

Klimax Working for the Climate: Through Humor, Play, and the Redefinition of Space

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Abstract

This article focuses on the strategies of protest employed by the climate-change activist network Klimax (circa 2007-10). My questions are: What, in their view, was the main threat to our environment? How did they protest against it? The study is based on a close examination of twenty – four protest actions, undertaken during the years 2009-11, as described on the movement’s own KLIMAX homepage. I am interested in how the website’s narratives and visuals demonstrate the ways in which individual actions’ specific protest strategies challenge the current social order. The analysis of these texts and visuals is based on concepts and theories derived from Cultural Studies, textual analysis and theories of representation, research on New and social resistance movements, emotion sociology and cultural–social approaches to place.

Keywords: Climate-change activist, Melucci, redefinition of space, emotions, counter-symbols.

Introduction

This article investigates the strategies of protest employed by the climate-change activist network Klimax (circa 2007-10). What, in their view, was the main threat to our environment; how did they protest against it? Klimax activists envisioned a society that no longer depends on fossil fuels, and they took direct action against sources of carbon dioxide emission such as coal-fueled power plants, cars and airplanes. The network had affiliates in Stockholm, Gothenburg, Uppsala and Malmö; it was a city phenomenon; and it was most active between 2007 and 2010. The organization, which kept no membership register, seems to have consisted of loosely knit groups and of individuals recruited for events through social media. Why is the movement interesting?

The study of social movements encompasses several different scholarly paradigms. Interest in and questions concerning what takes place in civil society has ranged from inquiries into movement strategies, influence and resources to questions of how a single movement may manifest itself differently in different countries. In the early 1980s, European research on social movements was marked by increasing interest in identity, as formulated by constructivist sociological theory – that is, the cultural processes by which collective identity is created. Alberto Melucci is a principal representative of this turn towards social groups whose concern lies not only with political power but also in defending personal autonomy and publicizing the risks of the Western life style (Wettergren & Jamison 2006: 12 ff.). KLIMAX activities fit into this paradigm: protests centered on ecologist personal autonomy were coupled to a great ability to gain Swedish media attention.

In his 2010 book on Swedish street festivals and the “right to the city”, Ulf Stahre describes KLIMAX. The movement arose when the Stockholm Reclaim the Streets movement was disappearing. Reclaim the Streets had arranged protest actions meant to reclaim the city from the injustices of capitalism and the pollution of automobiles. KLIMAX picked up on the idea of street festivals, but adapted to new purposes. Their program may well have been inspired by the British organization Plane Stupid, which launches direct protest against air traffic and airports. Stahre sees KLIMAX as unique, however, in its symbolically expressive manner of protesting. As we shall see, organization members were fond of role-playing (e.g., blocking traffic dressed as polar bears). By 2009, Stahre notes, KLIMAX actions were in decline; the KLIMAX homepage notes no protest action later than December 2011. This is not uncommon; many so-called “new” social movements have limited life-spans. As Melucci puts it, new social movements are more “nomads of the present” than embedded in a long-term historical process. (Melucci 1989/1992: 69). So what might such a “symbolic expressive” style of protest mean in this case?

Sources and Methods

This article is based on a close examination of twenty-four protest actions, 2009-2011, as described on the KLIMAX homepage. I do not attempt a complete or anthropological description of the events; rather, I am interested in website narratives and visuals. These show how the website re-told and represented the movement to its own members and to the public. Today, the KLIMAX homepage server is closed; but the author can supply complete screenshots, etc., upon request. My analysis of these texts and visuals is based on concepts and theories derived from Cultural Studies' textual analysis and theories of representation, research on New and social resistance movements, emotion sociology and a cultural-social approach to place.

Let me illustrate my approach by describing a 2010 KLIMAX "action". In March 2010, Gothenburg KLIMAX members blocked access to a supermarket meat counter. According to the website, the activists wanted to focus attention on the adverse impact of meat consumptions on the environment. Visuals were supplied, such as that below, which shows an activist holding up a placard whose "Meat counter cordoned off because of climate changes" is framed by black-and-yellow zebra stripes (a police cordon signal). This announcement warns bystanders of approaching danger. Further, the website report tells readers, the activists offered people alternative, vegetarian food, and distributed vegetarian recipes.



