

Trauma 1 - 11

**Stories about
the Copenhagen Free University
and the surrounding society
in the last ten years**

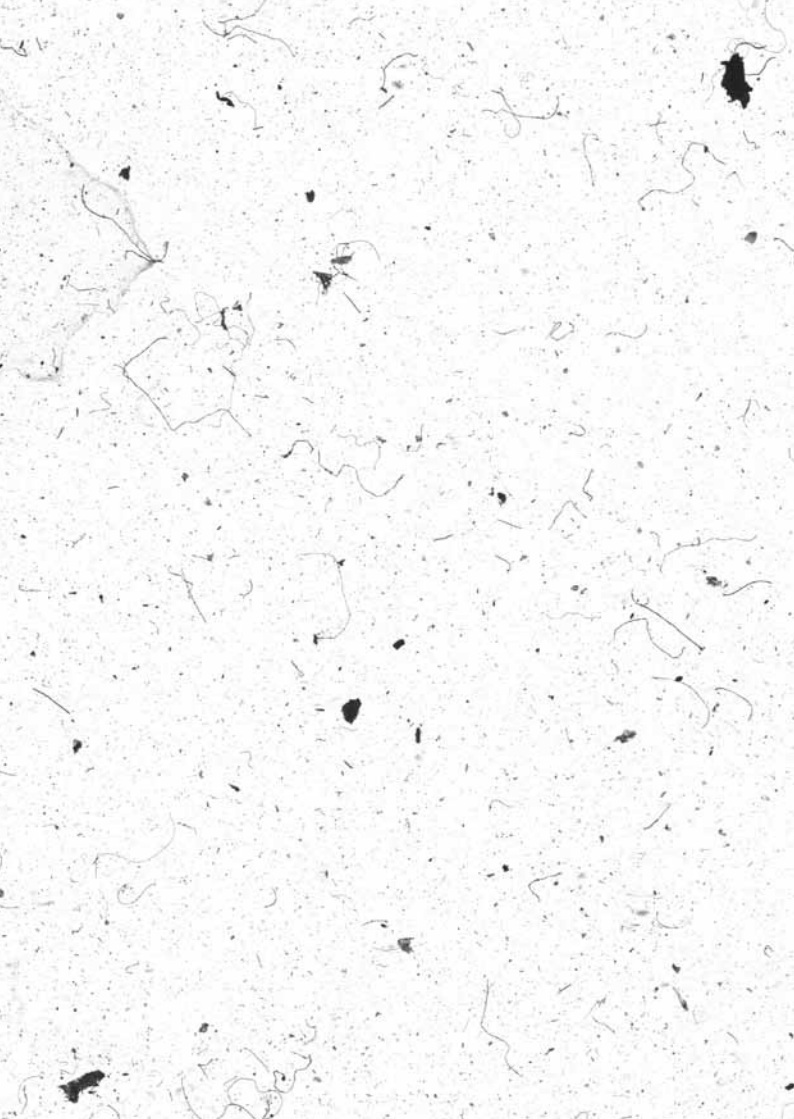
**Museum of Contemporary Art
18 June - 11 September 2011**

Museum of Contemporary Art

Det kgl. Palæ
Stændertorvet 3A
DK-4000 Roskilde
Denmark

T: +45 46316570
info@samtidskunst.dk
www.samtidskunst.dk

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The Copenhagen Free University

The Copenhagen Free University was a self-organised university taking place in a private apartment in Nørrebro, Copenhagen, where the visual artists Henriette Heise and Jakob Jakobsen were living at the time. In 2001 they opened their door and announced that their home was a free university. Over the next few years the apartment became a meeting place for artistic and activist research involving both Danish and foreign artists, intellectuals and other ordinary and extraordinary people.

University of the Everyday

The Copenhagen Free University was in many ways a university of the everyday that tried to combine daily life and research in an entirely practical way. The apartment in Nørrebro linked the disorder and irregularity of everyday life with research and the production of knowledge. The research was developed as collective processes, since the artists behind the Copenhagen Free University thought that knowledge is fundamentally a collective social production. At the Copenhagen Free University there were no laboratories and auditoria, which function at ordinary universities by virtue of their isolation from the ordinary world. Here, on the other hand, you could find all the rooms typical of a home where people live. The living room was used for presentations and film screenings. The workroom became a library and archive. The kitchen was a canteen and meeting room. The flat was also the setting for the many foreign guests who stayed at the Copenhagen Free University over the years.

