

Tensta Konsthall

Reverberation: A film portrait of Megafonen

By Behzad Khosravi Noori and René León Rosales

Tensta konsthall 13.6–29.9 2013

In the 30 minute long documentary **Reverberation** (2012), the artist Behzad Khosravi Noori (Teheran/Stockholm) and the ethnologist René León Rosales (Stockholm) follow some of the members of Megafonen on a trip to Gothenburg. Megafonen is an organization that works for social justice and the rehabilitation of the Swedish suburbs. During the trip many questions are asked regarding the processes of segregation and integration in Sweden today. Among others **Megafonen** met Bobby Seale, one of the founders of **The Black Panther Party for Self Defense** in the US. Will the much younger people of Megafonen be able to identify with the struggle that, for example, the black panthers lead in the US in the 60's and 70's?

Megafonen and **Pantrarna** for the rehabilitation of the suburb (Gothenburg) are examples of a new type of movement that have emerged in socioeconomically deprived urban areas in Sweden, as well as elsewhere in the world. The two organizations consist of, and are led by, young people born and raised in Sweden with a background in non-European countries. Megafonen was founded in

2008 in Husby by Basar Gerecci and Rami Al-Khamisi and since 2010 it is active in several suburbs in Stockholm, namely in Rinkeby and Alby.

René León Rosales has previously undertaken research in young people growing up in stigmatized areas in large cities. In this work, he looked at structural racism, segregation and discrimination in Sweden. Behzad Khosravi Noori works with representation and identification in different ways. He approaches the question of how an outsider's gaze affects those who are being examined and identified as "the other".

Reverberation was born out of a curiosity for a type of activism that is part of a larger context and a general trend in other parts of Europe and the world. The members of **Megafonen** are often well-read, politically conscious and are looking for concrete solutions to the problems they are experiencing. The group pinpoints a widespread malaise in society and together they create places to meet to influence the situation. The main question of the film is what this type of movement can tell us about our society today.

Saturday 15.6, 14:00 Behzad Khosravi

Noori and René León Rosales will have a discussion with members of Megafonen about how they are represented in the media and other arenas.

Thursday 20.6, 14:00 Behzad Khosravi Noori will introduce **Reverberation**.

Saturday 29.6, 14:00 Behzad Khosravi Noori and René León Rosales will introduce **Reverberation**.

Saturday 17.8, 14:00 Behzad Khosravi Noori will introduce **Reverberation**.

Saturday 31.8, 14:00 Behzad Khosravi Noori and René León Rosales will introduce **Reverberation**.

Self-presentation

Behzad Khosravi Noori is an artist and researcher graduated from Tarbiat Modares university in Tehran in master of motion picture. Since then he has been involved in research and teaching in theory of art in art schools in Tehran. In 2011 he achieved his second master in Art in Public Realm at Konstfack, with the focus of multiple identities within the notion of the political and polemics of

Asrin Haidari in conversation with Behzad Khosravi Noori, René León Rosales

Asrin Haidari: Reverberation was recorded in May 2012. How did you decide to make a film about **Megafonen's** trip to Gothenburg?

René León Rosales: As an ethnologist, I felt that I wanted to look into how Megafonen organizes themselves to change their own, and others', living conditions in the suburb. I met Behzad at **Mångkulturellt Centrum** (the Multicultural Center) in Botkyrka, where we both worked at the time, and we started to talk about this movement and decided to look closer into it. I had contact with a few members from **Megafonen** and heard they were going on a trip to Gothenburg to listen to Bobby Seale from the Black Panthers. I got intrigued by this kids that interest in hearing him talk.

Behzad Khosravi Noori: I went in to this project with an artistic approach that is connected with my personal story.

multiculturalism and hyper politicized socio environments. His prior research projects concludes the representations of middle east and people from middle east in SVT since 1976 when Sweden started to practice multiculturalism.

René León Rosales is a Ph.D. in ethnology. He works as a researcher and is in charge of the education at the Multicultural Centre in Botkyrka. In the thesis **Vid framtidens hitersta gräns** - about masculine pupil positions in a multi-ethnic school (2010), he analyzes the impact of economic and ethnic segregation, school policies and masculine ideals on boys' identities as pupils in a multiethnic school located in the northern part of the municipality Botkyrka. Current research interests include how local organizations can develop their work against racism and discrimination, and the emergence and politicization of the youth movements in socioeconomically disadvantaged neighborhoods.

Megafonen is one of these organizations.

I was born in 1976 in Iran, a couple of years before the revolution. After the revolution, when everything was in chaos, my family decided to go to Sweden. My father couldn't continue his job so he sold everything and got a passport to go to Sweden. He fixed everything for us so we could come later. Two days prior to his departure, the war started and the border was closed. So I grew up, studied, and worked in Tehran. When I first came to Sweden a couple of years ago I didn't even think about this connection. It hit me later that if my father had come here, I probably would have been one of the guys in the suburbs. That fictional layer made me wonder who could've been in another environment? We followed Pantrarna and Megafonen because we saw an interesting connection to The Black Panthers in USA in the 1960s. The Swedish society officially practices multiculturalism, a utopia that seems to have become dystopia. How did this happen?

AH: A member of **Megafonen** says in the film that problems are constantly shoved under the carpet here. That this is a big challenge in itself, to get people to

recognize there is a problem to deal with. What's your relation to the Swedish self-image as a prosperous democracy and an equal society?