The homepage gives the following narrative:

This year in the month of March Klimax Gothenburg arranged a blockade of the meat counter at a superstore. For no fewer than 45 minutes they managed to remain in the cold temple of consumption frenzy and take up discussion about the climate effects of meat. They saved some of the customers from the desperate robot-like migration between the shelves, the desperation over the choices and the anger that there never is a really good choice (klimax.se, 2012).

This is a battle of symbols. The activists are challenging established power structures through presenting alternative systems and practices. They strengthen their challenge by showing the public that their “alternative” life-style is feasible, in a public performance of personal, embodied, esthetically articulated practices. These practices included (as we see in the quote above) not only food, cooking hints and arguments, but an alternative to the consumers’ patterns of movement, which were interrupted through the use of contra-symbols.

Climate-friendly recipes, traffic-warnings of cordoned-off areas of meat, “vegetarian food” – all show symbol manipulation. Melucci (1989) describes this presentation of counter-symbols as typical of new social movements. Personal, public performances of this counter-symbolic world are (argues Melucci) a new social-movement medium, effective because they illuminate the dominant system’s hidden and arbitrary codes. A social movement’s aim must, by this argument, be to provide the public with an alternative symbolic system from which to re-interpret individual and collective experiences.

Melucci also argues that collective actions have taken on a new guise which makes political effectiveness and success less important. Conflicts now take place at a symbolic level. The organizations are, he maintains, self-reflective. They can be seen as laboratories where actors test their ability to challenge dominant cultural codes.

This seems to apply to KLIMAX’s actions, as re-told and communicated on their homepage: their publicly-communicated actions challenge the social system at a symbolic level. The website is one example of such communication; but more important, if one believes website texts, is on-site communication with the public. Passers-by and observers are actively engaged during KLIMAX actions. According to the homepage, KLIMAX activists routinely contact and involve bystanders, inviting them to read placards and inverse advertising, enjoy free performances, to participate in discussion, singing, dancing, foot-ball, to eat gifts of vegan food, coffee and cakes, to “shop” at free shops. Above all, observers are invited into the humorous counter-use of symbols. Activists are often dressed up as animals, Santa Claus or clowns, a sort of “play” with power relations which introduced their own alternative to the prevailing social order.

Challenging Emotions in Place

The action described above is very much about claiming place. The redefinition of the significance of a given place is a recurring feature in KLIMAX action. The supermarket, above, is first charged with negative emotions. Supermarket food stores, advertised as places of joyful exercise in self-expression, bodily enjoyment and family-care, are here described cold and frenzied temples of consumption, places of “desperate robot-like migration” which produce only anger. KLIMAX activists seek to change the emotions of the place, and thereby the meaning of the place itself: they generously distribute “environmentally friendly” recipes and vegetarian food, and do so even with a touch of humor.

The use of humor in connection with civil disobedience has a long tradition. It not only ridicules repression and hierarchy, while articulating an alternative state of being. Humor also creates feelings of joy (Lundberg 2008). And joy (if one is to believe the text) would deprive the temple of consumption frenzy of its meaning. Place is included in this challenge to the prevailing symbolic order. The website narratives recount contra-symbolic actions which mean to redefine the places where they occur – be they commercial sites, transportation hubs or places of mass production.

Cultural geographers such as Tim Cresswell (1996: 3ff) claim that we apply various meanings to the word place. Sometimes we refer to a building or a geographical place with a certain meaning. At other times the word appears to have no specific geographical spatial reference, for example in “everything is in its place”, “you must know your place”, “she was put in her place” etc. These phrases intimate that something is correct, that something or someone fits in a certain context but not in others. One’s “correct” place is determined by one’s relationship with other people or objects. Expectations and norms are coupled to a person’s place in the social structure and to the activity that takes place in a geographic location. Thus, “place” has a social as well as a spatial reference. Since the social system first and foremost serves those in power, the norms of place serve ideological functions as well.

