

CUDI

a text by Simon Sheikh

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The establishment of Cudi points towards a crux of dilemmas and potentials for a contemporary social and political motivated aesthetic thinking. It will be right to say, that Cudi is placed in the crossing between different categories; artistic practice and social activism, nationality and locality; politics and atheistic.

According to Cudi, their work is initiated "as a reaction to the media's construction and representation of a picture of reality opposed to the ethical minorities". In other words, Cudi rise from a crisis in the representation. A crisis concerning a reactionary definition of Danishness and the consequential outlimiting, demonialization and even criminalization of otherness. A crisis concerning representation of 'Danishness' as something original (which of course never has been anything but a phantasm). This fictive, fragile "Danishness" seeks support by a negative representation of anything that can be defined as 'different' and thereby non-Danish in the mass media and everyday life. We are here dealing with a complex psychological logic of constructing an identity and we demand investments. A logic that in a contemporary political sense, finds perhaps its best expression in Slavoj Zizek's description of a national identity as a symbolic identification that organises the demands and desires in a united, national life style. This nationality exists only to the extent that the members of the nation invest a vow of fidelity in it.

This nationality exists solely by virtue of this fidelity, it is this fidelity. In this way the appeal of this vow of fidelity and the reinforcement of it become important political battle means for nationalistic and racial politicians. It is now a political, patriotic vow of fidelity to eat pork (as well as T-bone steaks!), evading taxes and pro be "Denmark and the Crown"

According to Zizek this sense of nationality builds on what he calls "the deprivation of the logic of pleasure". Nationality treats of pleasure and desire. Threatening, is other national identities' alien way of organising their pleasure; their unappetising eating habits; strange manners, wierd work morale etc. A fear of the alien or of the Other is ambiguous - on one hand they appear to steal our pleasure; partly in a direct way by taking our social benefit and flatly by stealing our commodities from the store; and partly by demolishing our (national) life style by their way of living. On the other hand they appear to have access to a pleasure impervious to us, due to their different life style; their exciting spices, exotic clothes and women and their suggestive music. These ascriptions and transcriptions of the desire, have according to Zizek, to do with central psychological processes and basically with castration: The fear of

being deprived of our pleasure conceals the trauma that the pleasure never was ours to possess - it is, on the contrary, always defined by privation and castration. This original theft is now imputed on the Other and in this way pleasure is always tied up with the Other - and the hatred towards the Other's pleasure is always an expression of the hatred (and the fear) of one's own pleasure. In that sense, no wonder that xenophobia dominates the media as well as it dominates and tortures our subconsciousness, and no wonder that the politicians seem so keen on rewarding the public feeling of xenophobia since exactly this logic of desire enables us to be more productive and thereby act as good, working citizens! In other words it is not the aliens's otherness that is a menace to the nation (and the production), but their (possible) integration.

Cudi tries to contra-pose these mechanisms and place themselves in the centre of the otherness. Or more precisely: in Vollsmose. Cudi seem to integrate and even absorb in this; and thereby undertake a representative function towards this. Artistic and identity-founded conditions are mixed with social and political - and with activistical. Of course there are artistic precedents in this line of work such as Group Material from USA (1980's) and Botschaft from Germany (90's) - just to mention two groups. Group Material and Botschaft have that in common that they as groups give up any sacral, individual, artistic identity in favour of a collective work and the notion of art as an object in favour of an activist and political process as workfield. But most significantly they share a specific, national based context; historical moments where crisis in the representation occurred. Group Material came to life immediately after Reagan's dismantling of democracy in the USA and the AIDS-crisis. Botschaft after the identity-crisis following the reconciliation. National crisis comparable to our national, political crisis concerning "Danishness" after voting no to the Maastricht treaty in 1992. Eventhough we did have racial problems in Danish media and in Danish politics before '92, but since then it has become the central issue: The otherness is always disgusting and unwanted; regardless of the issue is left-wing contra-Europe politics or rightwing contra-refugee and immigrants politics. The political wings have not directly divided their 'otherness' but express the same logic of desire. "We" have something, that "they" want to take away from us. Cudi however do not attempt a contra-representation like Group Material, but construct a contra-public like Botschaft. Botschaft's project was not only about representative questions, it did also involve a change in the arena, where the local habitants were addressed just as it is the case with Cudi in Vollsmose. Artistic questions are connected directly to political. The art context and the media-public becomes subordinate, while the local reference and activity becomes the central. In other words the idea of a generalised civic public dissolves - like in the art world - and is replaced by a specific, de-centralised public. Or what you in a political sense - inspired by Alexander Kluge and Oskar Negt's book on public and experience - might call a contra-public. This points

towards the, previous mentioned dilemmas and potentials affected by a social and political artistic thinking. Which arenas you can display yourself in and from where you can speak. And where the identity politic (as e.g. in the works of Group Material in the 80\'s) was pre-occupied with the central arenas - the media, the museums etc - the last years political, critical art thinking has been involved in an attempt based on the specific, fragmented and local to establish particular platforms and publics.

In 1996 I wrote, \"for artists as Botschaft, relations of inclusion and exclusion are built into every spatial praxis, in every practical room. Dromania [a Botschaft project] did not place itself in front or away from the social room like a picture, an exhibition or a mirror. Botschaft is conscious that they have a room or are permitted in it. The artistic work consists not in the creation nor in the pleasure of a vision, a contemplation or a drama; on the contrary it situates in the room as an active participant\". Words, I believe also describe the supreme essence of Cudi\'s project.

Simon Sheikh, February 2001