

DIARY FROM A REFUGEE SHIP AT DOCUMENTA14 IN KASSEL

By Ilya Bernstein

Day two

I slept in the van on a mattress laid across the back three seats, covering the buckles, I didn't realize I'd been comfortable until I woke up to Karsten stepping in the next day asking me for the key. We left for the supermarket to buy groceries for the trip. The most impressive thing I saw was a liter of can of beer for 10 kroner. We headed back with our bags full of supplies to make breakfast and start unloading the trailer I was supposed to be looking after. We began assembling the different components to create the ship's visual we'd travelled here for people to see. Copper refugees in tattered clothing lining the ship's deck, an image of Europe's imminent future normally intercepted by the various institutions designed to systemize the people travelling here by whatever they can float on.

We started carrying their forms down a narrow staircase leading towards the dock, more than once the wind from the river's small current caught the sculpture's clothing, bluffing it like a sail over our field of vision. I never felt completely like I wouldn't collapse on top of one of them, but we managed it without incident. The day moved fast despite the slow process we'd chosen to fill it, setting them up across and around the ship's deck facing outward. We rearranged them multiple times, to honor the reality of the disorganization inherent to the problem, at first they were lined up like they were looking off the side of a cruise liner casting off.

Once we'd set up the installation we were ready to sail. The ship's captain came to help our skipper learn the mechanics; we sailed down the Fulda River, pulling the people of Kassel to the edges of its banks and bridges to witness our virgin voyage. The image was powerful and seemed effective, fixing the time around it to a slow crawl as it chugged through the water. We turned around a few times as the old boat needs to be parallel parked at the dock, if it comes in at the wrong angle the only thing to do is pull out and back it in straight. We were confident in our purpose; however we faced certain limitations created by the boat's mechanics and dependency on its environment.

Me and Wendy helped Aske make a dinner of spaghetti bolognese with a vegetable curry side, we ate it and talked about tomorrow. Apparently our presence had made a stink with some of the higher-ups responsible for documenta's organization. We hoped to sail back and forth across the river, holding press conferences and general walk-ons to make our presence felt even more the following day.