

A Promising Family Picnic

The Institute for the Art and Practice of Dissent at Home

16th June 2009, part of Two Degrees Festival at Artsadmin, London

Performance Text

Artsadmin Courtyard. 7pm.

Instructions read by Gary, the father of the family:

Mark out a picnic space with around 30 meters of hazard tape. Tie the tape around an object, for example a bin, a park bench, a lamppost, move on towards a tree and then proceed to another tree. This will form a triangular space that you may now call a picnic space.

Make sure the stretched length of banner is as straight and taut as possible. Make sure there is a pot of white paint and a decent, thick brush with which to write upon the banner, placed conveniently underneath the banner. You will write upon this banner. Make sure you write in large, clear lettering, readable from a distance.

Proceed to spread the picnic throw in the centre of the triangulated space. Place all the items of food and drink on the throw.

Take the small red step and place it front-right of the picnic space, you may call this a soap-box if you wish.

Begin.

Lena (stands onto the soap-box; Gary and the kids eat during this speech):
We are the Institute for the Art and Practice of Dissent at Home, we are twoaddthree, a nice hetero-normative, family unit, of two adults and three children: Gary, Lena, Neal, Gabriel and Sid. We are a nuclear family, the darling of neo-liberal consumer capitalism, Tesco loves us, ASDA adores us and Marks and Spencers can't get enough of us. We fly, we drive, we eat meat, we bank with HSBC, we are careless with recycling, we don't compost, we breed too much. We are bad, bad, bad. Bad for the planet. But, we are not beyond redemption. We are willing to change.

Now, we are a transnational family, see we got married for the papers, so that we could build our lives here in the over affluent UK. I'm Croatian whilst Gary is a proper British Citizen. The children are both. As a transnational family, we travel a lot. We are addicted to travel, to flying, to cheap low cost airlines. Ryanair, Easy Jet, Wizz Air, SkyEurope, BmiBaby... Actually being here today in London is our pit stop on our route from Liverpool to Dubrovnik. Our overall carbon footprint for the household according to direct.gov.uk website is 7.06 tonnes a year.

Average household of our size is 9.96 tonnes. According to these figures we are doing pretty well, however resources aren't infinite ... and our largest carbon footprint comes from our flights. Can we, a nuclear family unit, be helped? So, on this road to change, we have come here from Liverpool today to explore what a family might mean in the face of climate chaos. Can we better ourselves? Can we save the planet?

Gary:

Paint the banner and let me get on with the speeches.

I will read from various conflicting sources identifying the family as one of the key sources of our current climate chaos problem.

(During Gary's long speech the Family disrupts him. Children throw bits of food at him and sing: It's not easy being green! It is not easy being green. It is not easy being green! Lena is painting the banner)

The Sunday Times 7th May 2007:

"Having Large families should be frowned upon as an environmental misdemeanour in the same way as frequent long haul flights, driving a big car and failing to reuse plastic bags, says a report to be published today [May 2007] by a green think tank. The paper by the Optimum Population Trust will say that if couples had two children instead of three they could cut their family's carbon dioxide output by the equivalent of 620 return flights a year between London and New York.

John Guillebaud, co-chairman of the OPT and emeritus professor of family planning at University College London, said: "The effect on the planet of having one child less is an order of magnitude greater than all these other things we might do, such as switching off the lights. [...] The greatest thing anyone in Britain could do to help the future of the planet would be have one less child." Professor Guillebaud says that, as a general guideline, couples should produce no more than two offspring. The world's population is expected to increase by 2.5 billion to 9.2 billion by 2050, almost all the growth will take place in developing countries [...] Professor Guillebaud says rich countries should be the most concerned about family size as their children have higher per capita carbon dioxide emissions...higher per capita CO₂ emissions"

From the Sunday Times to MUTE: Climate for Change Special Edition, article by Manchester No Borders "Overpopulation': Letting Capitalism off the Hook".

"We should be attacking capitalism, not children and families. In a world where children are killed over oil and exploited at the hands of multi-national corporations it isn't surprising that children will eventually be

blamed for capitalism's fuck ups [**Lena:** Mind the language!]. Capitalism doesn't make sense and neither do capitalist solutions. The 'overpopulation' argument ignores the contradictions inherent in capitalism that mediate the relationship between human beings and the environments and already limit our freedom and desires on a real everyday level.

Instead of acknowledging the unprecedented global disasters that seem to spiral as capitalism grows and spreads its destructive wings, the 'overpopulation' argument asks not for a new form of social organization (that might see land and resources accessed and shared more evenly, contributing to less poverty, more sustainable lifestyles and fewer wars) but takes the shameful and hopeless route of asking people to have fewer children. In a world where we are repeatedly screwed over we are now being asked not to screw!"

Lena: Mind the language, mind the language.

Gary: From Mute to Marx and Engels' :*the Communist Manifesto*:
Abolition of the family! Even the most radical flare up at this infamous proposal of the Communists.

On what foundation is the present family [...] based? On capital, on private gain. [...]and [the family] will vanish with the vanishing of capital.
Do you charge us with wanting to stop the exploitation of children by their parents? To this crime we plead guilty.

[...]

The bourgeois clap-trap about the family and education, about the hallowed co-relation of parents and child, becomes all the more disgusting, the more, by the action of Modern Industry.

