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S23X BELGRADE  
BUS LECTURE  
BY PIRATBYRÅN

/The lecture by Piratbyrån [Rasmus Fleischer, Magnus Eriksson] held in S23X modified bus,  
parked in front of the Museum of 25th of May, Belgrade, 7th of November, 2008./



This photo is from the spring mountain in Stockholm<sup>1</sup> and that was the place where we made this performance, yes it was in spring last year. What we did there was actually to burn the book Copy Me that we had published in 2005, and we did a statement that can be read here, that the file-sharing debate is over. And in one sense it was we who once started the file-sharing debate. Before, there was only one entity with the name 'pirate' in Sweden - The Bureau Against Piracy. So, more or less, Piratbyrån maybe started out as a joke, we don't really remember. It was obvious that if there's an anti-piracy bureau, then there must also be a bureau for pirates, so we started and got an immediate response. Starting this by choosing this name and publicly defending copying, it was quite a new thing. So, I can say we started a file-sharing debate in Sweden, and in 2007, we declared it to be over. And now I'll try to give some time-lines: I'll go back from this physical analog space to and connect back to the Internet, because I think this project is very much about the constellation between what is usually known as analog and digital. And since I'm historian I'm obsessed with time-lines, I'll try to make really brief historization of our views of the digital work.

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We often talk about the 1990s as an entity, but I will try to break up that periodization and instead talk about one decade from 1995 to 2005, and then another one where we are now, maybe up until 2015, if we go a bit into the future. The period between 1995 and 2005 was the breakthrough of the Internet discourse and of the Internet in everyday life. First as the World Wide Web, then as peer-to-peer. By 2005, it had somehow stabilized with bit-torrent as a protocol, and with the Pirate Bay. During this time of breakthrough for everyday Internet use from 1995 to 2005, I think one could talk about connectivity, networking, bandwidth, computer capacities as more or less synonymous things - you were more or less online. And if we are to put in some canonic texts, I'd say that the best example - from when this period started - is John Perry Barlow's text: "Declaration of Independence of Cyberspace". It's very funny to read it today and

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<sup>1</sup> See page 125 of this publication.

one must have ambivalent feelings around it because it sounds in one sense very radical, but in today's context it also sounds reactionary. Very dialectical. OK, this very Californian guy, writes this "Declaration of Independence" for the cyberspace in 1996: "Cyberspace consists of transactions, relationships, and thought itself", and he writes that "our identities have no bodies" and to me it looks like one must speak in religious terms about this, it's like a pure, total separation between body and spirit. Body, matter and anything physical and analog belongs to the past, and now we go into purely new world, where we bring some of the old, but only to digitalize it, to rebuild it again.

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¶So, we've been thinking a lot about this, the question about analog and the digital, and how we talk about it, how we relate to it, how we conceptualize it for ourselves, what the relation is between cassette tapes and the bus, and so on. And we've had fun doing it.

I said that during this time, 1995-2005, you could still conceptualize it as a quantity question: being more or less online... Like our parole "Welfare starts at 100 megabit". We made some 1<sup>st</sup> of May demonstrations, of a very new kind, we tried not only to connect with workers' struggle but also with conspiracies - you know the Illuminati were said to be founded on the 1<sup>st</sup> of May - and also pagan traditions of Spring rituals, like we did on the Spring mountain... like how you forget the old and move on to the new. I think in the beginning this was still partly in line with this Californian-influenced idea of going from analog to digital, going from 1<sup>st</sup> of May and instead of the traditional social-democratic parade in Stockholm you say "Welfare starts at 100 megabit!" It was really nice, it turned something around and was able to draw a map for a new territory.

But today we'd definitely not put it that way, but there are probably other groups in Sweden that does. So I actually think - and this is very speculative thesis, but we need periodizations to orient in time - I think that now, loosely between 2005 and 2015, we live in a period of transition. If we want to draw a parallel to this bus trip, one obvious reference is the tradition of the hippie-bus, in California and other places, but there is also one another reference that can be more important to us through the time, and it's bus trip made by *Neue Slovenische Kunst* in the middle of the 1990's - *Transnationale*, that traveled from the US east coast to the west, and they published the great book which were very much about the time of transition and how the concept of the art world in the Eastern Europe could relate to the Western art system. So we published a fanzine with this great text of Victor Misiano titled *The Institutionalisation of friendship*. This text was after the trip, so we mixed, we changed some names of the participants in this bus travel, we changed the talk about transition period of west-east, to discussion about transition from analog to digital which is an obvious topic. It produced no answers, it just presents some different ways to conceptualize that. We are in a period of transition where we can no longer just talk