Research

Between 2001 and 2007 a number of research projects were developed in the areas of culture and economics, feminist organisation, media activism, refugee subjectivity, and finally research on art and cultural history. The research took the form of collective processes that started with open invitations to everyone to participate and to share knowledge in the field in question. Since the Copenhagen Free University had no illusions that knowledge is neutral and value-free, the approach to the subjects was necessarily politicised and often polemical.

Closure and Illegalisation


In 2007 Henriette Heise and Jakob Jakobsen decided to close the Copenhagen Free University. The conclusion of the project was manifested with the declaration 'We have Won'. But in December 2010 the Copenhagen Free University received a letter from the Danish 'Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation', explaining that a new law had been passed protecting the term 'university'. The Copenhagen Free University would thus now be illegal if its activities were resumed. Under the heading 'Helge Sander [then Minister of Science] takes up the struggle against fake universities', the possibilities of creating free, self-organised universities was precluded. The civil servants of the Ministry of Science explained over the phone that with the new laws they wanted to prevent 'the students being disappointed'.

Free Universities

The idea of the free university is not a new idea. The first free universities arose in the USA in the middle of the 1960s as a part of the Free Speech Movement with Berkeley Free University as one of the first self-organised initiatives. Successors quickly arose in other places: the Free University of New York and the London Anti-University, which combined the demand for freedom of expression and self-determination with beat poetry, counter-culture and anti-psychiatry. The New Experimental College in Thy, Jutland, was also a part of this movement. The first wave of free universities ebbed out at the beginning of the 1970s. A new wave arose around 2000 with 'do-it-yourself' thinking as the point of departure. A whole succession of self-organised universities grew up around the world with the Copenhagen Free University as one of the first.

The Knowledge Economy

With the opening of the Copenhagen Free University, Heise and Jakobsen asked certain fundamental questions about how a university functions in society, and what a university could be. It was their view that at the end of the 1990s the universities had begun to assume a new role in the 'knowledge economy'. The new influence of political and economic interests on the way the universities worked in society was the object of widespread discussion and criticism around the world. It was viewed as a limitation of the autonomy of research and knowledge-sharing. And this was how it was viewed at the Copenhagen Free University too. With the establishment of the Copenhagen Free Uni-



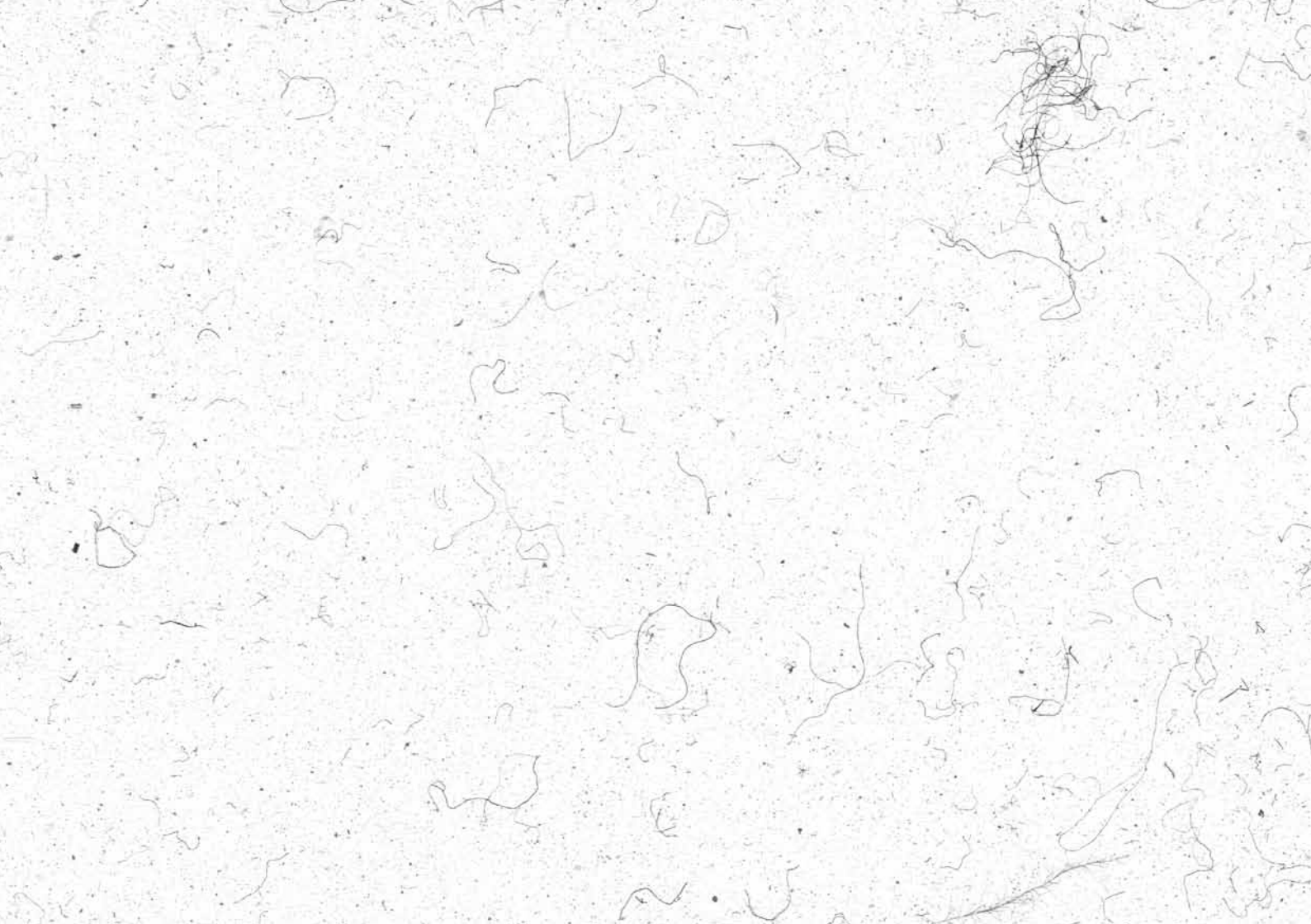
versity a space was created that attempted to sustain the idea of free and experimental research and knowledge production. The project aligned itself with earlier avant-garde strategies in the twentieth century that endeavoured to link art and life in a non-specialised, emancipatory universe.

