



Copenhagen Free University #11

# UtopiaLive

- Let's dismantle the artist genius and replace it with an open ended self-organised multitude.

Utopia Live was a 12 hour one way transmission from the Copenhagen Free University to the cinema at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in East London on June 18 2005. The Copenhagen Free University (CFU) is situated in a flat and a household in a northern neighbourhood of Copenhagen. We (Jakob Jakobsen and Henriette Heise) live and work at the CFU. For the Utopia Live transmission we collaborated with our friend and fellow researcher Emma Hedditch, who is based in London.

In the months running up to June 18 we had to develop a conceptual structure of this 12 hour window we were going to open on the activities at the CFU. How could we represent the messy everyday life at our self-organised university? We had no illusions about making an unmediated representation and we decided to view the transmission as an experimental journey into the construction of an everyday life within the framework of television and cinema. The everyday is a problematic concept much fetishised in the practices of the CFU - we occasionally call it a university of the everyday. Could we learn something about this construction by forcing it onto a screen for a duration of 12 hours? In the planning process we had to decide whether we should try to choreograph normality insisting on doing things during the day that we would normally do, or should we surrender to this spectacular event and plan a programme of successive situations and happenings? Moreover we had to sort out how to place and use cameras and microphones in relation to the architecture; how to produce the space? And on the level of the production of the live stream; who was going to be in control of the montage of images and sound that was going to be transmitted to the cinema at the Whitechapel?

As a starting point in the planning process leading up to the UtopiaLive event the three of us decided to read the same book: 'Loving Big Brother: Surveillance Culture and Performance Space' written by John E. McGrath. In the book McGrath draws a parallel between the controlling Big Brother in the television show and the fetishised figure of the twentieth-century theatre director; i.e. the sovereign artist genius. It soon became clear to us that we didn't need a Big Brother; we had to dismantle this figure and replace it with an open-ended self-organised multitude. As a consequence of this we wanted to flatten the hierarchy and integrate the production of the images and sound as an integral part of the activities during the transmission. We tried to decide on what the production of a

# Actors/pa

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Emma Hedditch, Henriette Heise,

Ralo Mayer, John E. McGrath

Jakob Jakobsen, Don Hurley. Joe

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Utopia LIVE • 12 hours LIVE transmission from the Copenh

# Participants

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Eva Egerman, Peter Laugesen,  
n, Ian White, Solvej,  
achim Hamov, Jesper Siberg

collective process within the frame could mean. So the decisions on how to use and direct the cameras, how to make the montage of images and how to produce the sound became a collective task for the people present in the space of the CFU during the 12 hours of the broadcast.

We decided to have a kind of schedule structuring the 12 hours: every two hours we should have a meeting in an ad hoc TV-studio we set up in one of the rooms of our flat. These meetings should serve as a framework for a discussion of the situation and how to proceed. Between the meetings we decided not to arrange any specific events or happenings. Instead we wanted to focus on the flow of interaction and discussions that appeared - or did not appear - between those present during the day. We had, though, some pre-planned cues written into the schedule like "Watching videos together that we have found interesting, in relation to what we are doing. Doing other things." - the cue for the two hours between 4pm and 6pm. Various guests arrived during the 12 hours. And Jesper Siberg and Joachim Hamou were there to take care of the technical side of the transmission. So something did happen, but it was not very spectacular. One of these non-events was a phone conversation with the author of the *Loving Big Brother* Book John E. McGrath. Here is an extract from the conversation we had with him on June 18 2005 starting at 8.30pm. Those present in Copenhagen were Emma Hedditch, Joachim Hamou, Jesper Siberg, Eva Egermann, Jakob Jakobsen, and Henriette Heise. John E. McGrath spoke from Manchester.

