

Amorph 03! Summit Meeting of Micronations An Absurdist Choreography of the State

Scene One: An auditorium in Finlandia Hall, Helsinki, site of legendary CSCE (aka KSZE) conference in 1975. Summit meeting, 1969. The audience stand in reverence to the music of a National Anthem they have never heard before. A flag is raised, the audience sit down, listen to a speech, and stand again for another anthem. Then another, and another, and another. Not everyone in the auditorium is standing for every anthem. Who are these states and why should they be shown respect by standing? I am tired and consider sitting down during one of the anthems, but hesitate. I feel like something bad might happen if I sit. I don't want to take the risk.

Scene Two: I have arrived by boat to a small island (Harakka) just off Helsinki Harbour. I see a series of bunkers and buildings with flags hoisted over them and follow a group of about 15 suited men who walk in line up a stony path. They stop under a tree next to a bunker festooned with flags and banners. A conductor raises his stick and the 15 men bellow in unison 'TransNational Ree – pub-lic: TransNational Ree – pub-lic', red-faced and veins popping from their necks with exertion. Silence. The conductor gestures with his stick toward the bunker, takes a quick bow and proceeds with his posse to the next bunker. In the background, there is a round of applause coming from a small hilltop. The State of Sabotage has been declared. H.R. Giger and Robert Jelenik mingle and shake people's hands. Along another stony path, two people carry a green tent with 'Lobby' sprayed on the side, drop it next to a flagpole and go inside. There are cameras everywhere.

'What would happen if these micronations came together? What kind of situation would it be?' These were the central questions for the curators of the Amorph! 03 Performance Festival, Tellervo Kalleinen and Oliver Kochta. Over the course of three days at the end of August 2003, The Principality of Sealand, NSK State in Time, Ladonia, Elgaland and Vargaland, TransNational Republic and the State of Sabotage met, talked and worked from temporary Embassies set up in bunkers and buildings on Harraka Island. The

situation had no precedent, nothing much to measure it against, yet it was curious and compelling. Throughout the events there was a recognition of one's 'intuitive' understanding of the rules and protocols of the state, when to sit, when to stand, the kind of language to adopt, the kinds of procedures and bureaucracy it requires. But who are these states, and what, other than this most elaborate performance, is filling up its signs? In the midst of this situation one's easy comprehension of the surrounding signs and symbols and one's sense of how to behave, are rendered truly absurd. As an experiment in curatorship, organisation and indeed performance, Amorph! 03 produced a situation and a singular experience that toyed with our most embedded relationships to the states we live in. As such, the festival and the event must be considered in its entirety.

Day One of the Festival, held at Finlandia Hall, saw the first historic summit meeting of micronations and the opening gala. Half of the summit was conducted as a closed meeting for micronation representatives only and the other half, with an invited audience for question and answer sessions, lunch, a long coffee break and a roundtable discussion. Some of the issues and questions that arose during the summit meeting included the extent to which each micronation considered itself an 'art project', questions of economy and relative autonomy, how the micronations might function as a political tool and broader questions of what the micronations actually 'want'. At the end of the summit it was proposed that the assembled group vote on key issues. In the spirit of all good summit meetings, there was a unanimous vote to have further summit meetings. A vote was held regarding the production of a joint statement for the meeting, with Lars Vilks of Ladonia suggesting that such a statement should make reference to specifically art micronations. The former motion was passed while a majority voted against Ladonia's proviso.

So, what were the major points of interest and questions that emerged from the micronations and how did they relate to the festival as a whole? Apart from the embassies set up on day two and three on Harakka Island, a large marquee was also erected to facilitate presentations and/or performances by each micronation. When it was NSK's turn to present, Peter Mlakar from the Department of Pure and Applied Philosophy

marched the audience to a flat, rocky part of the island. From a rock on a slightly higher gradient, with a microphone stand, he stood and preached a complex sermon on the relationship between the NSK state contra-reality and the state proper. Afterwards, he had a German-speaking young Finnish girl read the lyrics of a Laibach song. The stark, echoing sound of the voices speaking to the crowd gathered created an effective space to performatively explore the rhetorical structures of totalitarianism. At a first glance, Mlakar's dense philosophic sermon on the abstract form of spirit underpinning the state against the backdrop of the idyllic Nordic landscape seemed to recall Heidegger's 1933 rectoral address on Spirit and its relationship to the National Socialist party in Germany. Yet, this tactic of over-identification employed by NSK seeks to uncover the rhetorical structures in and through which people are seduced by totalitarian ideologies. In fact, numerous miming strategies, strategies of identification, and repetition were employed by all of the micronations and indeed by the summit meeting structure of the festival itself. On the issue of the power or limitations of these strategies, Amorph! 03 complicated and opened up many questions.

On the one hand, the *affect* of being caught up in this theatre, the sense of your intuition suddenly feeling strange and absurd to you and the at times frightening energy of NSK for example, is a powerful if slightly unnerving experience of the state that no book or straightforward pedagogy could ever provide. On the other hand, we must ask how radical the micronation's relation to the state actually is and to what extent the repetition of the nation's political form might actually limit the imagination of other political spaces. Each case is very particular.

When asked during the summit meeting why they chose the structure of the Nation to articulate their political/artistic forms, NSK said that they wanted to reference and work with the idea of the German *volk* or 'the people'. If this is the case, then it would seem that the notion of the people, the citizen and indeed the subject being constructed within each micronation might go some way to determine whether this is a repetition of the same or something different. When asked in the summit meeting how each micronation was internally organised or how decisions were made, Elgaland and Vargaland replied

that the individual is free to do whatever they want while the TransNational Republic spoke of the individual's freedom to choose the most suitable TransNational Republic for their needs. One cannot help but wonder on what basis, or within what horizon would or could such an individual make that choice or how meaningful that freedom might be? Isn't the consumer as citizen the perfect embodiment of capital's subjection of all social relations to its own terms? It was noted by a participant of the summit meeting that the inscription on NSK's passport sounded like it had come from the New Testament. Interestingly, Hannah Arendt has also used the example of the New Testament in relation to her theories of community, the public and human action. Arendt discusses the kind of community talked about in the New Testament, as a small but powerful group of people working together in a specific way in order to resist the Roman occupiers -- an Empire whose scale they could never match. If the one thing that micronations share is their small scale, some questions remain concerning how their potential power will be organised and articulated internally, in relation to each other and in relation to the state and the global world order as it stands. It seems that in order to be able make choices, be 'free' and in turn produce new collective political forms, the micronation might yet have to take on board issues of community, and the micro level of the construction and nurturing of the subject/citizen. Amorph! 03 created a situation, a coming together, that staged and created space for these concerns to be performed and addressed in the most interesting and affective way.

Scene Three: August 2050, the 25th Summit Meeting of Micronations. An auditorium in Finlandia Hall, Helsinki.