Lena: Bloody Marx and his modern industry! It's past Sid's bedtime. Bedtime story time!

Gary: Let Neal and Gabi read it for Sid, I'll continue speechmaking.

(Lena puts Sid into pyjamas, changing nappy etc, then the children read "Oil" picture book.)

Gary: If Capitalism is the hungry monster whose appetite destroys the planet, then we have to stop feeding it. Oil is its favourite dish. The Oil industry relies as heavily on the family as Marx's Modern Industry relied on its families; on families who want cheaper petrol, on families who drive to shop in TESCOs where every single item they buy carries the smell and price of diesel, on families with SUVs, two cars, three cars, two homes, two three four credit cards, families on package holidays, families on flights,

transnational families who spend half their income on flying. Families, families, families...

These airport codes that are written on the red banner in white paint represent all the places that we as a family have visited. These are the last nine years of flying with kids:

LHR ZAG SPU DBV PIC - not for reading, this is just info for painting
STN AOI ABZ AMS BKK
HKG LTN GLA GRZ TSF CRL
LPL BGY TRN TRS DUB
MAN PHL CMH BTS GRO
MAD HAV LGW TRF EMA

LHR Heathrow
ZAG Zagreb
SPU Split
DBV Dubrovnik
PIC Prestwick
STN Stansted
AOI Ancona
ABZ Aberdeen
AMS Amsterdam
BKK Bangkok
HKG Hong Kong
LTN Luton
GLA Glasgow
GRZ Graz
TSF Treviso
CRL Brussels
LPL Liverpool
BGY Bergamo
TRN Turin
TRS Trieste
DUB Dublin
MAN Manchester
PHL Philadelphia
CMH Columbus, Ohio
BTS Bratislava
GRO Barcelona, Gerona
MAD Madrid
HAV Havana
LGW Gatwick
TRF Oslo Torp
EMA East Midlands

Neal (8) has been on 90 flights, Gabriel (6) has been on 72 flights and Sid (22 months) has been on 12 flights.

Lena: I come from Dubrovnik, Croatia. I am a foreigner. All my family live in Dubrovnik. We visit them two-three times a year. And today we are going to Croatia again! This time the reason we are going is to chair a panel at Performance Studies international conference in Zagreb. We are to talk about sustainable, anti-instrumentalist arts practices. During the conference the children will stay with their grandparents in Dubrovnik and be learning Croatian.

Over the last nine years we have taken mad routes from Liverpool to Dubrovnik. We drove to Stansted 5 hours, we took Ryanair to Ancona in Italy 3 hours, we took an overnight ferry from Ancona to Split, 9 hours, my mother waited for us in Split and took us on a 5 hour journey to Dubrovnik. Sometimes we would fly from Stansted to Graz, Austria where my mother's friend Djurdja would be waiting, and driving us from Graz to Zagreb 4 hours. Then we would wait at Zagreb airport 3-4 hours more and fly to Dubrovnik. It used to take us anywhere between 18 to 30 hours to get from door to door - from Liverpool to Dubrovnik.

Now, for the first time, and from the first of June 2009, there is a direct flight from Liverpool to Dubrovnik. Easyjet. 3 hours 5 minutes. Here is our ticket. Booked and paid for Friday, the 19th June. £227 for all 5 of us one way including 'carbon offsetting'. This is not good enough.

[calls Neal who comes and rips the ticket]

As a part of this performance, we have decided not to take the plane. This commission here at Artsadmin and being part of Two Degrees has inspired us to experiment. We have decided to spend the £500 performance fee from Artsadmin on slow travel. £500 wasn't enough so we also took some funding from Liverpool Hope University where we work and the Institute for the Art and Practice of Dissent at Home. Let's see if getting from Liverpool to Dubrovnik by slow travel with three kids works.

Here's our itinerary:

16.6 Liverpool to London Virgin Train 10:48 to 12:56 (2 hours 8 minutes) £37.40 - already done

17.6. London St Pancras International - Paris Nord by Eurostar leaving at 13:32 arriving at 16:47 (2 hours 15 minutes) £208

17.6 Paris - Munich overnight from 8:20 pm to 7:19 am including 6 berth cabin (10 hours 59 minutes) 181.50 euros

18.6 Munich - Rijeka departing 8.27 am arriving at 17:25 (8 hours 58 minutes) 85.50 euros

Journey from Rijeka is still in the planning, we will either take 19:50 train to Split which would be an overnight train with 2 changes, arriving to Split at 6:55 am. From Split we will have to take a coach to get to Dubrovnik, some 5 hours. The whole thing should cost some 120 euros.

The other option is to take a coastal boat from Rijeka to Dubrovnik. Some 22 hours and again we estimate 120 euros.

Overall time: over 3 full days or over 4 full days if we go by boat

Overall cost: some £575 (does not include any food nor city travel)

Compare it to £227 by air, 6 hours door to door

Now, we wanted a big exit to this performance, a big dramatic ending, we wanted to leave here, Toynbee studios in London and set off on our journey. However, two things went wrong with that: we already journeyed here from Liverpool this morning AND the train from London to Paris, our next leg of the journey, leaves tomorrow morning, not tonight. So, we can't make that dramatic exit, unfortunately, reality, is just too messy. Maybe saving the planet isn't that dramatic a thing after all.