

OVERGADEN.

Stine Marie Jacobsen
Mann beißt Hund
28.03 – 17.05 2015



Stine Marie Jacobsen, *Mann beißt Hund*, 2015. Video still

There Oughta Be a Law

By Post Brothers

In its idealized form, law is a practice defining rights, duties, and conduct within a community, a formalization of social rules agreed upon by its members and maintained by a controlling authority. Too often naturalized and impenetrable, authorized agents institutionalize and reform legal mandates, determining not only required behaviors, but also imposing penalties upon those who violate them. Law is not simply a form, tool, or restraint of power, but rather the substance of power itself, a means of control that penetrates all aspects of public and private activity. This conception of the law as a maintenance of social order has recently reached a preposterous level in many communities across Europe. In Belgium, for instance, individual municipal governments have introduced their own capricious and gratuitous administrative fines for acts deemed as a public “nuisance”. These often target the behaviors of those most vulnerable within society, demonstrating how quickly such discretionary sanctions can degenerate into overt repression.

While on residency in Belgium, Stine Marie Jacobsen interviewed lawyers, citizens, and activists regarding how they felt about such regulations. Identifying these rules as emblematic of undemocratic legal processes propagating throughout Europe, the artist’s resulting exhibition *Mann beißt Hund* explores conceptions of the law, its formal language, and its social consequences, through an interweave of pedagogical, cinematic, and conceptual framings. At once humorous, empathic, and politically incisive, Jacobsen’s work uses in-depth social research to investigate how fictions and facts commingle, and how personal narratives intersect with broader social structures. During the conversations, she found that while some welcomed the measures, many acknowledged that without intervention, appeal, or scrutiny, such regulations have spiraled out of control. Always on the lookout for the ways people interpret their lives through cinematic narratives, the artist asked if there was a movie such a situation

reminded the subjects of. The answer she got numerous times was the 1992 Belgian cult classic *C'est arrivé près de chez vous* ('It Happened in Your Neighborhood'), translated as *Man Bites Dog*.

Why did the respondents evoke a mockumentary about a serial killer and his dastardly deeds? The controversial film features a film crew following a professional murderer as he goes about his daily life, recording both his atrocious acts of violence and his disturbingly normal activities. Filmed in a black and white pastiche of *cinéma vérité* that captures the "unfolding of reality" with a handheld camera and a visible film crew, the narrative serves as an indemnification of the pretensions of "truth" in observational documentary, a satire of the media's interest in deviance, and a critique of the "objective" non-interventionist stance in journalism. Exaggerating how far the media will go to entertain the audience by showing normalized and non-judgmental portrayals of violence, the movie charts the movement of the crew from passive recorders to active participants and therefore implicates the audience as also complicit voyeurs. But perhaps the more dismaying dimension in the film is how banal and indifferent the killer and his peers appear, subverting normal moral positioning. Thus, the film conjures Hannah Arendt's statements regarding the "banality of evil" represented by Nazi war-criminal Adolf Eichmann's unthinking obedience to orders: "The deeds were monstrous, but the doer ... was quite ordinary, commonplace ..."

Examining the ways this cinematic narrative correlates to legal mechanisms, Jacobsen's project *Mann beißt Hund* (2015) is a remake of *C'est arrivé près de chez vous* where the artist filmed the exact locations from the original movie with all human subjects eliminated. For the artist, the law is too often detached from the values and motivations of its subjects, auto-poetically reproduced in a loop of endless validity devoid of sense or signification. By replicating the same camera movements and location shots as if rigorously and unthinkingly adhering to a rigid system, the artist probes the ways law and cinema modify perceptions of public and private space and ignore the nuances of human experience, dem-

onstrating the structural, real, and symbolic violence at the core of both film and law.

Jacobsen's seemingly impossible endeavor involved meticulous detective work. Cross-referencing vague recollections from the original crew, extensive site visits, images culled from Google Earth Street View, and information found on the Internet, the artist reassembled the original shots with her own camera. By using Google Earth to visualize her research, the artist also calls attention to the program's omnipresent surveillance and registration of space, imposed on the world without respect for the privacy of its inhabitants. Unlike the corporation's exploitation of laws that allow it to photograph public space, Jacobsen did not film the sites without consent, and unlike the killer and the crew in the film, Jacobsen did not deceive to gain access. Indeed, she was denied access to a number of the locations due to "security" and "reputation" reasons, and a pair of suburban houses (whose images are printed and displayed) was never discovered.

The result of her painstaking mission is a full-length remake of the film that curiously honors the original French title, by turning attention to the neighborhood itself, exploring the intersection of private and public space. Jacobsen's gesture actually inverts the fictional documentary back into realism, not reducing the artifice inherent in the documentary form but rather inflating it, demonstrating how fiction modifies the reading of the world. Just as the original film deliberately mocked the documentary look, her movie is filmed in black and white with a handheld camera, functioning as obscure evidence displaced from time and place. The deserted images produced become akin to crime scene photographs, yet there is no crime visible. Sporadically, the gaze of the camera wobbles, alerting the viewer to the presence of not only the camera, but of an operator, producing an image of contrived artifice that makes the document seem more genuine, with the abandoned viewer in the position of direct witnessing. The lack of characters denies and abjures the viewer's scopophilic desire to see more. Indeed the phrase "man bites dog" is a journalistic term for how unusual events are considered more newsworthy than common-

place occurrences. This is not a question of shocking imagery or exhibitionist display but a kind of subtraction, an emptiness that is nonetheless saturated with information.

