



New Model Army

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Stand-in activists by Oliver Ressler

2016/2017

Humanity is on the brink of global ecological catastrophe. Copernicus Climate Change Service data show global temperature in 2016 close to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. Many scientists regard this threshold as the “red line” beyond which global warming will rampage beyond hope of control.

Human survival is at stake, yet public outcry for immediate action remains strangely muted, at least within official politics and media.

Meanwhile, a new social movement – the climate movement – has formed in response to dominant states’ refusal to cut CO2 emissions, much less take seriously the threat of irreversible ruin. This movement is bigger and more unified than it looks, because spectators see only occasional footage of isolated “newsworthy” interventions rather than the relentless pressure exerted by activists all over the world. The movement will not negotiate “concessions” from extractive industries. It will not be bought off with eco-crime-scene jobs, royalty deals, belated observance of safety standards or conscience-cleansing carbon offset programs. It just says “NO”.

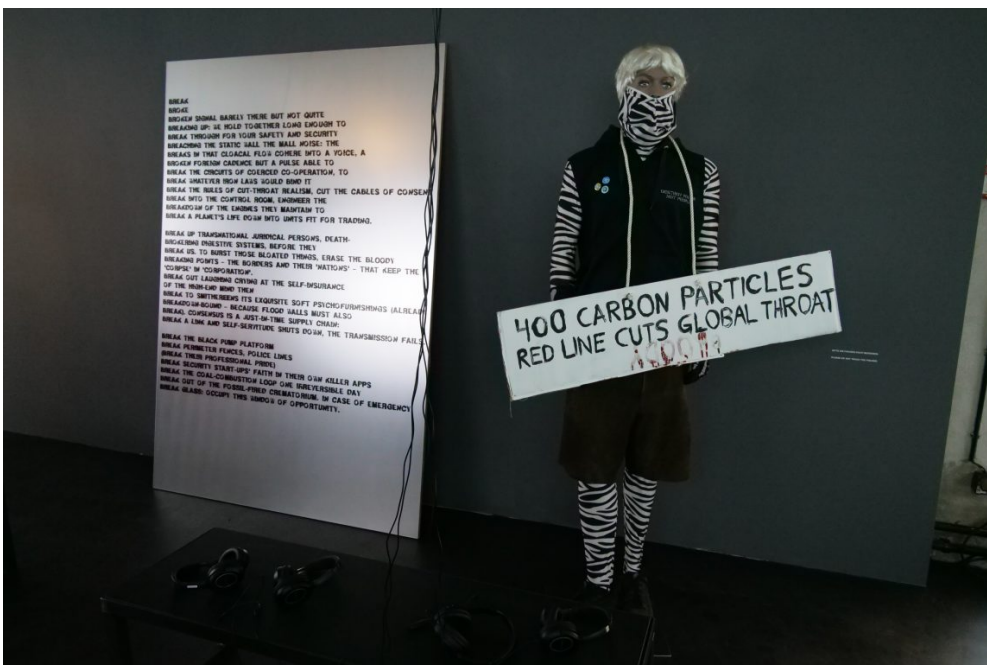


“New Model Army”, stand-in activists. Installation view: “How to Occupy a Shipwreck” (solo show), Kunst Haus Wien, Vienna, 2018



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"New Model Army" breaks the official silence, bringing spectres of the unseen climate movement protagonists into the gallery in the form of life-size mannequins. The mannequins stand in for activists whose civil disobedience ensures that no new eco-looting enterprise, however routine it may seem to stockholders, can ever be considered a done deal. These models are not even a perfect template or paradigm: something real but not yet real enough; container of the Geist of something still to come. The mannequins are stand-ins, visible ciphers for the unseen action of the climate movement everywhere. The modified mannequins hold up headline-style slogans concerning the crossing of the 1.5° threshold, e.g. "BLOODY RED LINES: CARBON UNCHAINED" and "400 CARBON PARTICLES – RED LINE CUTS GLOBAL THROAT".



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"New Model Army", stand-in activists, 2016. Installation view: "Property is Theft" (solo show), MNAC – National Museum of Contemporary Art, Bucharest, 2016



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One mannequin is dressed as a polar bear – a species whose survival is threatened as the Arctic sea-ice falls away from under its feet. Another is the double of an Ende Gelände activist – one of thousands who shut down Europe’s filthiest coal-fired power plant and thousands everywhere intent on spoiling carbon-fattened business plans. A mannequin all in red stands for a climate movement axiom: “BE THE RED LINE”. If institutions ignore the difference between life and planetary death, only we can make the line impossible to cross. The fourth climate warrior seems poised for self-defence against violent police. Not spoiling for a fight, but unwilling to bow to the riot squad ranks in armed occupation of the streets. The first two activist figures from the “New Model Army” were seen together in Oliver Ressler’s solo exhibition “Property is Theft” (2016) at MNAC – National Museum of Contemporary Art in

Bucharest. Others showed up in “The Extractive Machine – Neo-colonialisms and Environmental Resources” (2017) at the PAV (Parco Arte Vivente) in Torino. They surround the video installation “Everything’s coming together while everything’s falling apart”, acting as a sort of silent entourage; in the future they will also appear separately. Rumours suggest that this army will grow over time.



“New Model Army”, stand-in activists. Installation view: “Scharfstellen_1”, < rotor >, Graz, 2017



“New Model Army”, stand-in activist. Installation view: “...of bread, wine, cars, security and peace”, Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna, 2020

Note on terminology

New Model Army – As in the organized “rabble” that won the English revolutionary war of the 1640s: the “factious inferior persons” whose dangerously democratic Councils of War, habit of “mutual edification” and network of “Agitators” (the first known use of the word) frightened their own commanders into destroying them within a couple of years. This armed collective of those who “filled dung carts ... before they were captains” secured common survival when the vampire caste (or “0.1%”) of the time threatened to bleed the land dry. At which point the petty proprietors who had gained most from the victory lashed out at Agitators and Levellers, crushing the triumphant rabble by forcing it to fight itself. Survivors became firepower for Irish and Caribbean plantations. 350 years of defeat and counting. If the same thing happens to the climate “army”, there won’t be that much time.

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