University, London. His text on Baktruppen *Human Stuff: Presence Proximity and Pretend* (2006) had been included on the reading list for the students. I don't think any of them read it though. However, his final observation during the discussion is a cautionary message for any lecturer guilty of underestimating their students:

JOE KELLEHER: I think to be a learner, to be a student is not a straight forward business. It's not about being a sponge and receiving, and taking on and just reproducing. To be a student is a responsibility, it's a weight...it's something you have to learn how to do. So you have a situation like here where you have a company like Baktruppen who are not straight forward at all...how do you possibly engage? I was fascinated to see what the results of this would be. And watching the shows this afternoon, one of the interesting things is that different languages are going on. I see some languages that I feel are owned by the students, and I see other languages that I can't imagine could possibly be owned by the students. For example, the group outside working with a late Ibsen play that I have always fantasised doing with undergraduates. And the reason I've fantasised doing *When the Dead Awaken*, is because it is one play that I can't imagine undergraduates getting any purchase on whatsoever. It's a nineteenth century, romantic, patriarchal piece...but I'm watching this action of the moving of this office furniture from one side of the car park to another, and I find it rather beautiful...and that's the solution to the play let's say. But I still think, what is the students' purchase on this? But I see the students' wave goodbye to Baktruppen, and then I saw the pieces transform between this afternoon and this evening. And they transformed after Baktruppen had gone. They transformed because those students had taken ownership of the languages and taken responsibility for them, and found certain ways of modifying what they were doing, so like in Baktruppen's work, the process was still live.

3. BAKKANALEN: OR THE UNCANNY ART OF BECOMING BAKTRUPPEN  
28TH - 30TH NOVEMBER 2008

“It’s like the Rubaiyat by Omar Khayyam. Borges has written a wonderful critical essay on that poem, saying that the English translator, Edward Fitzgerald, was no good as a translator because his work on the Rubaiyat is very faulty; that Khayyam was actually not a very good poet. But somehow, over the span of nine centuries, they combined to make this little gem of a poem that would never have happened otherwise.”<sup>1</sup>

Here, filmmaker David Cronenberg uses this fascinating example of collaborative process to explain the approach employed in his 1991 adaptation of William Burroughs book, *Naked Lunch*. He goes on to describe this in terms of a synthesis of radically differing sensibilities that somehow transcend singular authorial intention, and thus create a mutated version of two individual visions. “To fuse my own sensibility with Burroughs and create a third thing that neither he nor I would have done on his own” says Cronenberg. Notwithstanding the fact that this example pertains to a shift in medium (from literary to filmic), this notion as delineated by Cronenberg could certainly provide a starting point for discussing the *Bakkanalen*, an event that transplanted the ‘It Doesn’t Workshop’ alumni to Norway for a potentially comparable fusion.

In late 2008, the (now former) students from London South Bank University<sup>2</sup> and The Norwegian Theatre Academy, Fredrikstad convened at the Black Box Theatre in Oslo to engage in a two week process, the basis of which was articulated through a series of recurring musical analogies - existing Baktruppen performances from over twenty years of ‘back catalogue’ were to be ‘remixed’. Or, this was to be Baktruppen’s ‘greatest hits’ - a series of ‘cover versions’ played out by the previous workshop participants to a public audience. The starting points of creative reinterpretation in the case of the *Bakkanalen* were six pieces<sup>3</sup> of performance that while representing quintessential Baktruppen works, were also in some cases ‘originals’ within inverted comma’s - *When We Dead Awake*: ‘a multi purpose all round Ibsen production’. *Germania Tod in Berlin*: ‘Heiner Müller, adapted’<sup>4</sup>. While it could be argued that the *Bakkanalen* represented yet another example of a growing trend in performance re-enactment<sup>5</sup>, there is an important distinction to be made at this juncture. Rather than an

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1. Cronenberg on Cronenberg (ed. Rodley, C.) Faber and Faber, 1997, p. 162

2. Two of these students (Martin Whelan and Richard Kightley) contribute to the after show discussion transcribed in part two of this trilogy.

3. *Germania Tod in Berlin* (1989), *Tonight* (1994), *When We Dead Awake* (1990), *Good Good Very Good* (1997), *Super Per* (1994), *Do & Undo* (2002).

artist or company choosing to revisit the work of those who maybe uncooperative or dead (or both), this recreation was initiated by the company themselves. Or in other words, certainly to be directed towards Baktruppen - *you asked for it...*

So what is it that Baktruppen (as distinct from the audience in general) wanted to see? Despite lacking a particular authorial provenance, let us presume that the following programme note represents a collective ‘voice of Baktruppen’: Seeing this old work made new, often in unexpected ways was the start of the *Bakkanalen* project<sup>6</sup>. But the notion of ‘old work made new’ could apply whether one is discussing this in terms of accurate, faithful depictions of existing material on the one hand, or on the other, radical reinterpretations of the same. Here it may be useful to recall Chris Cutler’s neologised notion of ‘Plunderphonics’, along with its related discourses on twentieth century cultures of sonic recycling from musique concrète to hip hop. Cutler cites the difficulty this phenomena poses for purveyors of supposed ‘high art’ practices, hamstrung by ‘the non-negotiable concern with originality and peer status - the craft aspect of creating from scratch: originating out of a “creative centre” rather than just “messing about with other people’s work.”’<sup>7</sup> In conversation it was confirmed that the perceived ‘originals’ for many of the *Bakkanalen* performers were the video documents of the original performances that were to be remixed – these plundered recordings formed the basis of the rehearsal process. Another distinction emerges here: the separation between the mechanics of a pure blow by blow replication of Baktruppen’s previous works (assisted by the endlessly re-playable tools of mechanical reproduction) or the giving of total interpretive license to the *Bakkanalen* troupe, (consisting of these relatively inexperienced former students), to approach such material in terms of stimulus rather than stipulation. Even if it is acknowledged that we are in the realm of *impressionistic* mimesis, it is worth looking again at Joe Kelleher’s speculations during the ‘It Doesn’t Workshop’ after show discussion regarding the possibility (or not) of students gaining purchase on, or taking ownership of a language. Words for example, can be learned as sounds to be made, but they may still be meaningless to those who speak them.