Social and spatial place join to form the normative landscape, where something may seem perfectly proper in one place but entirely out-of-place in another. According to Cresswell, this normative landscape is constantly being re-created. It is when spatial ideologies come in conflict with each other that the “proper” nature of places becomes visible. This is also the moment when climate activists (for example) can challenge the normative landscape and bring forth an alternative understanding of the spatial and social place.

Above, I mentioned the KLIMAX text’s reading strong negative emotions into a particular place, and the text’s evident attempt to introduce an alternative tone. Emotions are also a weapon. The fact that activists flout expectations and norms associated with particular social and spatial places raise passions. One should,

perhaps, complement the idea of dominant and counter-dominant symbolic and spatial orders with that of emotional structures. Indeed, Ron Eyerman (2005) claims that emotional structures order society. Anger can motivate activism; feelings of shame can stand in the way of social engagement. Emotions set organizations in motion. It is the collective feeling of an emotionally bonded “we”, independent of time and context, that makes a social movement possible. Such emotional ties are strengthened, further, by the collective protesters’ ritual practices and symbols. Sara Ahmed (2004) has looked, further, at how certain objects become emotionally-charged movement symbols. In accounts of KLIMAX actions, the airplane and the car are two such symbolic objects. Both can be related to anger and fear.

Ahmed brings up fear as one emotion that she believes to both regulate and invalidate social norms. The narrative of global warming is a “successful” image of menace, which constantly recurs in the media, and which is used extensively by environmental organizations such as KLIMAX. The threat of a “climate collapse”, presented as spelling the end of mankind, is always present as a KLIMAX under-text: With terrific speed (their website argues) the world is moving towards a total catastrophe. The future of humanity is at stake; we must go in an entirely different direction. (klimax.se, 2012). This apocalyptic vision is always present, often communicated, and is one inducement to action.

I am convinced that emotions not only strengthened KLIMAX organizationally, but were a necessary element in its strategy. KLIMAX actions were meant to generate specific emotions that would then affect both (imagined) audiences and the activists themselves. Humour, whose effect is often joy, is one such emotion. Another (one that pervades KLIMAX texts) is fear. The production of certain emotions not only helped establish sympathetic contact with audiences, but helped motivate the activists themselves. By appealing to emotions like joy and fear KLIMAX engaged its audiences, inviting them to participate in the emotional culture the network shares.

KLIMAX Actions: Sitting in A Round-About

My first example of symbolic and emotional struggle over the meaning of place is an action that took place in Uppsala in 2010. KLIMAX occupied a traffic round-about in order to call attention to environmental problems and to issues of city planning.

On Sunday, April 17th, Uppsala’s Klimax “occupied” a bit of land, the round-about traffic circle at the intersection of Kyrkogårdsgatan and S:t Johannesgata. The website provides the movement’s own version of the events. Activists spent the time planting vegetables and drinking coffee, while ten bicyclists rode around and around them in the traffic circle, including one dressed as a polar bear, carried along on a bicycle trailer. KLIMAX activist Per Tjäder went on record as saying

that the action was in order to observe the Small Farmers' International Battle Day, in memory of nineteen peasants murdered by military police in Brazil. (The placard in the picture reads "The land is occupied by Uppsala's landless peasants".) The occupation thus seems meant to contrast personal, peasant production of food and "social and constructive" activities such as bicycling and coffee-drinking against environmentally disastrous practices such as driving cars and highways, car pollution, and global land-robbing practices:

By delaying traffic we also want to show problems that are in today's city planning in Sweden. Enormous areas are left for drivers who make our environment dirty and destroy our climate, while social and constructive activities must stay in the periphery. The problems with lack of food in the world today is exacerbated by the fact that one uses agricultural products as fuel in our cars, at the same time as the highways occupy more and more of the best agricultural land in the world (klimax.se, 2012).



Note the symbols involved here (again, interestingly, including patterns of movement). A traffic circle is meant to keep traffic flowing. Those entering the circle give precedence to vehicles (cars) that already are in the circle. The activists break the flow by using the "wrong" kind of vehicles in the traffic circle, hindering cars from entering. They also transgress norms about how bit of land inside the roundabout's interior circle should be utilized, and thus show that it is possible to think differently about what and whom the place serves. The traffic circle's small patch of lawn is given direct associations to agriculture and food. Through their action, they call attention to the fact the automobile traffic takes up place and claims otherwise useful land.