about like digitalization as a quantitative question, or to be more or less online. What counts now is not so much like speed, size, computer capacity, but what we do with all this. There was a phrase that just came up one day: *The files have been downloaded, there is no more up or down anymore.* Maybe it was in 2005. I'd like to think that. In 2005, the files were downloaded and we had to start thinking what to do with them. And to do that we can still extrapolate some technical facts into the future, but not in order to follow some deterministic line of development, but we have to differentiate between this different technical aspects of digitalization, not at least to the question of how storage capacity of the digital media is increasing much faster than the internet bandwidth. It's sometimes called Kryder's Law.

¶So if we take all this pocket-sized storage devices... it is predictable that within like 10 or 15 years, and maybe in 2015, we'll probably be able to hold all the recorded music that had ever been released. And it's obvious that we can't just discuss about should it be copied or not, but what to do with it. It's ridiculous today to talk about whether it should be copied. The question is how to copy, how to use, and how to know what we like to listen to. It's a scary thought, to think about sitting with all music ever recorded in one playlist. What do you do with it? Do you just press "shuffle"? It wouldn't be music, it'll just be a sound. If you turn on short-wave radio it could give more music... Or play melodica - that would make more music than all music on shuffle could ever produce.

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¶We all know it, I think. We've all been sitting sometimes with two big mp3 archives and don't know where to start. We had this same experience at the bus, also. It's a quite analog bus, when the people first hear that The Pirate Bay is going on a busride, everyone is thinking that it's going to be equipped with all kinds of hi-tech stuff, live-streaming, so much data... but it's not! And in this travel we really pushed that tape recorder to it's end, we have been listening to mp3's that's been available... It was much stronger musical experience as soon as we bought a new used tape-recorder under the bridge in Belgrade and started playing mix tapes again. You don't have this temptation to jump to the next track... Now I'm standing here like a traditionalist disliking mp3 music! But I'm not, it's not constructive stand to have in a long run, you have to find out ways to handle situation of cultural hyper-abundance and to create meaning out of the abundance. And within the technology discourse of today the standard answer for this is that we must create smarter software, that recognizes what you want to listen and chose it for you... I mean it's perfectly nice with all this services, social networks, like Last.fm. Last.fm is the perfect example, and I've discovered lots of good music which I would never ever discover if not through Last.fm. But still I think that in the end we must come back through the loop to the same place we were. Because in 2015, we will say "Which of all these social networks should I



use? Which of all this media should I use? Should I hit shuffle?” and you come back to the same situation. So I don’t think that recommendation algorithms – even if they are driven by social networks – can take you away from the terror of the shuffle button. Because the terror of the shuffle button is the main problem today in the terms of music. For me, music is the best place to start this discussion. And also this recommendations systems are based on the idea that every individual has a taste, that you are still individual, and I’m not so sure that it’s true. Maybe we’re more individuals in this climate of cultural hyper-abundance. Your so-called taste is not just something that follows you throughout the life, but it depends on context, if we’ve chosen all this mix tapes today that are glowing in the dark – that’s not just coincidence, it’s fitting very well to the content of the bus. You are not an individual that has a taste that is “enlarged” by software.

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¶So, for a contemporary music fan there is no such thing as individual taste that is independent of the context. Of course that we need indexing and software, but we also need communities. Communities are extremely... however you put the question, you can’t like delegate it to software, and in the end we’ll come back to the question of community and context. And the question about what music is always about limits, and being somewhere between totally... the sound that is totally predictable is not music, and the sound that is totally unpredictable is also not music, it’s always somewhere in between that the music is happening. And that is true when you stand on the stage with an instrument and improvise and the instrument itself is a limitation, and it is true if you sit in front of mp3 archive. That’s why I’m not really sure that music can come out of a limitless archive of music, if you imagine yourself just as an individual without context.