If the documentation utilised in the *Bakkanalen* rehearsals could be read as a token of absence, let us consider this notion not just in terms of these recordings from another space and time, but also in terms of Baktruppen themselves – who at the start of this process happened to

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4. Programme note.

5. I have previously described this trend/tendency as ‘performance art eating itself’. See also: artist Peter Richards *Collective Histories* projects, *The Short History of Performance* season at the Whitechapel Gallery, London (2002), as well as my own re-enacted performances of late American performance artist Stuart Sherman (2006 onwards).

6. Programme note.

7. Cutler, C. ‘Plunderphonics’ in *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music* (eds. Cox, C. & Warner, D.) Continuum, 2005

be in another space and time zone. Kelleher points out that in Baktruppen's 2002 show *Homo Egg Egg* (not included in the *Bakkanalen* repertoire), "They also - at least in this particular work - appear unconcerned with that most basic theatrical pay-off, human presence, to the extent that they barely appear on stage at all."<sup>8</sup> . Perhaps then, there is form here, as when the workshop participants arrived in Oslo to begin devising the *Bakkanalen*, most of Baktruppen were on tour in the Far East with their new *Light Metal Band*<sup>9</sup> performance. Whether this was a deliberately contrarian strategy or just plain poor planning is open to speculation, but either way by the time they returned, the process of remixing was well under way assisted solely by the Baktruppen member Bo Krister Wallström.

In relation to this, let us revisit Cronenberg's evocation of the posthumous Fitzgerald/Khayyam interaction that opened this section of the text, whereby a mix of bad poetry and poor translation coincidentally produced something beyond the capabilities of either party. The neat suggestion here was of the possibility for fruitful collaboration outside of mutual intent, or even the respective life cycles of the collaborators in question. But watching the final performances of the *Bakkanalen*, it became increasingly clear to this viewer that such a breach of common sense notions of collaborative symmetry can just as easily take us beyond the emergent pleasures of that third, ineffable thing into some rather more disturbing territories.

In a 1987 edition of the now defunct British arts television programme *The South Bank Show*, Time Out theatre critic Steve Grant suggested that the Wooster Group's radical re-reading of *The Crucible* was closer in essence to what Arthur Miller was trying to achieve than his original text was. Grant's theory was that the form in which the play was re-presented (compressed, garbled, hysterical) heightened the fundamental themes of the play in truer manner than a 'faithful' reading of Miller's text could ever have done<sup>10</sup> . In response to this, here are a series of uncanny speculations - Baktruppen only take the stage in the guise of the *Light Metal Band* at end of the three hour *Bakkanalen* programme. Dressed for battle in suits of armour (fashioned from beer cans and other consumer detritus), this motley crew of conquistadors have returned from their sojourn in the Far East only to find that they have been cuckolded. An eerie pall descends over the Black Box theatre as a rumour ripples through the crowd - the *Bakkanalen* performers have presented something more 'Baktruppen' than Baktruppen could

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8. Kelleher, J. 'Human Stuff' in *Contemporary Theatres in Europe* (eds. Kelleher, J. & Ridout, N.) Routledge, 2006, p. 28.

9. Please note that the short dialogue section in part one of this trilogy (where Ingvild tries to inveigle her way into the university for 'teaching' purposes ) is based on the script from this performance.

10. 'To some extent it is probably - in the context of the present day - as faithful a version of what Miller was trying to say when he originally wrote the play as you could possibly get.' (Grant, S., South Bank Show 'Wooster Group' originally broadcast on ITV, 22/2/87).

ever have done. The disquiet increases as it is suggested that the 'real' Baktruppen performers have been maliciously usurped by these sinister and otherworldly body snatchers seemingly from London and Fredrikstad. Impostors in the face of this New Order, the *Light Metal Band* begin their performance – but seemingly 'less Baktruppen' than they were before.