Jacobsen's repetition of the film shots operates as a metaphor for the expulsion and disregard of people under the abstract application of the law. What may have had meaning and relevance in the particular initial narrative does not transpose when reapplied to another circumstance. Like the law, the fabricated system of the film completely neglects the presence of real human beings – in fact, it excludes them entirely. Movement, visibility, and action in both public and private space are here over-determined, signified without attention to the stories and social relations of the inhabitants. The viewers find themselves in an amoral, haunted, empty landscape, surveying grounds without figures, settings without action, spaces devoid of place. Like a horror film, the danger is continuously forestalled, withheld, invisible. The way the camera scans is almost paranoid, conjuring the original film title by inducing a heightened sense of fear, anticipation, and suspicion. Looking along empty streets, corridors, and within and outside households, we identify with the camera and become strangely voyeuristic, a featureless all-perceiving spectator in public hoping to catch a glimpse of the private, the "real". The uninhabited diegetic events on the screen are infrequently punctuated by non-diegetic sounds of unseen struggles, divulging a haptic effect that sustains the intensity of violence rather than the cause that produced it.

By refusing to repeat images of violence, the artist points to cinematic representation itself as an inherently violent act, a discourse of shots and cuts, movement and stillness, absence and presence, which dismantles phenomena. While law is often regarded as antithetical to violence, it is important to recognize that the law is itself a form of violence, an instrument of not only literal and imagined violence, but also a symbolic violence that labels, incorporates, and excludes individuals from the societal order, constrains and bans certain forms of conduct, and partitions the public and private. Like her movie, the law is a violence that is not seen, but instead felt, embodied.

As research and supplement to the exhibition, Jacobsen organized a workshop for teenagers exploring the rights to privacy, freedom of expression, and the role of law in society, where they drafted their own laws. Exaggerating the discordance between feelings and the codification of law, the artist then enlisted lawyers to transpose the student's proposals into legal jargon, granting them formal authority. These decrees are inscribed on the wall of a public toilet installed in the exhibition. Often spontaneously and anonymously produced, latrinalia is perhaps one of the last strongholds today for uninhibited self-expression, a private site within the public sphere for honest confession and uncontrolled discourse. A paragon for the intersection of private and public space, the lavatories are set forth as an emblematic forum for free debate and therefore apt surfaces for the entrant's expression and exchange of their edicts.

During the exhibition, the artist will once again instigate a form of critical reenactment where teenaged participants will re-judge real-world courtroom trials, exploring how power and arguments are exchanged within the legal system. While certainly these proceedings will be spirited, for most of the show the courtroom will be left empty, a barren arrangement of formal platforms demarcating roles for absent judicial players. Like Jacobsen's movie, the setting is accentuated. Devoid of subjects, the system is posed as tautological. Contesting the blind following of procedure, Jacobsen reminds the audience that the system has no power unless its used, inhabited, and called into question. Law acts as an empty signifier that attaches to everything through the privatization of public activity and the simultaneous publicization of private action. Like cinema, it imposes its own imminent rationale to the unfolding of events. By denaturalizing legal procedure, violence, and cinema, the artist endeavors to discover ways of talking about such phenomena that catalyzes a possibility for social change.

Post Brothers is a critical enterprise that includes Matthew Post – an independent curator and writer currently working from Białystok, Poland.

CV

Stine Marie Jacobsen (b. 1977) is a graduate of the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts and CalArts, California Institute of the Arts. She has exhibited at Nikolaj Kunsthal – Copenhagen Center of Contemporary Art, as well as the 7th Momentum Biennale in Norway and the Turku Biennale in Finland. Furthermore she has exhibited extensively in Berlin in contemporary art spaces like Haus am Waldsee and Künstlerhaus Bethanien. Stine Marie Jacobsen lives and works in Copenhagen and Berlin.

EVENTS

Thursday 16, 23, 30 April 1-3pm

Debate // *Appeal*

As part of her exhibition Stine Marie Jacobsen has invited teenagers from different educational institutions to rejudge a number of real court cases in a courtroom at Overgaden staged for the occasion. A lawyer will guide the young people through the cases, and through discussion and normal courtroom procedure they will jointly reach their own judgment and punishment. The trials are documented and subsequently included in the exhibition where the audience can read the trials of the two court decisions. The events are open to the public and will be in Danish.

Thursday 30 April 5-8pm

Evening Class // *The System*

This evening Stine Marie Jacobsen's exhibition will be the frame for the evening class *The System*: a symposium and basic course in forms of resistance for those seeking the absence of a government, political disorder, and confusion. No qualifications is required other than an interest to learn something about yourself, the system you are part of, and the opportunities for activism in our time. During the evening we will be taught by lawyer Marc Jørgensen, news editor at Modkraft Rune Eltard, a.o. Inspired by previous examples, we will then compose a joint guide on how to provide resistance in our legal present. The basis for the course is a compendium of selected texts and materials that will be sent upon registration. The event is organized by Anna and Esben Weile Kjær.

As the number of participants are limited, registration is required: info@infinitiescroll.dk. The event will be in Danish.

THANK YOU

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UPCOMING EXHIBITIONS

Friday 5 June 2015 Overgaden presents the solo exhibition *Spin Φ* by Lea Porsager and the group exhibition *Våbenhvile – 100 års forestillingen* curated by Tomas Lagermand Lundme. Both exhibitions run through 9 August 2015.

This exhibition folder can be downloaded from: www.overgaden.org

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