**Henriette:** We are in the middle of this live broadcast to a cinema in London.

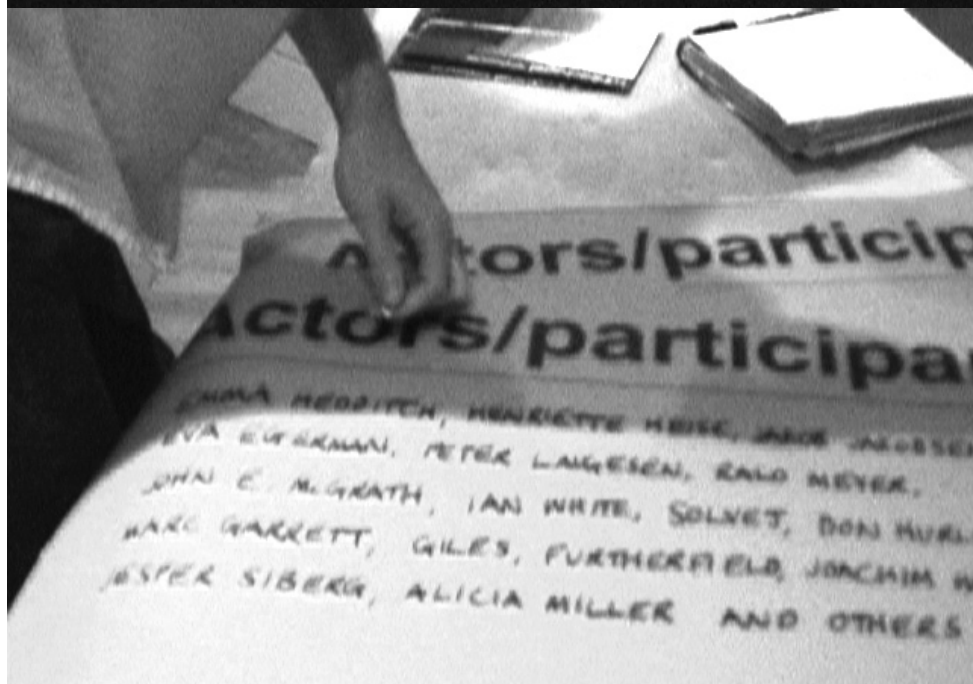
**John:** So what are you doing? Are you just hanging out and videoing yourselves or what's going on?

**Henriette:** Yeah, we have been doing this now for, I mean it feels like a lot of hours, I think its 6 or 8, sorry time seems a bit weird now, but um we have been trying different things, we are somehow trying to represent some kind of an everyday. But it's very difficult when you have a camera on you all the time, and then we have these meetings every two hours where we try to reflect on the situation and how we can continue.

**John:** So when you are being 'everyday' in between the meetings do you avoid talking about the fact that you are trying to be everyday?

**Henriette:** Not really because in everyday we somehow also reflect on the situation we are in. Not that we are on camera every day.

**John:** Yeah, I understand.



**Henriette:** And we have been reading your book, in the months prior to this event, and really enjoyed it.

**John:** And what do you feel about the arguments? Do you find yourself in agreement, or do you find yourself annoyed by them?

**Jakob:** But John, you have this idea of surveillance space as a performative space, maybe you could - we haven't really explained very much what we have been doing - but if you could introduce your ideas a little bit, then we can try to discuss our experiences in the light of your ideas.

**John:** Sure, basically the idea in the book is to try and find a different way of talking about surveillance. I think that essentially there are two usual kinds of conversation about surveillance: one, usually the governmental viewpoint, is the crime prevention, or nowadays the terrorism prevention argument, which looks at surveillance as a tool and sees it as a way of preventing something from happening. So there's this fantasy that somehow by watching things happen you can prevent something else happening. There is very little evidence anywhere that that is true, but nonetheless it's a very predominant idea in looking at surveillance.

In most books about surveillance, or in most academic critiques of surveillance there will be a focus on the second dominant argument: the privacy argument, the idea that surveillance is in some way taking over the realm of privacy and it needs to be countered by an attempt to guard privacy and to legislate more strongly for privacy. I think there are important arguments in there, but what my book is trying to do is work from the assumption that privacy is a historically specific phenomenon, that privacy is perhaps something that we are moving away from, that we're really not going to have any more and that actually was located as a very particular privilege for a very particular group of people for a very particular period of time; that it was never something that a majority of people have had access to. So what the book starts to do is ask what kind of space do we live in now that we are under surveillance? It suggests that surveillance creates a different experience of space. So what you guys are doing is trying to be everyday with a camera on you, but actually it feels completely different to the experience of being everyday without the camera and that's because you are in a different kind of space, you are in a space that has knowledge of other spaces, it has knowledge of being watched by other people, your physical interactions are both with the people there and with the imagination, your imagination of people who aren't there. So you inhabit a much heightened version of surveillance space but, to different degrees, in a surveillance society we all inhabit surveillance space. A key starting point of the book is to not assume that that's a bad thing (that's not to say that it's necessarily a good thing either but it's just to not assume it's a bad thing) and rather to ask: if we live in surveillance space, what does that



feel like, what does that make possible, both positive and negative, and how do we engage with it? And so the book is essentially an examination of the very many ways to engage with surveillance space, politically, sexually, artistically and to imagine the reality of living in a surveillance world. I think that's a brief overview of at least the starting point of the book.