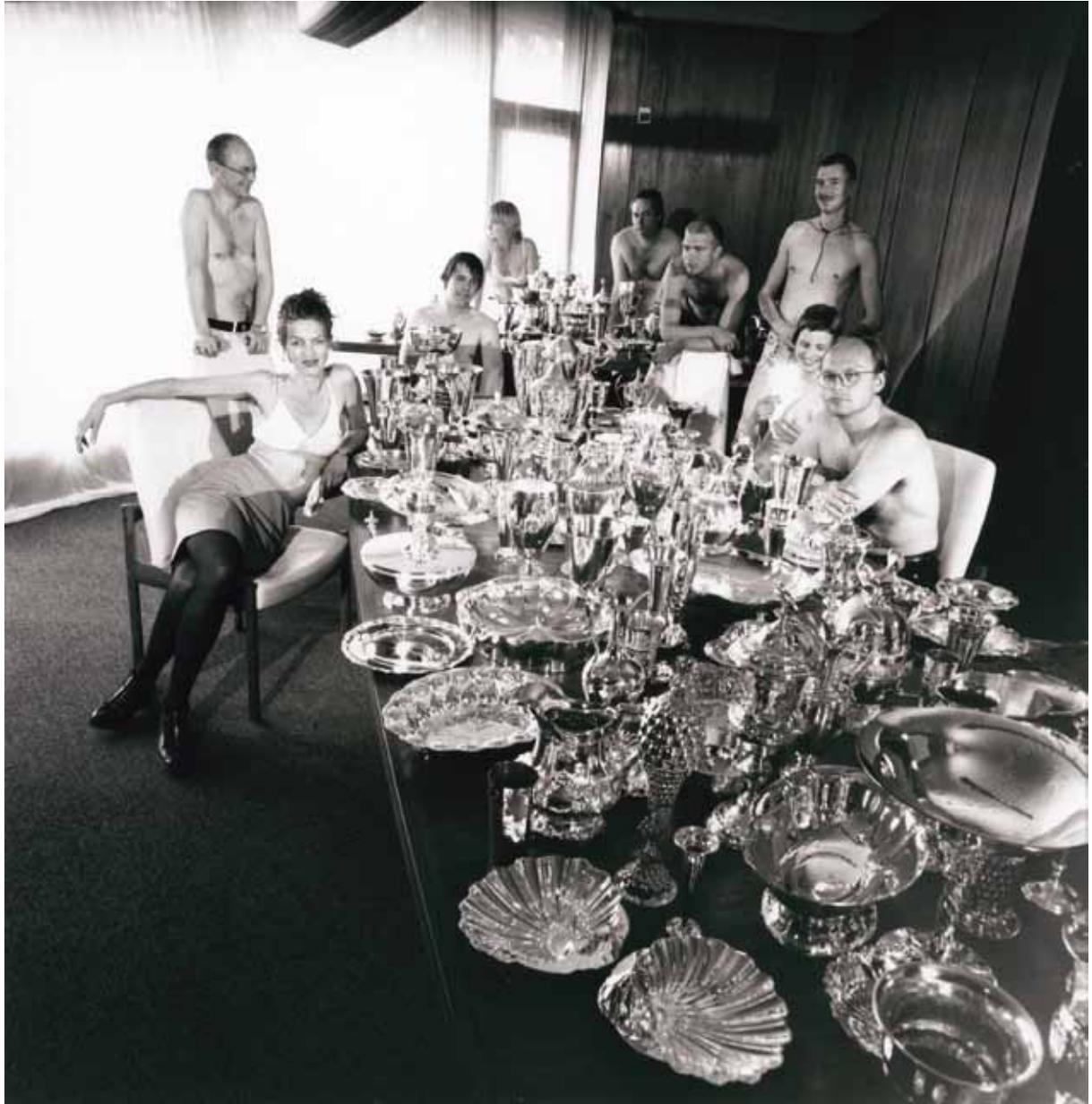


Pages 130 - 133: *Bakkanalen* - New and new versions of Baktruppen Performances: *Germania Tod in Berlin*, *Tonight*, *When We Dead Awake*, *Come On Everybody*, *Good Good Very Good*, *Super-Per*, *Spect* and *Do & Undo*. Performed by former students at Drama and Performance, South Bank University, London, Dartington College of Arts, Totnes and Stage Art Academy in Fredrikstad.









Baktruppen after polishing the trophies of the ice-skater Sonia Henie, Høvikodden Kunstsenter, Oslo/Norway (1995)

## SELECTED WORKS BY BAKTRUPPEN

### BAKTRÜPPEN LIGHT METAL BAND (2009)

Stamsund International Theatre Festival / Norway, Hanoi Sound Stuff-Greener Music Festival / Vietnam, Van Ho Exhibition Center / Vietnam.

Asia Tour (2008): Happy Monday, Bangkok / Thailand, Night and Day / Singapore, Velvet Underground, Taipei / Taiwan, Dreamer House, Xiamen/ China, Ninliho Gallery, Foshan/ China, MoCa Space, Shenzhen Museum of Contemporary Art / China, Oxwarehouse, Macao / China. Storåsfestival / Norway.

### BAKKANALEN (2008)

Baktruppen presented Bakkanale crew and *Baktruppen Light Metal Band* in an eighteen Man Band Baktruppen Forever Show. New and new versions of Baktruppen Performances: *Germania Tod in Berlin, Tonight, When We Dead Awake, Come On Everybody, Good Good Very Good & Super-Per.*

Black Box Theatre, Oslo. Co-producer: Black Box.

### BAKTRUPPEN EVALUATION TEAM (2008)

European Centre for the Arts Hellerau, Dresden.

In order to measure and increase the value of the festival as a whole, BAKTRUPPEN EVALUATION TEAM created a Money Pool. The audience was asked to help us find the Gross Artistic Product (GAP) by giving one € to one of the 22 performances. Then Baktruppen levered

this value by 10 and painted a piece of the diagram blue. To color the pool and to help them choose, thereby making the GAP grow, we gave resymées from the 21 other performances, and spoke about money matters, our universal unit of measurement. All in all, the audience gave 99 €, triggering 990 € from Baktruppen, which make a GAP of 1.089 €, the sum total given back to the festival.

#### THE YEAR OF THE BUSH (2006)

Celebrating The Year of The Bush.  
Dælenenggata 31, OSLO / Norway.

#### UN-DO-THREE (2005)

Third part of Baktruppen's dance trilogy. Developed at Kampnagel, Hamburg / Germany.  
Continental Brekafast Tallin- NU Performance Festival, Tallinn / Estonia.