¶So, information and the community are very related to the question of copyright, I’ll come back to it. Yes I will. It’s very interesting to see what size of the community is best to decide what we want to hear. I don’t think that a very very very huge group is the most productive one - it is not the size of the community that makes the community, it is also not in the individual - it is somewhere in between. And I think that maybe the number 23 for us - we’ve been experimenting with that number - has been kinda productive... And there are also very similar experiments going right now on by Bill Drummond, the former frontman of The KLF, who basically inspires us a lot and we’ve discovered many affinities... He chooses the number of 17, you go for prime numbers... I don’t know what it means, but maybe community can’t be, like, subdivided too easily, but it has this size: 17 to 23. On this trip we’ve been 9... maybe we should have been 11? That’s a prime number... maybe, I don’t know.

¶So there are dynamics that are not possible on the stage or in a kitchen, or a bedroom, but in between - like in a bus, for example... and here we get back to copyright. Because copyright does not recog-

nize this in-betweenness. From it's very beginning, or at least from... I would like to go to this larger periodization... maybe later... However, copyright does not recognize this in-betweenness. Copyright recognizes two modes of interacting with content: either it is private or it is public. And in between are the 17, the 23, and so on. When the activities are enlarging in the middle... like if you open a space in a town and 17 or 23 people are hanging there, listening to music, then after a while there comes a corporate guy and say "Well, is this a public performance or is it a private?" That's crucial for copyright: when we talk about it it's very common that we have this idea that copyright is always expanding and that it wants to submit everything to copyright... but that's not really true. Copyright



is rather working as a modulation of the modes of the private and the public. Copyright is redefining what community means, what publicness means, what privateness means. And it will always allow free things within the private sphere because otherwise it will collapse. It will always allow you to play music in your home for your family, you won't have to pay a license for that. So within... when talking in terms of this all-too-easy distinction between analog and digital, it is very easy, but it is much easier within analog architecture than within digital, because there are standardized ways of how we interact: we have a home, the apartment, that's clearly the private space, you can play whatever music you want, show a movie for your friends. There are also - in the terms of architecture - the arena, that's obviously a public space.

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¶With computer networks it is much much harder to tell the distinction between what is private use and what is public use.

¶The interesting thing with copyright laws and copyright institutions and copyright morals - in the sense that they clash against this informal in-between activities - is that when there is a legal power for copyright to act on this, it tend to force these activities to choose one of these ways: either they choose the way of the private, when they have to keep underground and can't too openly (approach) to people, can't advertise on them etc. Or you can go the public way and start paying the license fees. Now we have the example of film... if you have a small pirate cinema which in the beginning has maybe 5 people, next week comes 17, next week 23... oh, maybe it's not so much people, but if you advertise on the Internet and there comes 77 people and you show them all the movies, then you can be sure that the film-industry guys will say "this is the public performance of this film, you have to pay licenses", and the licenses for showing the film in public are very high, very high. It means that you have to commercialize, you have to do it totally, you have to be completely public, completely commercial, you have to start selling pop-corn... It is also related to this kind of non-commercial question.

¶But this is also a problem with copyright critics, my main problem with Creative Commons is that there is no something which is completely commercial or completely non-commercial...

The problem with Creative Commons is that they don't consider that three categories that you suggest: you suggest private, you suggest some kind of category of community, and the category of public. Creative Commons only suggests private and public.

Yes, the philosophy of this critique is that copyright is not just a repressive power, it's Foucauldian, in the sense of Foucault. Copyright is not just repressive, it is also productive: it's producing certain kind of interaction with cultural artifacts. And in that sense copyright materializes much more within the city, it affects things like what kinds of spaces are those that we use for certain

things, so it goes back to the material. And also it is not only about the architecture of the city, but about the architecture of the computer networks - right now the fight is very much about what kind of in-communities sharing technologies will be allowed. Sharing music on email is not an issue, because they consider it private. And these guys know nothing about this!

¶So, to draw the line between private and public was pretty hard to do during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Copyright guys and copyright institutions had lot of problems: what to do with education institutions, religious institutions, and certain other contexts that you don't know if they should be categorized as private or public... So these are the questions that those corporate guys have to think about a lot. They had to think hard about it in the previous century, but even harder in this century. Because drawing the line between private and public in the architecture itself is kind of easy compared to drawing the line between private and public in computer networks, because computers operate by copying corporate information all the time, copying between, for example, sound card and memory, and between computer and iPod... So where to draw this line between public and private is very very unclear.

This is also about both code and the infrastructure, because you can make something private by code, to have password for it, but also the infrastructure of your network, from your ISP to your cable to the computer, it is private... and if you share to your iPod it is private, it cannot theoretically be controlled.