**Jakob:** We have in a way been struggling all day, I must say. Of course we knew that it would be a total construction this idea of the everyday and trying to represent that, but also just to be able to behave in this space has been really, really difficult, because there was all these kinds of reflections upon the space we were creating, the representation of the space we were in, which is presented in London. For example we were just, before we called you, we were sitting here having dinner together and we just didn't know what to talk about, and of course we are not, I don't think we are, a company of actors. This is on a very experimental level, and we are in a way trying to engage in this, investing our own bodies and seeing how it works, but if you see it as a potentially performative space, then we have to maybe get rid of some ideas about ourselves, how we represent ourselves. You feel that you are undermining yourself, the idea of yourself when you are being represented in another space, in this case, in London. I find it; I think we all have found it quite difficult during the day.

**John:** I think that idea of, you know, trying to have the dinnertime conversation, but it actually being interrupted by your awareness of where you are, I think that's a really interesting experiment. It's quite noticeable, if you look at the classic example of the Big Brother TV programme, that actually what the camera often produces there is a kind of hilarity, a kind of hyper realism where every conversation is sort of exaggerated to the maximum and again I think that that's to do with a knowledge of being in a different space and not being able to settle into normal patterns within that space. In the Big Brother programmes you see that turning into a kind of hyperness and at your dinner you feel it as a sort of impediment, but the key thing is that the space you are in is different to the one you are familiar with and so your behaviour in it no longer feels normal.

I think that one of the main points in the book is the idea of looking at theories of language performativity in relation to space. The essential concept in language performativity is that by saying something you make something happen; and I think that, similarly, by the seemingly undynamic act of turning a camera on in your space, you've actually made something happen to the space you inhabit which means that physically and psychically it comes to feel unfamiliar for everyday actions. So, those everyday actions can't happen in a normal, normative way anymore and either you have a response of hiatus, of being stopped, or you have a response of a kind of hyperness. So your other options than having no conversation would be to have manic food fights and jump around on the tables screaming at each other.



**Emma:** But also because we're trying to think as well about how we're producing the space, so we're thinking about that at the same time as being videoed. So thinking how to make what kind of image to make and where to put the camera and whose voice to be transmitted, and these questions are also becoming more and more difficult to really decide or to see clearly what we want as it's going along, whereas I personally thought that it would get easier to do.

**John:** Are you trying to choreograph your movements in relation to the camera or are you just letting the camera be?

**Emma:** Well we have four fixed cameras and one hand-held camera, so we're trying to do things in certain places sometimes and then trying to work out a way, a system to follow some activity at other times, yes it's difficult.

**Jakob:** One thing is that we are also producing the programme we are transmitting at the same time as we are discussing the way we are producing the space and are moving in the space. So we have, in a way, kind of put Big Brother inside the house, so we are also in control of the transmission, and that's the source, of course, of all the confusion and also the interesting experiences as well.

**John:** So you're actually choosing which images are transmitted at any given point.

**Henriette:** Yeah.

**John:** OK, that's nice.

**Henriette:** It's a collective process, so we say that in a way we've somehow dismantled Big Brother.

**John:** Again, I think that I'm a lot more sympathetic to even the whole commercial Big Brother TV thing than most commentators are. I think that even in those formats, you find there's a lot of production going on. How I would read Big Brother on television is that the contestants are producing versions of themselves much in the way that you're choosing and producing the images that get beamed out to London; that people actually do start to take some control really and that when we're watching Big Brother on Television we have the fantasy that we're intruding and seeing everything of people's lives, but actually the contestants in those programs are producing versions of themselves for us to see. Some of them may be doing this very consciously and some of them may be doing it more instinctively, but I think that there is an element of production that always goes on, and again I think that the normal critique, the usual critiques of surveillance don't find space for that concept of production and I personally think that discovering

# Utopia LIVE

June 18 2005

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12noon

*Slow production of a space to be revised throughout the 12 hour transmission.*

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2pm

*Making a situation with another person, thinking about the quality and sensibility of the person, and what we can do together.*

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4pm

*Watching videos together that we have found interesting, in relation to what it is we are doing. Doing other things.*

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6pm

Invitation to a mutual friend who is visiting Copenhagen to join us for food.