#### DARIO FO'S CORPS FOR SALE (2005)

Baktruppen cancel their jubilee show about Norway and play instead *Dario Fo's Corps For Sale*. Karlstad Stadsteater, Karlstad / Sweden, Kulturhuset Stockholm / Sweden, Ålesund Theatre Festival / Norway, Black Box Theatre, Oslo / Norway, Teaterhuset Avantgarden, Trondheim / Norway, BIT- Teatergarasjen, Bergen / Norway.

#### DELIA COMMEDIA (2004)

Steirischer Herbst, Graz / Austria. PS 122, NEW YORK /USA, Nordic Excellence, Gothenburg Dance and Theatre Festival / Sweden, Nuffield Theatre, Lancaster / UK, Bowen West Theatre, Bedford / UK, Black Box Theatre, Oslo / Norway, CCA, Glasgow / Scotland, Rui Hortas Centro Coreográfico de Montemor-o-Novo / Portugal, Dansens Dag, Moderna Dansteatern, Stockholm / Sweden, Nordic Excellence, Kulturhuset, Stockholm / Sweden.

Co-producer: Autonnale Bergen Contemporary Music Festival. Rui Hortas Centro Coreográfico de Montemor – o Novo /Portugal.

STAMSUND GALLUP POLL (2004)

As a result of the poll a two and a half meter tall wooden sculpture made by Baktruppen was given to the people in Stamsund to decide it's name and if they wanted it to stand ON LAND or be thrown IN THE OCEAN. The sculpture was wanted ON LAND by 95% AND was named THE TOURIST.

Coastal Ferry Quay, Stamsund, Lofoten / Norway.

Co-producer: Kunstneriske Forstyrrelser/ Artistic Interruptions/ Art In Nordland/ Nordland County

FUNNYSORRYJESUS (2003)

Bread, red wine and Jesus.

Rosa Luxemburg strasse 24, Berlin / Germany Org.: Sophiensæle, Kunstbanken, Hamar / Norway, BIT – Teatergarasjen, Teatergaten, Bergen / Norway, Teaterhuset Avantgarden, Trondheim / Norway, Dæhlenenggata, Oslo / Norway, Tou Scene, Stavanger / Norway, Lime-light, Kortrijk / Belgium,

FUNNYSORRY (2002)

Modernism, fossils, Adam&Eve.

Dælenenggata 31, Oslo / Norway.

DO & UNDO (2002)

Baktruppen do and undo knots and unknots during three entrances, two exits and one turning point.

Steirischer Herbst, Graz / Austria, PS 122, New York /USA, Nordic Excellence, Gothenburg Dance and Theatre Festival / Sweden, Nuffield Theatre, Lancaster / UK, Bowen West Theatre, Bedford / UK, Black Box Theatre, Oslo / Norway, CCA, Glasgow / Scotland, Nordic Excellence, Kulturhuset, Stockholm / Sweden, Autonnale, BIT – Teatergarasjen, Bergen / Norway, Uganda National Theatre, Kampala / Uganda, Perfect Performance Festival, Stockholm / Sweden, Parkteateret, Oslo / Norway, Stamsund International Theatre Festival / Norway, Kunstbanken, Hamar / Norway, Limelight, Kortrijk / Belgium, Montemor-o-Novo Theatre, City Hall / Portugal, Norwegian Touring Exhibitions, Morokulien, border of Norway/Sweden.

Co-producer: Autonnale Bergen Contemporary Music Festival. Rui Hortas Centro Coreográfico de Montemor – o Novo /Portugal.

#### GREAT EUROPEAN BATTLES (2002)

Baktruppen Camp Kortrijk Uncover Operation (BACKUNCOP).  
Site Specific, Limelight, Kortrijk / Belgium

#### WARTE NUR! (2002)

BALD KOMMT DIE GANZE GESICHTE VON IDENTITÄT UND IDENTITOT

Live radio play performed body painted as animals. Transferred to Germany by Deutschland Radio / Bayerisches Rundfunk, and streamed to Bergen, Toronto and Barcelona.  
ZKM, Karlsruhe / Germany

#### HOMO EGG EGG (2002)

The identity, difference and evolution of mankind including the Neanderthals.  
Teglverksgata, Oslo / Norway, Kaaitheatre, Brussel / Belgium, Perfect Performance, Stockholm / Sweden, BIT – Teatergarasjen, Bergen / Norway.

#### LIEBESTOD (2001)

Biljana Srbljanovic's play *Pad* slaughtered by Baktruppen.  
Stavanger International Festival of Literature / Norway

#### OLD TIME FFWD (2001)

Baktruppen's CV performed in fast forward mode.  
M/S Vesterålen between Rørvik-Brønnøysund, M/S Vesterålen between Svolvær-Stokmarknes  
/ Norway, Music Factory, Bergen / Norway.

#### QUALITYSMASHING (2000)

Smashing quality and a Mitsubishi at The Norwegian Council of Cultural Affairs' conference  
about art and quality, Grieghallen, Bergen / Norway.

#### EUROHÆ? (2000)

The author Dag Solstad went from Moscow to Dublin. Based on his reports, Baktruppen  
made a floppy horror show about Europe.

BIT – Teatergarasjen, Bergen / Norway, Gøteborggata 27, Oslo / Norway, Høvleriet, Hauge-  
sund / Norway, Norwegian Literature Festival, Lillehammer / Norway, Kunstbanken, Hamar  
/ Norway, Teaterhuset Avantgarden, Trondheim / Norway, M/S Vesterålen Rørvik-Brøn-  
nøysund, M/S Vesterålen Svolvær-Stokmarknes, Tromsø Kunstforening, Grenland Friteteat-  
er, Porsgrunn, Black Box Theatre, Oslo / Norway, Von Krahli Teater, Tallin / Estonia, Homo  
Novus Festival, Riga / Latvia, Amorph 01, Helsinki, Kultuurihusi Gloria / Finland, Turku Art  
Academy / Finland, Localmotives, Stavanger / Norway, Kampnagel, Hamburg / Germany  
Co.prod.: Baktruppen, BIT, Cultural City of Bergen 2000.