The Copenhagen Free University as a Vision

The Copenhagen Free University was an artist-run university. The Copenhagen Free University was a utopian idea of other forms of knowledge and other ways of being together. The project can perhaps best be regarded as an idea of a different society. With its unorthodox way of working it helped to break down fixed ideas about how society's institutions should function. The university's mission statement said that the project was dedicated to the development of poetic language and critical consciousness. The Copenhagen Free University thus combined aesthetics with politics.

Contemporary History

Trauma 1-11: Stories about the Copenhagen Free University and the surrounding society in the last ten years is the artists' attempt to present history in an experimental way. It is history as seen through the eyes of the artists and expressed through artistic production. In collaboration with their colleagues Emma Hedditch, Howard Slater and Anthony Davies, Henriette Heise and Jakob Jakobsen have developed a script which is presented as a kind of audio play in the exhibition. The script tells the story of a personal journey through the past ten years. The five have collaborated very closely since the end of the 1990s.



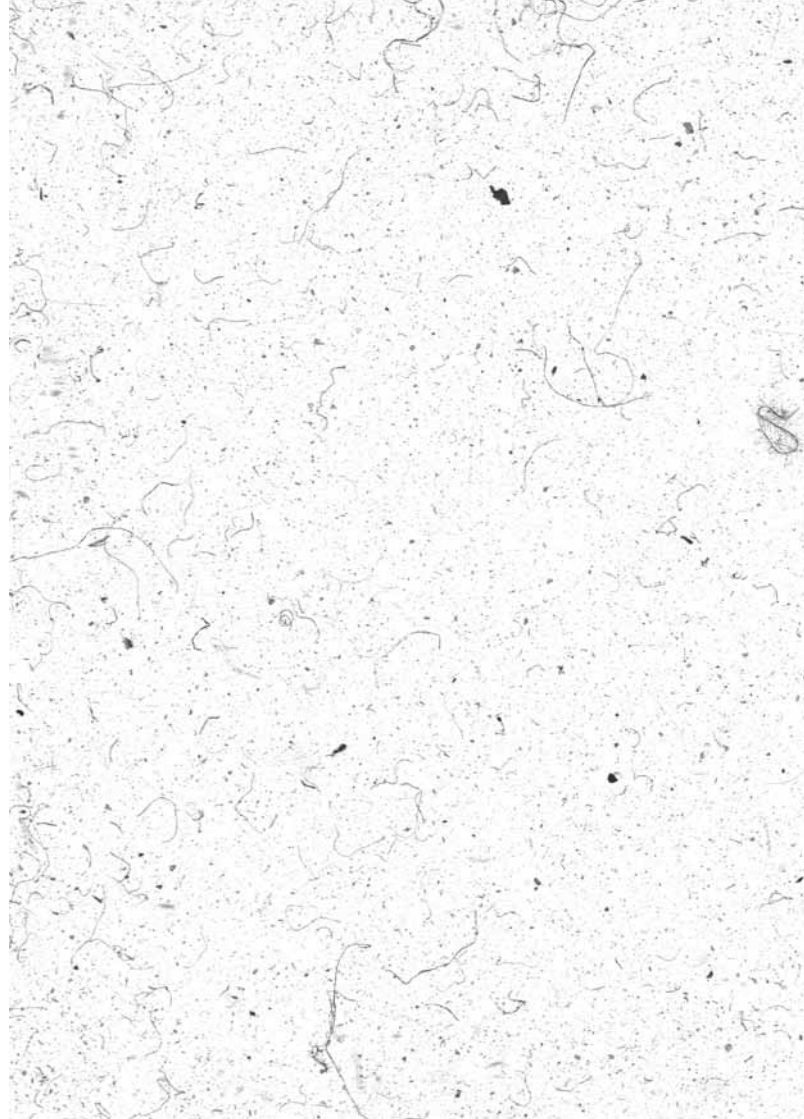
Their discussion-based friendship in many ways laid the foundations for the establishment of the Copenhagen Free University, although Emma Hedditch, Howard Slater and Anthony Davies do not live in Copenhagen.