Coffee, placards, planting vegetables in impossible places, riding round and round, stopping traffic with bicycle-borne polar-bears: the activists' protest actions bear some resemblance to carnival-like events. According to Strindlund & Vinthagen (2011), such actions do not set out to engage the authorities in political dialogue. Rather, they play pranks on (and thus, arguably, subvert) the authorities. This kind of performance was used effectively, not least, in the non-violent Indian liberation movement. It remains popular: at the G8 meeting in Scotland 2005, a group of activists actually dressed up as clowns (ibid: 280).

Dressing up as an animal, of course, is also – as Timothy Ingalsbee (1996: 270) points out – a way of intensifying an ideological message. In this case, it signifies the activists' ecological identification with nature. For the environmental movement, the polar bear is a recurring symbol. It has great media appeal. The link between the diminishing Arctic icecap and the polar bear's extinction is a prevalent symbol of the vulnerability of the earth. Cars, of course, are another key KLIMAX symbol. The automobile is presented as a global threat, not only because of emissions but because biofuels threaten the food supply of the third world. The reference, here, is to ethanol-powered cars. To plant, drink coffee, and bicycle around in an occupied round-about become a set of anti-car, symbolic acts of resistance: the actions show and offer “alternatives”, not least to the waste of limited resources, especially those of poor countries.

The “Climate Clash”

Actions playing “pranks” against, for instance, car-directed city infrastructure, are a recurring theme in KLIMAX. Cars are already heavily charged symbols in modern society: as wrecks, penis extensions, environment rogues, symbols of city/village, as carriers of high or low social status. In the eyes of KLIMAX, cars and the inner-city motor roads represent a threat to the environment and to people's health. The car is also a socially unjust means of transportation. On its homepage, KLIMAX states that

many people cannot afford to drive a car, but must use public transportation, travel on bicycle or walk. The fact that these latter forms of transportation are far better for the environment, and for people's health, hardly needs reiteration, but we think it is important to stress that there are also egalitarian forms of transportation (klimax.se, 2012).

KLIMAX's means of spot-lighting this problem has been to arrange what it termed “climate clashes” in larger cities such as Stockholm, Malmö, Gothenburg and Uppsala. In this, KLIMAX was inspired by the so-called “culture clashes” arranged twenty years earlier in Stockholm. These #clashes” had started off as traffic blockades but subsequently turned into a sort of cultural festival, hence their name (Stahre 2010: 185).

In their “climate clashes”, KLIMAX brings together a series of emotionally loaded symbols and ideas which challenge the connotations of the place. This can start with posters advertising the event. Below, for instance, we can see how an upcoming action is announced, in a combination of meaning-carrying entities; smoke, a lonely child trying to eat up the car, the black background, the dove smoking a cigarette. (The slogan reads, “For a car-free inner city and a sustainable society”.) Together, the images form a kind of horror vision of a future society. Placing a baby child – the symbol of future generations, innocent and natural, something to safeguard – in a horrible, insecure place, far from nature (save in its perverted, smoking-dove guise) and parents, says something not only about who has right to the city, but just who is in the wrong place: drivers and cars.

To disturb traffic by physically sitting down in the middle of the city street is what Cresswell would describe as transgression (of the normative landscape). This is what KLIMAX activists did; and they got strong reactions. According to the KLIMAX homepage account of a “climate clash” action in Malmö, things became rowdy when some drivers refused to stop: they would detour around or simply drive straight ahead (klimax.se, 2012). The KLIMAX homepage describes how about two



hundred activists gathered and chanted slogans, attacking “motorism” in order to “save the planet from a climate catastrophe”. They blocked a heavily trafficked city street. True to type, the activists had

quickly carried out a table at which they offered coffee and home-baked goods. A polar bear made a little welcome speech on [from on top of] a [city] electrical box and a penguin went around collecting money for KLIMAX. The police were present but made no attempt to break the blockade. Nor were lines formed, as drivers were quick to find short cuts in one of the side streets. Also, many chose to drive straight on over the traffic island between the roadways in order to avoid waiting. Buses were let through and were greeted with hand-waving and cries of joy (klimax.se, 2012).