### STYLE IS KING (1999)

International hip hop event. Graffiti, rap, break from Bronx to Oslo.

Stretch and G9, Brenneriveien, Oslo / Norway.

Writers: USA: Wane, Dash, Sebar, Persue, Virus, Denmark: Bates, Side, Sweden: Tariq, Norway: Goal, Coderock, Pay2, Sean.

Rappers: Petter (Sweden), Pen Jakke (N), various artists from Tee Production.

### BAKTRUPPEN AS WALL (1999)

In the absence of legal wall space for graffiti, Baktruppen dressed in white and acted as wall for writer Goal outside the Oslo Courthouse / Norway.

### VERY GOOD (1999)

Cheers to alcohol, fat, the Sami people and the Chinese.

Helsinki Act, Theatre Corner / Finland, Panacea, Stadsteatern, Stockholm / Sweden, Podewil, Berlin / Germany, Künstlerhaus Mousonturm, Frankfurt / Germany, Reykjavik Nordic House / Iceland, Baltoscandal Festival Rakvere / Estland, Capitals, Modern Art Centre, Lisboa / Portugal,

### SPECT (1999)

3D wild style body graffiti on sleeping pills.

Samtidskunstforum, Oslo / Norway, 21. Norddeutsche Theatretreffen, Theatre Lübeck / Germany, Helsinki Act '99, Helsinki / Finland, BIT - Teatergarasjen, Bergen / Norway, Stretch, Oslo / Norway, Künstlerhaus Mousonturm, Frankfurt / Germany, Museum for Contemporary Arts, Oslo / Norway, ICA, London / UK, Teaterhuset Avantgarden, Trondheim / Norway.

### KVAKK (1998)

Contemporary agricultural theatre about the breeding ox Storm Kvakkestad.  
Chapter Art Centre, Iconoclastic Theatre Season, Cardiff / UK, Samtidskunstforum Art Gallery, Oslo / Norway, 21. Norddeutsche Theatretreffen, Theatre Lübeck / Germany, Helsinki Act-99, Theatre Corner / Finland, Theatretextcontext BIT – Teatergarasjen, Bergen / Norway, Kvakk in the field, Tynes Nedre, Levanger / Norway.

### PERFECT HAPPINESS (1998)

Baktruppen tell Chinese stories while Zhou Huilin og Zhang Zhulian play Chinese music in an exhibition of ancient Chinese art.  
Cultural City of Bergen 2000, Museum of Industrial Arts, Bergen / Norway.

### GOOD GOOD VERY GOOD (1997)

Cheers to alcohol, The Sami People and The Chinese. In co-op. with L&O Amsterdam.  
BIT Teatergarasjen, Bergen / Norway, Expo Zaal, De Brakke Grond, Amsterdam / Netherlands, STUC, Leuven / Belgium, Limelight, Kortrijk / Belgium, Fellessentralen Art Event, Kunsternes Hus, Oslo, Smutthullet, Alta, Porsanger Vertshus, Lakselv, Bakteharji, Kautokeino, Kulturhuset, Karasjok, Malmklang, Kirkenes, M/S Midnatsol, Tromsø Kunstforening / Norway.  
Co-prod.: Baktruppen, STUC, Das TAT, L&O Amsterdam, BIT Teatergarasjen and EU's Kaleidoscope.

### COME ON EVERYBODY (1997)

Music for alcoholics. Songs from the CD *Come On Everybody* performed live.  
Hordaland Prosjektgalleri «Nye møte», Bergen Kunstforening / Norway: «ZOOM», Zoolounge, Oslo / Norway.

GOOD (1996)

Erik Balke's unpaid bills exhibited and sold.  
Galleri Struts, Oslo / Norway.

VERY (1996)

Antipodal dance theatre about the Sami people and the Chinese.  
Galleri Otto Plonk, Bergen / Norway.

GOOD (1996)

Music for Alcoholics. Warm up concert for Mike Kelley, Paul McCarthy and Extended Noise.  
UKS / Oslo Rock Festival, Stratos, Oslo / Norway

WE AGREE (1995)

Street demonstration, Hong Kong / Hong Kong.

BAKTRUPPEN POLISHES THE TROPHES OF SONJA HENIE (1995)

Bak-truppen's contribution to the site specific art event Ad Hok at Sonja Henie Art Centre.  
Photo and press release, Høvikodden Art Center, Oslo / Norway.

TONIGHT :- ) (1994)

Hyper textual lecture on industry, technology, time and memory on 350m<sup>2</sup> synthetic carpets.  
Kampnagel, Hamburg / Germany, TAT-Bühne, Frankfurt / Germany, Hebbel Theatre, Berlin  
/ Germany, Det Akademiske Kvarter, Bergen / Norway, Kongsvinger Teaterfestival / Norway,

BIT - Teatergarasjen, Bergen / Norway, Electra, Høvikodden Kunstsenter, Oslo / Norway,  
Co-prod.: Kampnagel, TAT, Hebbel Theatre, BIT Teatergarasjen.

BAKTRUPPEN OPEN PROJECT IN GAMLEBYEN (P.I.G) (1994)

Buried to the waist in the maple grove Baktruppen praise the art event.  
Borgen, Oslo / Norway.

SUPER – PER (1994)

Highlights from Baktruppen's life as Peer Gynt (1993).

