

urban occupation : ACTION

experiment : instant occupation



*Image: 3 visitors after having successfully shot the bad guy - What to do with him now? Note the murder weapon in the blond man's hand.
Source: Own Photo*

authors / actors / participants:

Niklas Kuhlendahl / ghosts of Karl Liebknecht and Horst Wessel / passers-by on Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz

title: shoot horst liebknecht (be shot with karl wessel)

location: Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz, Berlin, Germany

date: may 1, 2009

manifesto:

The bottom line is, obviously, the question whether or not violence is an adequate means of political struggle. I intend to abruptly confront the passersby with this problem by (playfully) asking them: If you had the chance to do a big favour to mankind by killing a dangerous man - would you take the risk of an incorrigible mistake? I hope to remind everyone who does or does not take a chance of the fact that WE CAN'T BE INDIFFERENT - whatever we do or not do implicates (political) decisions. The confusion of identities of the two men also is a comment on the recent phenomena of extreme right-wing 'political activists' fishing for followers with the help of leftist symbols (or even arguments). Needless to remark that people sometimes drift from one end of the political spectrum to the other (and sometimes back again). On the social level, it's even more plain: We can't know ourselves, nor anybody else: would I shoot, am I sure which one is the nazi? I'm especially interested in the 'initiation moment' when people take a weapon: What does our collective subconscious say (Winnenden / 9-11 / Columbine...)? Is running amok already the last way of re-conquering public space (also in a figurative sense (broadcast slots...))? Of course, I don't mean to encourage people to take it back this way, rather I hope to start them thinking: "How else could it be done?"

techniques / Shift of identity in the participant - from a normal person to someone committing a political murder.

tools: Two identic cardboard-men, one with the head of Host Wessel, one with the head of Karl Liebknecht. Various weapons (including a tennis ball, rotten apples, a cobblestone, a wooden sword, and more).

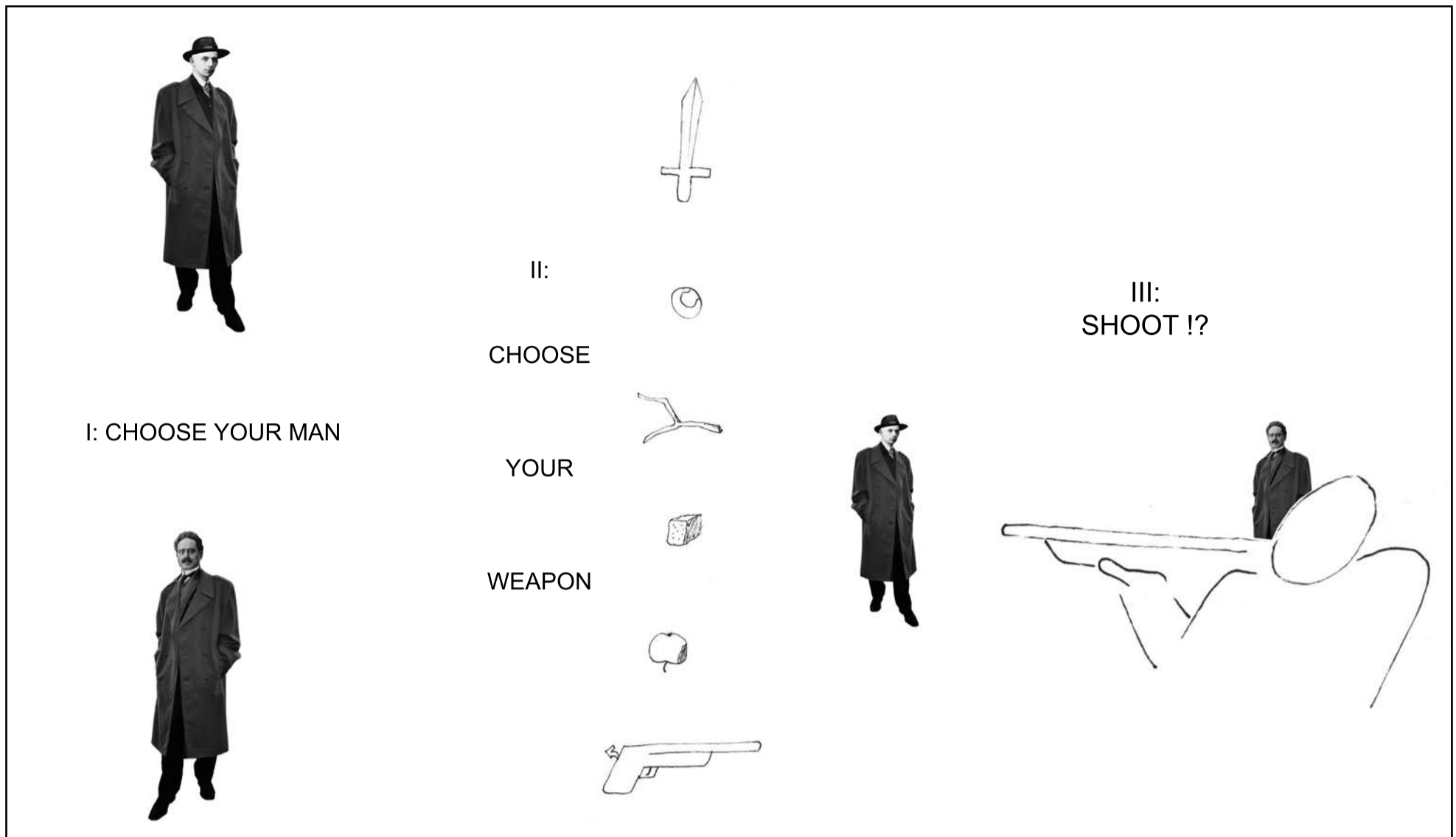
action: The cardboard-men are installed 10m away from the arsenal. Passersby are invited to shoot one of the two, so that he finally is really and forever: dead. Before shooting, they have to indicate which of the two they intend to shoot. They will be told only afterwards whether their assumption was correct.

actual outcome:

Drawing attention to the installation was, surprisingly, easier than anticipated: several visitors took interest in the two cardboard men without my assistance. The next step, however, was complicated. I'm not yet figured out whether my instructions were too exact, or too violent, or simply boring: Some of the visitors were reluctant to take action and attack one of the figures, and chose to either follow their own inspiration (like the dutchman who attached a strawberry to both figures) or simply had me take a photo of them with one of the figures. Which, to me, didn't spoil the intervention, but I should have been prepared for that case, or should have let more space/flexibility for such things to happen in the first place. I think the most important criteria to evaluate the action is: Did I really manage to provoke the visitors to think, did they have the same connotations, or did, in my case, the two cardboard men make them think of McDonalds? Unfortunately, that question is hard to answer, unless you'd ask people right after they took part in your installation...

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sketch: Not much explanation necessary, I guess.

Source: Own diagram



Image: Triangle-formed lawn in front of the Volksbühne, on Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz, Berlin.

Source: Own photo, small aerial image: virtual earth.

bibliography:

The idea for the intervention came up when I was lying in bed and couldn't sleep. I had been thinking about Rosa Luxemburg and her assassination. Before that I had been reading Hannah Arendt ("Vita activa") and kafkaesk short stories by Erich Fried, which might (or might not) have had some influence on the idea - who knows?