This description of a “climate clash” may be considered characteristic for this type of action. An underlying threat is often cited, in this case a future climate catastrophe. The message of apocalypse is, moreover, given from within a particular, symbolically-laden place. In this case, it is a heavily trafficked road which the activists transform into a “performance stage”. Theater expert Dirk Gindt (2007: 39-40) defines “theatricity” as songs, slogans, flags, costumes (polar bears and penguins) and the like that differ from the customary and normal. The “theatrical” action takes place in a kind of extended context – a public place – outside the ordinary stage. The public place, as Cresswell points out, has its own ideological association and meaning; and this, in turn, contributes to the theatric event. (For similar analyses of environmental activism, Alaimo 2011: 45.) The heavily trafficked road has a symbolic content which KLIMAX challenged, altered and “extended”, so to speak. A transportation route was transformed into a recreational place, an invitation to get out of the car, meet others, take a coffee-break. The website text also goes into the emotions involved. There is a playful (polar-bear) welcome from a city infrastructure perch; no waiting was involved; busses become positive symbolic objects, a kind of ally, greeted with hand-waving and shouts of joy.

Rudolf the Red-Nosed Reindeer

The free hand-out of food and coffee is typical for KLIMAX actions. Commercialized consumption is ranged with car emissions as an environmental problem. KLIMAX has protested against consumption in actions in shopping arcades. According to Cresswell (1996: 160), shopping arcades are prime examples of places that try to hide their historical origin by appearing as something “natural” that just “is”, rather than the result of series of social relations created by capitalism, each with its unique meaning. A prime, if not public, place for intervention.

The organization’s homepage describes, accordingly, how activists mingled with Christmas shoppers in a city shopping arcade where, according to the website text, they “dumped” masses of cinnamon buns. They were dressed as Santa Claus (the pictures shows one such, holding a package on which “?? Christmas joy??” is written), distributing Christmas cards and carrying a poster with the slogan “Santa Claus hates Christmas ham” (the Swedish Christmas dinner focuses on ham). Instead of using polar bears to show their identification with animals, an activist was dressed as the red-nosed reindeer Rudolf. Activists also made suggestions and demands. They (according to the text) “called for restraint and reflection on what Christmas is all about”, as well as general de-commercialization and a six-hour workday. Again, the norms defining what belongs to and goes on in a given place, this time a shopping arcade at Christmas, are used to frame and strengthen a *challenge* to that content and those actions – in the form of humorous, reinterpreted theater.

The emotions engendered by this action were good: the activists were, according to the homepage, met with “encouragement and warm smiles”. But their joyous invitation to reinvent the place was suddenly stopped. This was not, after all, a public space: it was private and commercial. Security guards set in “violent intervention [...] they were wrestled down, and were mocked for their beliefs” (klimax.se, 2012).

The Swedish Christmas celebration comprises a number of phenomena such as Christmas gifts, food, mulled wine, window displays, advent-calendar TV-shows, year-end sales, etc. Although some go to midnight mass and early service on Christmas Day, Sweden is relatively secular; and



so consumption plays a central role in the celebration. Buying Christmas gifts and food is the natural thing to do. Here KLIMAX succeeded in transgressing the rules for behaving suitably within this (semi-private) place, which led to security-guard action.

At the same time, however, they claimed that they had won approval of those present in the arcade. Klimax urges people to do something different, to slow down and reflect, calling for “restraint and reflection on what Christmas is all about”. The symbolic world is very much like that of a church. It invites people to participate in spirituality in the form of higher, communal values, including communal coffee and cakes.

Like Christmas, moreover, this type of action has its own history and tradition. Demonstrators dressed up as Santa Clauses are not new. In the 1970s, the Danish non-violent theater group Solvognen arranged several anti-consumption demonstrations (Strindlund & Vinthagen 2011: 97). They would, for example, take merchandise off the shelves in department stores and distribute it among the customers as truly “free” gifts. Like the Klimax activists, the Danish activists were seized by the police during what the participants called a “violent” episode – indeed, it led sympathetic shoppers to protest against the police. One is lucky, however, to be so successful in creating a counter-space. Cresswell (1996: 24) writes that those who transgress the norms are often themselves considered abnormal – including, of course, activists who transgress in public.