BIT - Teatergarasjen, Bergen, Bodø Kunstforening, Bodø, Arbeideren, Kabelvåg, Gimle, Stamsund, Trondenes fort, Harstad, M/S Ragnvald Jarl, Ungdommens hus, Tromsø, M/S Vesterålen / Norway, TAT-Probebühne, Frankfurt / Germany, Trippel X, Amsterdam / Netherlands, European performance and theatre towards the year 2000, Kanonhallen, København / Denmark, LIFT, ICA, London / UK, EXIT, Maison des Arts, Creteil, Paris / France, Theatre 140, Brussel / Belgium, STUC, Leuven / Belgium, Hong Kong Arts Centre / Hong Kong, TAT, BIT Teatergarasjen, Züricher Theatrespektakel, Hebbel Theatre and Monty.

PEER YOU'RE LYING, YES! (1993)

V version: Peer Gynt opens an Institute for happiness research.  
Goederenstation Zuid, Antwerpen / Belgium. Co-produced by Monty.

PEER DU LÜGST, JA! (1993)

IV version: Seit letzte Eiszeit.

Hebbel Theatre, Berlin, TAT-Probebühne, Frankfurt / Germany.  
Co-prod.: The Norwegian Dep. of Foreign Affairs, Hebbel Theatre.

PEER YOU'RE LYING, YES! (1993)

III version: In 1997 Hong Kong will be incorporated into China.  
Rote Fabrik, Zürich /Switzerland.  
Co-produced by Züricher Theatre Spektakel.

PEER DU LYVER, JA! (1993)

II version: Meeting the Curved one.  
BIT - Teatergarasjen, Bergen / Norway.  
Co-produced by Bergen International Theatre - BIT.

PEER DU LÜGST, JA! (1993)

I version: An erotical enlightenment show.  
TAT-Probebühne, Frankfurt / Germany.  
Co-produced by Theatre am Turm (TAT).

THE MEANING OF EXTACY (1992)

The adult world explained to children.  
Performance Art Festival for Children and Youth, Black Box Theatre, Oslo / Norway.

HAMLET FOR FREE (1992)

HAMLET performed in a gold painted bank valve, video transferred to the street outside.  
Scene 1935-92, Exhibition in Norges Bank, Bergen / Norway.

BAK-TRUPPEN LIVE FROM ESPEVÆR (1992)

Radio-play transmitted through 37 local radio stations in Norway.  
Espevær / Norway.

AB JETZ III - OR BAK-TRUPPEN GERMANIA TOD IN BERLIN (1992)

Based on Bakruppen's *Germania Tod in Berlin*, based on Heiner Müller's drama. Performed playback with bleached hair and no trousers. Text in co-op with Stefan Döring.  
Felix Meritis, Amsterdam / Netherlands.  
Co-produced by Felix Meritis, Amsterdam.

“ ” (1991)

11 sequences performed in different order each time.

Bergen Visningssenter, Bergen / Norway, Felix Meritis, Amsterdam / Netherlands, BIT – Teatergarasjen, Bergen / Norway, Touch Time, Melkweg, Amsterdam / Netherlands, Eurokaz, Scena Ceca, Zagreb / Croatia, Belluard/Bollwerk, Belluard, Fribourg / Germany, Festival International de Teatro, Claustro de San Augustin, Malaga / Spain, Inteatro 91, Teatro del Parco, Poverigi / Italy, Züricher Theatre Spektakel, RoteFabrik, Zürich / Switzerland, Black Box Theatre, Oslo / Norway, Hedemark Teater, Elverum / Norway, Kaaitheatre, Brussels / Belgium, STUC, Arenberginstituut, Leuven / Belgium, Theatre am Turm, Frankfurt / Germany, Salle Sthrau, Maubeuge / France, Theatre du Radeau, La Fonderie, Le Mans / France, Freistil '92, Tacheles, Berlin / Germany.  
Co-produced: Felix Meritis, Mickery, B.I.T.

ACTION IN NIEDERKIRCHNERSTRASSE, BERLIN NOVEMBER 1990

Bakruppen sell the remains of Bakruppen's office in Bergen. The remains of the sale were given away, and the last things were left by the wall marked "umsonst".

#### WHEN WE DEAD AWAKE (1990)

A multi purpose all round Ibsen production.

Teater Druzhba, Tbilisi / Georgia, IOGT-huset, Bergen, Folken, Stavanger. Sykkelfabrikken, Sandnes, Dalane Vidergående Skole, Egersund., Music Factory, USF, outdoors, Bergen, Hedemark Teater, Galleri F15, Moss, Oslo Int. Theatre, Scenehuset, Oslo / Norway, Theatre Westend, Zürich, Züricher Theatre Spektakel / Switzerland, De Markten, Brüssel / Belgium, Akademie der Künste, Berlin / Germany, Felix Meritis, Amsterdam / Netherlands, Scena Ceka, Zagreb / Croatia, Festival Int. de Teatro, Claustro de San Augustin, Malaga / Spain,

#### GERMANIA TOD IN BERLIN (1989)

Heiner Müller's drama, adapted. Seven people behind a wall. An episcopo showing pictures. The participants speak, sing and walk their way through a treacherous post-war period, where the betrayal is unconscious and private. Each and every man is alone, yet vaguely dreaming of a common stance. Pictures are taken.