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8pm

Speaking with the author of a book we have been reading that has been helpful in thinking about what we are doing, and explaining to them what it is we are doing.

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10pm

Considering sound, listening to music and other prerecorded sound, recommended and produced by friends.

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12midnight

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Utopia LIVE • 12 hours LIVE transmission from the Copenhagen Free University

production within surveillance is crucial to a response to surveillance, is crucial to an empowerment within surveillance. So I think that what you are doing isn't actually, um, it isn't actually in a binary to the commercial versions of Big Brother, what you are actually doing is sort of bringing into view certain tactics that ordinary people who just happen to get involved in the Big Brother experiment do often engage with around production and around performance.

**Henriette:** Yes, somehow these Big Brother programmes we have seen are also getting more and more distant in our minds. For me it's been very much about, not the only reflection, but one reflection I have had during the day is very much to perform, which is not something I do on a daily basis, at least not more than normal people do, but I don't do it on a professional level. I've been thinking quite a lot about how actors work, but that's only guessing, I guess.

**John:** I think again one of the interesting things to look at in the book is the relationship between performance and performativity, because there's a bit of a, I mean there is such an important distinction between the two things and certainly for some commentators it's almost as if performance can be the opposite of performativity: performativity is making something real happen, when things perform in the sense that an athlete performs or a car performs, whereas performance is the pretence of theatre. But I think actually again in a surveillance space those distinctions start to break down because the almost theatrical performances that you might find yourself tempted to fall into, or I think various reality show contestants inevitably fall into, blend into the new space that surveillance is making happen and that distinction between performativity and performance starts to crumble a little. So yeah, I think that you should unleash the theatrical beast within.

(Laughter)

**Henriette:** Yeah, we still have some hours to go.

*Introduction by Henriette Heise and Jakob Jakobsen 2006*

# I and I / 12 to 12

- Notes on UtopiaLive by Ian White

On Saturday 18th June 2005 the home of Henriette Heise and Jakob Jakobsen, or the Copenhagen Free University, opened to a mass audience for twelve hours. That is, the cinema space at Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, was open from midday until midnight, receiving a durational live broadcast from the University - organised with friend and co-worker Emma Hedditch - that is based in the home of Henriette Heise and Jakob Jakobsen. What unfolded was a major work that shifted "reality" into performance, sliding between spontaneous action and speech and rehearsed actions, scripted speech, between visible and off-screen decision-making: mundane and beautiful, an essay on television delivered through the aesthetic of cinema.

*The Free University is an artist run institution dedicated to the production of critical consciousness and poetic language. We do not accept the so-called new knowledge economy as the framing understanding of knowledge. We work with forms of knowledge that are fleeting, fluid, schizophrenic, uncompromising, subjective, uneconomic, acapitalist, produced in the kitchen, produced when asleep or arisen on a social excursion - collectively.*

So reads the entry under "SLEEP", three-quarters of the way through CFU's ABZ - the closest thing they have to a manifesto. It is an oft-quoted statement in any description of their project, but is used invariably minus its critical section heading. That the self-consciousness of such a definitive paragraph be modified by association with its seemingly opposite state of mind is precisely the point.

The ABZ is a strictly non-alphabetical, a-systematic collection of texts that outlines a field of activity and enacts a methodology. That is, it is a blueprint for a way of working which to be understood requires an engagement with the very practices it attempts to describe. "UNHAPPY CONSCIOUSNESS" is explicated by the sentence "A motor running in the background"; "CONTESTATION" equals "Strike and disappear"; an entry under "MESS" is specific, like the news, about the Danish elections on Tuesday 20th November 2001 which saw a government supported by the far-right come to power. Other entries list organisations with which CFU have a literal or symbolic allegiance (Black Mountain College, London Anti-University...), or promote the work of affiliates ([www.andiwilldo.net](http://www.andiwilldo.net)) while still others are disarmingly first-person ("We are both sitting at the table,



with our hands under our legs, waiting for the food to arrive. I am not sure if I should speak..."). The ABZ becomes, through the act of reading, information and poetry, didactic and performative. Its message is found as much in the actual and metaphorical spaces between its words as it is in any attempt to summarise (rewrite) it into something that reads like a cohesive argument or defines a position. And this too is precisely the point.