RLR: I grew up in Västerås were I came as a 15-year old in the 1980s. My experience when I grew up is influenced by what happened in Sweden at that time with the first wave of Nazi skinheads, the **Laser man**, refugee camps burning down, a gay hockey player was murdered and the populist right wing party **Ny Demokrati** was in the parliament. I never had the image of Sweden as an ideal country and I get surprised when others have that. What's happening now, with the riots et c, is nothing new to me. It's part of a long history of injustice that many of us tried to organize against. That's also one of the reasons I'm a researcher today. When I looked at the research I got some of the answers and explanations to everything I felt and had been thorough. I understood that people were treating me in a certain way because of power structures. Our parents and their generation had an idealized view of Sweden. They saw and accepted the picture of "the good Sweden" with Olof Palme and Social

power is concentrated. They go towards the center and then come back. They produce this idea about agonism like the political philosopher **Chantal Mouffe** describes the friendly minded opponent that debate and clinch with its counterpart without agreement or total enmity. This is something that is often theorized but **Megafonen** practices this in society. This is really interesting. They know that they need new strategies but at the same time they need to learn from different resistance movements in history. And that is exactly what they did.

RLR: **Megafonen**, and groups similar to them, work more like networks than centralized organizations with public figures or heroes. They work more organically. **Megafonen** is very important—they really show that the cliché about youths in the suburbs as passive people that only speak with their fists is not true. One of the central figures in **Megafonen** told me that he has studied for many years and he was wondering what people use their knowledge from the university for. Where is the decisiveness?

democrats, a picture that Sweden worked hard to cultivate to get good relations.

AH: **Megafonen** and **Pantrarna** are a part of a history of grassroots movements. A young woman from **Pantrarna** says in a speech in **Reverberation** that they don't need to claim themselves to the inner city or the wealthy. It's more important to mobilize in the suburbs so they can take the fight on their own terms, she says.

BKN: Who's the victim is different, depending on time and place. Now it's the cars in the suburbs of Stockholm that are the victims. We can definitely see a white gaze and attitude toward the events. To be allowed and to be included in to the white nation you have to critique the nation according to a mediated narration. For example, you have to criticize the dystopian country you originally come from to get access to white society.

If we look at **Megafonen** in this sense they are a part of a history of grassroots movements in Sweden. The social democrats came up like that, for example. The difference is that **Megafonen** acts transversally. They cross the way between the suburbs and the center where the

AH: How is it working to work together with different procedures—as an ethnologist and an artist? What different functions do you have?

RLR: **Behzad** is the gas in a car and I'm the brake. This whole process has been a journey in itself for me since I'm not an artist and **Behzad** is. Sometimes I didn't realize what he was talking about or how he was thinking, but I realized that art really has something to say about what's happening in society. It's a powerful medium. And there is an interesting tension between research and art. The researcher tries to explain the links, show the bigger structures and consequences and to prove something, while the artist's work is more complex and tries to show the different layers that exist. This tension and how these worlds can speak together, interests me a lot.

AH: I would like to know more about how you think about the distinction between the journalistic narration and the artistic. Since the beginning of the 1990s it is common that artists use journalistic tools. This progress has evolved at the

same time as the media logic has become more limited. What gap can the art fill?

BKN: Rene explains how you within academia try to prove something, and the journalist works in a similar way. Art doesn't have that approach, and I try to create a story with several layers. The media logic, or the narration of journalism, tries to, in a simplified way, make you visualize what you read and wants to prove something through producing images of the hegemonic order. I googled "Husby" and "riot" in relation to the events there, and 80% of the pictures contained burning cars. As an artist you can either show the images that follow the order or brake it. I think that abstraction maybe can be a part of an political resistance when it comes to the representations of "the others".

AH: In **Reverberation** we can see an additional camera —did **Megafonen** record their own film at the same time?

RLR: Ethnology and the academia are behind regarding technology—it's not until recently that we started experimenting with how technology can

AH: How is **Megafonen's** approach interesting?

BKN: It is important to remember that **Megafonen** doesn't say that the suburb only contains problems. But they are not romanticizing the suburb either. Maybe because they embraced the post-colonial idea about the Orientalist picture of the suburb as exotic and genuinely different as not true.

RLR: They are really aware of what's central in social movements and that is to gain control and power of the knowledge production. Through that they can create new stories and identities, and a different way to view the world.

be used. I started to think a lot about what is going to happen if you take in a camera in the process, what effect it's going to have on the results. Is text really the only way to present your research though? There is an intimate relation between text and authority in our society. Young people today, that are affected, and that the research directly is about, are interested and need to take part of the results. As researchers maybe we have a responsibility to try to communicate our research in different ways. One of the cameras we used for that purpose—that's the camera in the picture.

BKN: The film is a cooperation. It was easier for Rami to interview the others in **Megafonen**. During a group interview we just put the camera on the table, and it became a natural part of the conversation. Rene and I were the ones that edited it in the end, and that's why we put our names on the film. During the process we had a discussion with **Megafonen**. It was an agreement from the beginning that we weren't going to show the film without them seeing it first.

Asrin Haidari is an freelance writer, educated at Kulturvetarlinjen at Stockholm University and a contributor at Tensta konsthall