Høvikodden Kunstsenter, Oslo / Norway, Bandens Teater, International Video & Performance Festival, Odense / Norway, Teatretreff –89, Hotel Norge, Bergen / Norway,

Back 2 Back, Frascati, Amsterdam / Netherlands, Experimenta 6, Mousonturm, Frankfurt / Germany, Helsinki Festspel, Savoy Teater, Helsinki / Finland, Theatre Westend, Zürich, Züricher Theatre Spektakel / Switzerland, De Markten, Brüssel / Belgium, Akademie der Künste, Berlin / Germany,

Co-prod.: Bergen International Theatre and Høvikodden Art Centre.

#### CUR (1989)

A new burlesque about two Norwegian families celebrating Christmas. On the Holy night a murder is committed and immediately forgotten. The play takes place on four platforms, stylized according to a clumsy normality.

Turnhallen, Bergen, Black Box Theatre, Oslo, Student Society, Trondheim / Norway.

### PETRA (1988)

Cabaret from Norwegian topography. An informal mix of recitation and songs. Wonderful effects and catchy new music. Excerpts from *Before we get married* (1957), the song book *Petra* (1949), and lyrics by Øyvind Berg.

Bergen International Theatre Festival 1988, Café Chagall, Bergen, Great Hall, Turnhallen, Bergen / Norway.

### EVERYTHING (1988)

Based on Ibsen's *Brand* (1866). Brand's conflict is manifested in a 5,5 m. high steel tower. In and around the tower, his inhuman craving for utopia is revealed. The will to control the world according to one specific viewpoint leads to a 55 minute long continual and social collapse.

USF, Bergen, Nordre Teater, Oslo, Solheimsviken Verft, Bergen / Norway.

### YES, I GO OVER TO THE DOGS (1987)

Norway in the eighties. Performed in three different areas in a 100 m. long tunnel with one masculine and one feminine side. After the demise of democracy, freedom is presented as a heightened awareness of death and sexual pleasure.

Based on the books *The Moment of Freedom* and *Without a thread* by Jens Bjørneboe.

Teatertreff –87, Fall-out shelter, Bergen, Det røde sjøhus, Stavanger, The Architect school, Oslo / Norway, The Box, Gothenburg / Sweden, Singel record, Berlin 1988.

### THE LITTLE BEARS (1987)

Red-clad people sidled round and round outside the café, then walked into the café, sat down with their teddy-bears and made teddy-bear noises. Evacuation.

Action, Café Opera, Bergen / Norway.

INVISIBLE THEATRE AT CAFE OPERA (1987)

Participants wearing identity-cards walked into the café, sat down and read the Invisible Theatre's Repertory. A collection was made at the exit.

Café Opera, Bergen / Norway.

NORWEGIAN POETRY WHILE PADDLING (1987)

With woolen socks and wet feet reading Norwegian classics aloud.

Action, Ole Bulls Plass, Bergen / Norway.

FOUNDED

Autumn 1986: Baktruppen is founded in Bergen, Norway.



Baktruppen at Lantau Island, Hong Kong/China (1997)



Members of Bakruppen have been sitting in front of a camera obscura for 3 minutes each, creating the picture of the body and mind, named *Bob*. Bergen/Norway (1990)

**ARTISTS IN  
BAKTRUPPEN  
(1986 -)**

**MEMBERS 2009:**

Øyvind Berg (1986 -), Jørgen Knudsen (1986 -), Worm Winther (1986 -), Ingvild Holm (1987 -), Bo Krister Wallström (1989 -), Per Henrik Svalastog (1999 -).

**EARLIER MEMBERS:**

Tone Avenstroup (1986-1994), Erik Balke (1989-2006), Hans Petter Dahl (1986-1995), Trine Falch (1988-2006), Gurå Mathiesen (1986-1999).

**FOUNDED 1986**

by Tone Avenstroup (1986-1995) and Øyvind Berg (1986 -).

**OTHER PARTICIPANTS:**

2009

John Hegre.

2008

John Hegre, Hans Skogen, Hildur Kristinsdottir, Richard Knightley, Eleni Nicolaou, Eliot Bradshaw, Maria Dommersnes Ramvi, Martin Whelan, Rebekka Maria Nystabakk, Vito Maraula, Rudi Jensen, Veronika Bökelman, Dee Patton, Christina Jensen, Anders Thorbjørnsen.

2007

Hans Skogen, Lise Risom Olsen, Nina Tecklenburg, Florian Feigl.

2006

John Hegre, Hans Skogen.

2005

John Hegre, Hans Skogen.

2000

Dag Solstad

2002

Gisle Frøysland, John Hegre.

1999

Gisle Frøysland, Sean, Goal, Pay2, Harald Fetveit, Klaus Tjønn, Marianne Tjønn.

1998

Harald Fetveit, Pål Norheim, Zhou Huilin, Zhang Zhulian, Thora Dolven Balke

1997

Anneke Bonnema, Hans Petter Dahl, Knut Ove Arntzen, Sofie Berntsen, Lisbeth Bodd, Morten Cranner, Ali Djabbari, Staffan Eek, Sven Erga, Fredrik Falch Johannessen, Preben Faye Scøll, Harald Fetveit, Otto Fischer, Svein Flygari, Pål Flygari, Anne Britt Grana, Mattias Härenstam, Finn Iunker, Kai Johnsen, Inghild Karlsen, Marina Krig, Sofia Lagerkvist, Tor Lindstrand, Håkon Lindbek, Martin Ljungberg, Anders Mosling, Asle Nilsen, Anné Olofsson, Tommy Olsson, Ales Ree, Tor Sandnes, Ketil Skøyen, Marianne Solberg, Mårten Spångberg, Amanda Steggell, Mark Steiner, Ingeborg Torgersen, Death Waits, Trine Wiggen, Johan Wollmer, Terje Lind Bjørsvik.

1995

Terje Dragseth, Marit Anna Evanger.