Bill-Boards as Contested Places

KLIMAX had other places, as well, in which it could use the strategy of appealing to emotions of shame, guilt, pleasure – as well as to people’s sense of irony (humor and joy). These were billboards. KLIMAX’s homepage has up-loaded several pictures from actions, without captions, featuring bill-board advertisements whose messages have been altered – so-called reverse advertising. Scholars link this phenomenon to the concept culture jam, activism where the actor infringes on well-known signs and symbols. (In Sweden, Adbusters are probably among the most well-known logos saboteurs.) Åsa Wettergren (2005: 174) traces culture jam as an ironic resistance technique to the French Situationist Internationale and its *détournement* (inversion, turning upside down). The 1960s Situationists claimed that the spread of consumption culture and mass media transformed society into a seductive spectacle, blunting working-class activism. Their answer, *détournement*, involved exposing the “spectacle” by creating situations or visions of another, possible world. How did KLIMAX use reverse advertising to this end?

Consider the pictures below.

The first picture is a billboard advertising the travel agency *detur* (their non-capitalization and italization) with the slogan “where the sun shines!”. The joyful image of bikini-clad female, sea, sun and beach, headed “Winter 2010-2011”, endorses the slogan. If you buy a vacation through *detur*, you will get the happiness of sunny and warm weather – a scarce commodity in Sweden, where summers are short and winters long. (The female featured is another matter.) But that joy is then openly belied. The woman brandishes and even seems to caress a large, prominent tattoo of a “no flying” sign, a crossed-over airplane. The sight of this, emblazoned prominently on the woman’s arm, brings consumption-culture’s stream of emotionally-laden symbols to a jolting halt. Many people know that flying is bad for the environment. The aim is to remind people with travel plans of the negative environmental consequences of flight. I would call the tattoo an “ironic trope” (Lindgren 2011: 91f). The airplane becomes an object



associated with “doing wrong” by contributing to climate change. The picture’s signification has been reversed; new connotations have changed its original message.

The second website picture features an advertisement for a conservative party’s pet project, “Bypass Stockholm” – that is, the plans for a new, partially under-ground Stockholm expressway. The proposal had not met with approval from all sides. Rather, the plan to construct additional expressways has been criticized for producing more traffic and greater carbon dioxide emissions. The image has been “turned” by using masks as ironic tropes – less seductive and more shocking than the tattoo. The two serious-looking conservative politicians, supposedly radiating



statesmanlike concentration, are now both muzzled, worried-looking, dressed-down as construction workers and seeking protection against emissions – and therefore comical. Moreover, the politicians stand very close together under the conservative party’s logo – the circle enclosing the word TOGETHER. A viewer might think that perhaps without the masks they are together, united for a “better” environment; but with the masks they look more like two oddly-groomed figures huddled together to protect themselves against the emissions caused by their own proposition. If, as Wettergren argues (2005: 179ff), cultural symbols serve the purpose of regulating people’s options by codifying good or bad choices, KLIMAX’s interference with this last image recodes its message and diminishes its political impact.

KLIMAX used ironic humor as a strategy in another protest against the Bypass Stockholm project, this one outside Stockholm’s Royal Palace. They chose this location because they supposedly wanted to appeal to the Swedish King for help, entreating him to “live up” to his Christmas Speech of 2010. As their petition (reproduced on their website) put it, “In his Christmas speech 2010, the King compared earth to an apple, and life here on earth the King called fragile as dew on the skin of the apple.” We agree with the King, the petition continued, and therefore “are confident” that the King, soon to meet with Catharina Elmsäter-Svärd, Swedish minister of infrastructure, would urge her to rethink the Bypass. “Say to her”, the petition continues, “that to build a six-lane expressway on this beautiful apple

is to build us firmly into automobile traffic” – and this in a situation when, rather, one must “build” traffic “away”. Say (the petition continues)

That you are merely King but that you feel uneasy about the situation and are forced to bring this up. Not only will the road run close to Drottningholm [Palace] and an important world universal heritage but it will also ruin the possibilities for life on this fragile, beautiful apple, and that you now want to talk about this over lunch. That if we are to survive, Bypass Stockholm must be stopped (klimax.se, 2012).