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So the question of copyright is not the question of, like, here we got artworks and here we got networks and how should artworks go through the networks. The question is - what do we mean by these two things, it is two questions really. One is, what do we mean with 'artwork'? The second question is what do we mean with 'network'?

¶So, yeah, that's it... [short break]

OK, we told you about communities, and this temporariness is really connected with this bus. I think that is one of the main conclusions from our second trip - it is about the difference between being in the bus while it's rolling, and being in bus while stationary. Because while the bus is rolling you must be in it, you can't just get out of it, you're kind of stuck in it. And that is when the real creative outbursts appear. The bus rolls and people immediately start with various workshops, people do things. When the bus stops, there is always a bit of boredom in that, I mean, we always come over it, but it's just that thing that you can actually get out of it. You have a bit too much freedom, maybe. You can get out of the bus at any time, and therefore you are not forced to start doing stuff. And maybe that's somehow related to the difference between listening to mix-tapes and listening to music that you recorded as mp3. Because you have to have some limits on what you can do, what

to relate to. Being in the bus that is running means that you're deemed to be in this community, but of course it's only for a certain period of time - bus can't go forever, it's especially true in the connection with the fact that the fossil fuel is about to end.

¶I quote from this fanzine here: "To a contemporary art the group functions as a foreigner, it's an alien structure. Our basic aim is to establish this structure, that's why we're always talking about strategy. The ultimate threat to art world is not some subjective revolt, it is an alien structure. We are trying to establish that alien structure. The last question is how we relate to this structure personally, and that's perhaps our biggest blind spot."

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**This idea of the structure** is that the question is not how would networks distribute artworks, or what networks do we use to distribute artworks, but the right question is how through the terms of artwork and network these notions cross-define each other. And of course that this relates to our bus-project, which has not only one author, not presents just one producer of meaning, and it wasn't really clear what will happen before the bus started rolling. Of course, it's a bit of a trouble to write a text about what you will do before... And also, when we came down to Bolzano, people - the art journalists - asked if our work was finished yet, and said they will come back the next day if we didn't finish it today, so that they can write a review of it. So, one of the reasons why this idea came up, to do this trip, was that we found that the bus lost it's meaning while it was stationed there.

**So how the networks** and artworks define each other? The answer is 'connect the dots'. This connecting of dots relates to two things: of course it relates to our project and to connecting the people in the bus with all its objects and structures and so on, but also the another thing that happened a bit before and during our trip in summer was that we were trying to connect a certain Swedish word, that might be a third Swedish word that got internationalized after the words "smörgåsbord" and "ombudsman", and that is "signalspaning", where "signal" is signal, while "spanning" means to look for or listen to or somehow spying after signals. The reason that this became a known word this summer in Sweden is because we had something called FRA, the defense radio establishment that during the cold war has been listening to the signals from Russia, basically, to the radiowaves and satellites, and they proposed that they will have resources to transfer this "signalspaning" from radiowaves to cables, so they want to plug-in, they want to basically copy all this traffic that goes in and out from Sweden to their supercomputer and look for patterns, for threats to Sweden, and so on. And this became a really big thing in Sweden, it started on blogs, the protests against this started. Later this summer it culminated in the Parliament because

all the newspapers were against it, because they thought it would be a threat to anonymous communications with the newspapers. And there was a big live-sound debate in the Parliament before they voted.

It was actually the day we modified the most of the bus.

A lot of people heard about the reactionary attitude of this, they thought it is against the rights to have privacy and so on, that will be misused and... But we thought about doing more affirmative approach to it, so we adopted, more or less consciously, this idea of signal-spanning during the trip. There are two things that make it impossible to have a signal: if we have no input whatsoever, or if we have too much input - which is just noise. We have to be somewhere in between to be able to find patterns and so on. The question of being between the private and public is connected with that. You can't create meaning starting from zero and you can't do it starting with everything. It's the same way as when we talked about private and public. And the idea of this signal-spanning, that FRA was supposed to do, is to find where terrorist threats are located, and they don't do this by tracking individuals like in old Big Brother style surveillance - instead, what they are after is the communication, the traffic, patterns, between people and so on. Not interested in what that communication is about, so therefore they can say back: "No, we don't read your emails - we are just interested in patterns". ●

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