### EXODUS

*The active refusal of the present social relations of capitalism, an evacuation of its means of support and the construction of an alternative. Not a direct opposition or negation, but the immediate evacuation.*

What constitutes this "immediate evacuation"? In part it is a particular combination of occupation and escape, where opposition is configured not as destruction but as revelation, the occupation of a form conducted to make its organisational and operational principles apparent.

During the live broadcast, the auditorium at Whitechapel became the site of multiplying occupations; the University itself occupied by its organisers and collaborators, under a peculiar self-determined house arrest, the auditorium occupied by the projected durational event. Television and cinema occupied each other, the former read through the codes of the latter by the wide-screen format of the projected image, the carefully constructed camera positions foregrounding formal composition as a key function, the immediacy of the live represented by the cinematic image to effect a continuous mental flickering, a constant reminder that the "everyday" being witnessed was in fact both a construction and a live event in which the viewer as receiver became complicit, or occupied, in other words, by the request to spend some time with people.

### EVERYDAY LIVES

*Our work is usually closely connected to the daily life we live. The Copenhagen Free University is, in fact, situated and functions within the framework of our flat and household economy...*

At 4pm London time we (CFU and the audience in the gallery) watched together two videos – an extract from Yvonne Rainer's film *Lives of Performers* (1972) and Dan Graham's video *Performer/Audience/Mirror* (1975) – on a screen erected in the University. The tops of the University inhabitants' heads were just visible on the screen in the auditorium, a beguiling mimicry of Graham stood in front of a mirror in the presence of an audience who he then described from their reflections through a series of instructions that inverted authority. When the camera in the video piece moved it served as a jolt of recognition that the camera relaying this image projected in Copenhagen was not moving, that no-one from the CFU was in Graham's audience but also that no-one in the auditorium was in







the audience in Copenhagen even though we were sharing the act of looking. The double mediation of a projected image displaying a projected image, like a double negative, cut through geographical distance.

*The Copenhagen Free University guarantees a wide array of personal, improvised and politicised forms of knowledge embedded in social practises around us - forms of knowledge we would like to make explicitly social and create communities around.*

In Rainer's film extract, discursive texts were being spoken about acting, about modes of speech, correlating to the intimate stylisation into which those in the University had situated themselves, exposing the formal acknowledgement of being simultaneously personal and conscious. Both videos were exemplars and an interview between Rainer and the writer Scott MacDonald published in *A Critical Cinema 2* (1992) that I re-read after the event provides a telling exchange. Attempting to locate the "personal" in Rainer's work, MacDonald notes the difference between her films and those of a self-mythologizing avant-garde typified by the work of Stan Brakhage. Brakhage proceeds by extending his eye to the lens of camera, by filming the marks of his own hand on a strip of film. Rainer describes her non-"visual" filmmaking perversely as playing a form such as melodrama back on itself to the extent that it exposes the form's defining tenets such as narrative and identification, making what they signify (emotion) explicit by their absence – a practice Rainer describes as an expression of "the emotional life lived at an extreme of desperation and conflict", or, even, an evacuation through occupation.

The last entry in CFU's ABZ reads, finally:

#### *MANIFESTO*

*Today there are loads of manifestos being produced promoting all sorts of ready-made subjectivities wanting to become government. Our intention was to produce a power that refuses to become government.*

This "power that refuses to become government" is dependent on ellipses. Precisely those ellipses effected by the act of reading what, by that process, precipitates itself into being a counter-manifesto. Not to replace a social system with its inevitable double but to construct an alternative through the instigation of shared experience. To approach the whisper from a stack of speakers with something other than its explanation.

#### *SUBJECTIVITY*

*Become one, become many. I and I.*







# Credits

Texts by Henriette Heise, Jakob Jakobsen and Ian White 2005-6. Photos taken by Marina Vishmidt in London. Thanks to Emma Hedditch and John E McGrath

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