This message is, like many KLIMAX texts, both well formulated and has clear ironical undertones (“merely King”, “not only” run close to the Palace but destroy life on earth, “talk about this over lunch”). KLIMAX often makes ironic use of material from other texts: in this case, they also take out an intertextual loan from the King’s Christmas speech. The humorous result exposes power relations. The King’s Christmas speech metaphor may very well have presented His Majesty’s emotional standpoint on nature’s needs, but when quoted in the KLIMAX text it seems threadbare and ineffectual. The petition, indeed, invokes the King as an ally, but this invocation is ironic; and it is in this irony that gives the text its explosive political effect. The text confirms Melucci’s claims about this kind of network: the form is in itself both result and expression of resistance against the established institutions.

The petition is presented at a location which is chosen with care: next to a heavily trafficked road outside the royal palace. This is, of course, more or less expected of petitioners to the Court. However, in this case the activists do not transgress the expected spatial behavior and the presence of KLIMAX does not lead to a redefinition of the place – unless using this place to present such a heavily ironic petition, obviously not meant to be taken seriously (“merely King”, “you now want to talk about this over lunch”) is itself a challenge to emplaced traditions of King-subject, government-citizen authority.

Altogether New Places: Giving Things Away

A recurring KLIMAX feature is the so-called “free-store” event. The point is to create a place from which commercial consumption can be excluded, thus encouraging “right” feelings such as sharing and generosity. At a free-store, people take what they want free of charge, and leave off things they wish to give away. The KLIMAX website characterizes the free-store a way of “practicing alternatives to the capitalist system” (klimax.se, 2012) – or, as the placard on the picture shows, “FREE-STORE – SHOP FOR REAL – CONSUME SUSTAINABLY HERE WITH US”. An activist describes the phenomenon on-line:

A for-free-store is a concrete, above all fun way to decrease carbon dioxide emissions and environmental effects that come from newly produced goods. Put up a couple of tables and clothes racks in the city, get together friends and strangers and let clothes, gadgets and toys find new homes. [...] a for-free-store is a concrete alternative to capitalism’s unsustainable market and eternal growth. In future Klimax

for-free-stores we think there should be room for free services such as bicycle repairs, haircuts, and *dumpstrad* food [food recovered from supermarket dumpsters] (klimax.se, 2012).



The activists goes on to write that the ties between people are strengthened by the exchange of gifts, and that it teaches people to be more generous. “By sharing you can achieve security [in] that your neighbors will share with you when this is what you need. In this way, everyone gets richer without having to exploit anyone” (klimax.se, 2012).

According to the activists, if no alternatives to the consumption society are offered ruin will be the consequence.

Capitalism has led to the greatest inequality in wealth, the greatest mass starvation and the poorest distribution system in history. Capitalism’s fixation on growth has caused a climate chaos that may be the death of humanity and the world. (klimax.se, 2012).

In this description, an apocalyptic view of humanity’s future is paired with a view of an alternative humanity which has more fun, is more generous, is more egalitarian, lives more ascetically and is more conscious in its consumption. Altruism is seen a solution to the coming crisis. Some of this may seem nostalgic. To advocate a non-commercial exchange culture connotes a will to struggle for a pre-industrial, more pristine culture. “Evil” is placed in consumerism, as exemplified in the shopping arcade. On the other hand, I believe that when the activists speak of virtues such as thrift and generosity, they refer back to traditional humanistic

values. Thrift, simplicity and self-restraint are, indeed, the values that most often characterize the ecological discourse (Alaimo 2011: 44).

I quoted Sara Ahmed, above, as saying that emotions are not only things people carry within them. Emotions circulate in interactions between people; objects can be associated with emotions. It is evident that in the actions described above cars and airplanes, for example, are associated with expressions of negative feelings while the for-free-store is associated with positive feelings. The free-store is, “above all, fun”. KLIMAX practices seem often meant to call forth well-being, irony, concern and even sympathetic identification.