1994

Finn Iunker, Terje Lind Bjørsvik.

1993

Gisle Frøysland, Caspar Evensen, Ragnhild Vannebo, Stefan Döring.

1992

Stefan Döring, Peter Hollinger, Bert Papenfuss, Morten Eng, Sven Åge Birkeland, Linda Krogsæter, Rune Hovda, Casper Evensen, Rolv Skøien, Janne Aas, Reidar Karlsen, Rolv Bergesen, Sveinung Igesund, Dag Igland, Henriette Harbitz, Bjørn Kolbjørnsen, Erling Thorsrud, Svein Kirkhorn, Trude Rabben, Trond Absalonsen.

1991

Sven Erga, Niko Tenten, Stefan Döring, Chain Fjolnesa Hansen-ert, Dunungen Jørsk, Bela Kirek, Verb Nidgøy, Rett Nash Pedal, Gorm Hau Teisen, Krall Woterbröm Tiss, Nesa Venturopot, Ming Hild Vol, Reim W. Wortenh.

1990

Wolfgang Krause, Bente Geving, Werner Durand, Terje Geving, Jan Sveen, Ole H. Hagen, Anne Katrine Dolven, Per Kvist, Niko Tenten.

1989

Rolf Eriksen, Erik Meling, Monica Haugan, Tom Rasmussen, Monika Wilkosz-Ohldieck, Olav Myrtvedt.

1988

Monica Haugan, Tom Rasmussen, Rolv Bergesen, Olav Myrtvedt, Gry Nøstdahl, Roddy Bell, Arnold Iversen, Katrine Nylund, Anne Tone Lindsholm, Anne Stine Bankrøed-Nielsen, Sven Åge Birkeland, Tim Birkeland, Svein Ove Kirkhorn.

1987

Ketil Berge, Rolf Eriksen, Anne Tone Lindsholm, Jarle Aadna, Rolv Bergesen, Robert Heggdal, Anne Gro Innstrand, Anne Stine Bankrøed Nielsen, Dorthie Mowinckel Keyser, Gry Nøstdahl.

Thanks to The Norwegian Arts Council and promoters everywhere.



Baktruppen visiting Merce Cunningham at his dance studio in New York/USA (2005)

## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

DANJEL ANDERSSON is a Swedish writer and curator. He is artistic director for the festival Perfect Performance and chief editor of the magazine *Visslingar och Rop*.

KNUT OVE ARNTZEN, studied theatre in Bergen and Paris, and has since 1988 been an associated professor of theatre studies at the University of Bergen, Department of Linguistics, Comparative Literature and Aesthetic Studies. He has for many years been a theatre critic in newspapers and magazines, and was a scientific consultant to the *Bergen International Theatre* and *Les 20 Jours du Théâtre à Risque* in Canada/Québec. Arntzen has been a regular visiting professor, teaching postmodern theatre and performance at the Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas, Lithuania, as well as the Theatre Academies in Helsinki and Oslo. His latest book is *Det marginale teater*, published by Alvheim & Eide, Laksevåg 2007.

HANS-THIES LEHMANN, studied literature and philosophy in Berlin, and has since 1988 been a professor at the Institut für Theatre-, Film- und Medienwissenschaft at Goethe-Universität, Frankfurt am Main. Before that he was, with professor Andrzej Wirth, a co-founder of the Institut für Angewandte Theatrewissenschaft, known as the “Giessen School”, at the Justus-Liebig-Universität in Giessen. Lehmann is the author of many articles and several books, among them *Postdramatisches Theatre*, Verlag der Autoren, Frankfurt am Main 1999, translated into several languages. The English version, *Postdramatic Theatre*, was published by Routledge, London 2006.

ARND WESEMANN studied theatre at the “Giessen School”. Since 1997 he has been the editor of *ballet-tanz*, Europe’s leading dance magazine. He has published various articles

in national and international papers (such as *Süddeutsche Zeitung*) on expanded concepts of dance. His latest book on the cultures of the feast, *Immer Feste Tanzen*, was published in 2008 at Transcripte-verlag.de

KATHRIN TIEDEMANN studied theatre at the Freie Universität in Berlin, and has since 2004 been the artistic and managing director of Forum Freies Theatre in Düsseldorf. She worked as a writer and editor of the German Theatre Magazine *Theatre der Zeit* before she became a dramaturg at the Kampnagel Theatre in Hamburg. She was also a co-founder of the festival *reich & berühmt* (*rich & famous*) at Podewil in Berlin.

CAMILLA EEG-TVERBAKK holds an MA in Performance Studies from New York University. She has been active as an artist, curator, writer and teacher within both the performing arts and visual arts. She trained as performer and theatre maker, and worked in the independent theatre scene in Norway until 1997 when she followed up an academic career. As a scholar and performance theorist Eeg-Tverbakk has taught in national art schools, and written articles for books and art magazines. She is the editor of the book *Dans i samtiden* (Spartacus 2006) and is currently Artistic Director, Acting at the Norwegian Theatre Academy/ Østfold University College. She also works as a dramaturge for independent theatre and dance companies.

KJETIL RØED holds an MA in Literature from the University of Oslo. He is a freelance writer and critic, published in art magazines and newspapers such as *Film & Kino*, *Billedkunst*, *Kunstkritikk.no*, and *Morgenbladet*.

ROBIN DEACON is an artist, writer and filmmaker based in the UK. Working since the early 1990s, much of his work encompasses live performance with a body of works that have explored journalistic and documentary approaches to arts practice. He is an Associate Artist of Artsadmin and is Principal Lecturer in Creative Arts at London South Bank University.

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