This contrasts with studies done of other environmental movements. Take, for instance, animal rights activists. As Jacobsson and Lindblom (2013) show, these activists compare industrial meat production with extermination camps. They are often driven by a sudden awakening to the fact that animals suffer. In order to evoke feelings of disgust in themselves, they may start the day by looking at films or pictures depicting mistreatment of animals. The radical animal rights organization is ideologically anchored and has a clear goal: to stop industrial meat production. Here, we are faced with a fundamentalist worldview

KLIMAX’s use of playfulness and humor, and way in which it “easily” shifts between different symbols, is interesting insofar as its activists are also usually portrayed as fundamentalists. Of course, my comparison is based on website texts and visuals; Jacobsson and Lindblom use interviews. Nonetheless, the contrast is striking. The animal rights organization attempts physically to stop something that is being done. KLIMAX acts out its resistance on a playful, symbolic level. In this, the movement falls outside the prevailing and popular image of environmental activists. Perhaps this is intentional – perhaps the focus on pleasant fun allows KLIMAX to reach its audience more effectively, by side-stepping the view that environmentalism is a matter of dour sacrifice? Or does it devalue and trivialize the message?

Conclusion

As a rule, social movement research focuses on issues such as organization, identity formation, globalization, resource mobilization, political power etc. In this article, I have taken a closer look at individual actions and their meaning in terms of opinion-making, that is, the manner in which the specific protest strategies of individual actions challenge the current social order. I have chosen to focus on a different aspect of one of today’s networks, one that shows greater flexibility than do the mass movements of the industrialized society, not least in its decentralized and symbolically charged resistance. This aspect also appears to be imbued with playfulness and humor, in contrast to, e.g., Swedish animal rights activism. At the same time, these activists do view the “climate threat” in strong emotionally negative terms.

In today's society, which Melucci sees as characterized by the increasing importance of the symbolic, one may take it for granted that communication is essential to the function of many social movements. I have, accordingly, analyzed the communication, the narratives presented on the KLIMAX website. My focus on these climate activists was initially sparked by an interest in how various environmentalist groups view questions of humanity's place in and responsibilities towards nature. There exist several parallel discourses about nature: nature to be discovered and mastered, as a threat, as a source of income, as something to be valued for itself, etc.

Surprisingly, it appeared that "nature" was very much absent in KLIMAX rhetoric. There was general talk of a threat from increased carbon dioxide emission and a subsequent climate collapse, and there were the activists who dressed up as animals. The rest of the references were to city, roads, cars and humans. The focus, evidently, was not on ecology, but challenging the current social system (first and foremost transportation policies and people's consumerist life styles).

In order to challenge the prevalent view of city, transportation and consumption KLIMAX arranged climate crashes, free-shops, protests in shopping arcades, blockades of superstores, different types of culture jam (anti-advertising), and so on. A characteristic feature of the actions was KLIMAX's attempts to create space for alternative ways of thinking and acting in relation to specific socially-determined places. In an almost ritual manner, they used "inappropriate" actions and things to make it possible to use the original places and situations for pause and reflection. They challenged their audiences to think new thoughts, to give up the capitalist and technocratic society, to become physical and participate in the overturn of the symbolic system. They played not only on feelings of shame but of laughter, in efforts to change opinions. They were, thus, typical "new social movements", bent on winning the battle over the creation of meaning, and following Wettergren's (2005: 179) precept: if information is to carry meaning, it must catch the attention of the recipient and affect him or her with its challenge and questioning, through identification with emotive and cultural symbols.

Whether KLIMAX succeeded in affecting its audience cannot be answered within the scope of this article, but they certainly made use of well-known emotive and cultural symbols. Narratives recurred to allies and positive emotional objects, symbols of vulnerability, symbols of respect (and perhaps light ridicule): polar bears, a baby, Santa Clauses, bicycles, busses, the King, vegan snacks, thrown-away food and free clothing and services. Then there were the objects constantly cited in negative emotional contexts, to be resisted and avoided: cars, meat, airplanes, shopping arcades and holidays that encourage consumption. These sets of objects were played out against each other in the narratives presented on the KLIMAX homepage. If, as the researchers cited here have argued, power is situated in symbols, then KLIMAX has shown that a mastery of cultural codes allows one to challenge established thought patterns and ways of life.

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