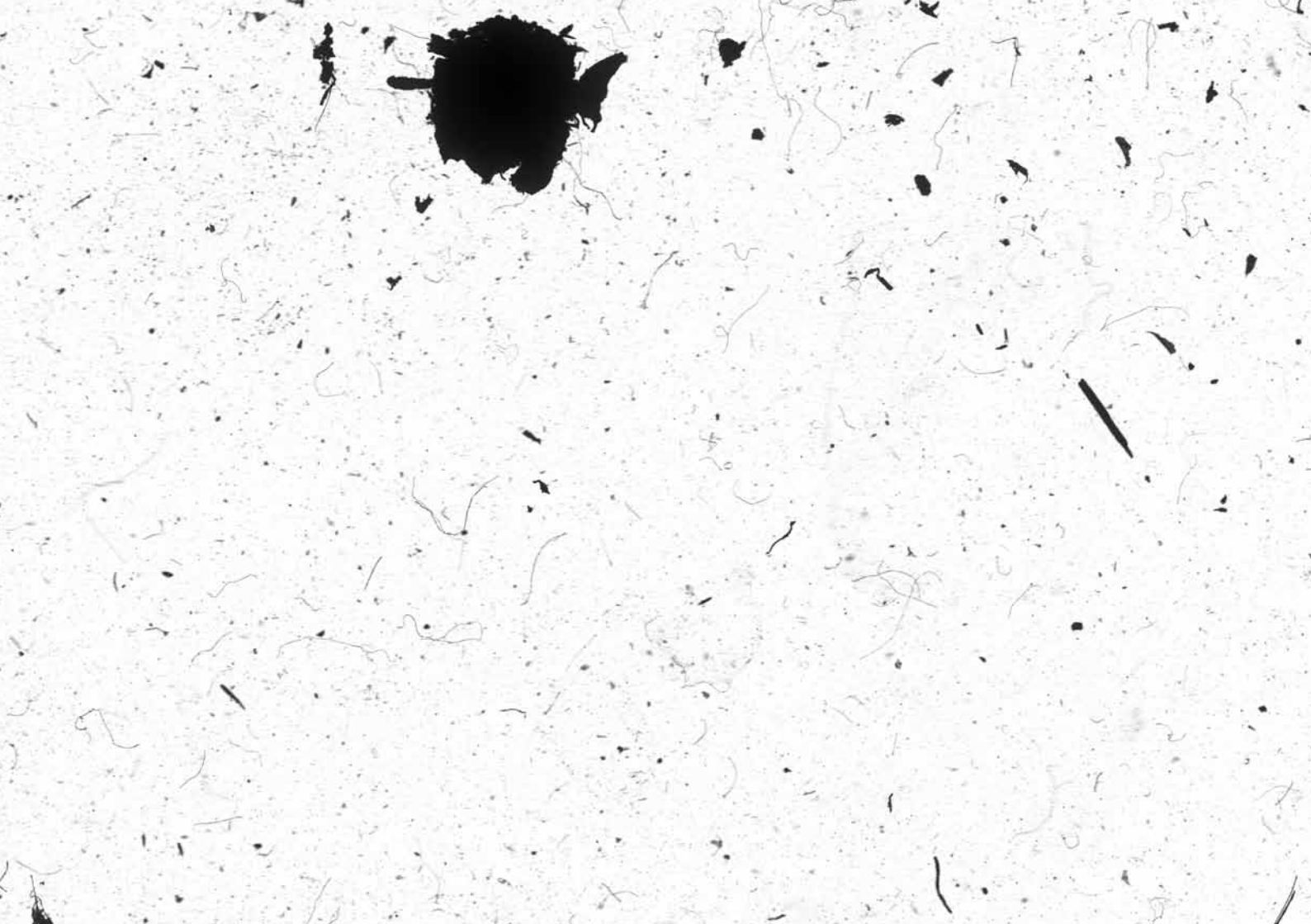
No Representation

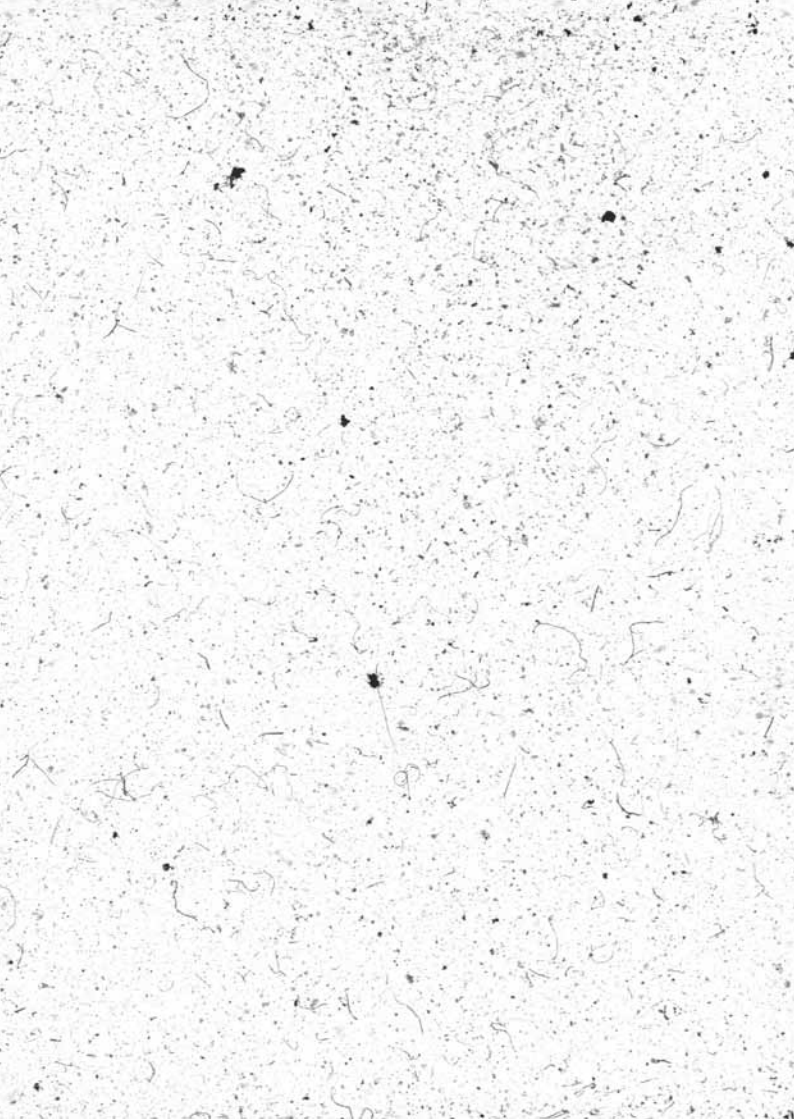
The Copenhagen Free University was often invited to present the institution and its work at international museums and exhibition venues. However, at the Copenhagen Free University they did not believe that the activities could be transferred directly to the institutional space. This was due to the fact that the activities were based on a connection between the domestic situation and the people who contributed to the university. For the same reason the Copenhagen Free University only to a limited extent documented the activities at the university with photographs and video. It was thought that the documentary gaze shifted attention away from the main activity of knowledge sharing in an everyday space.

Propaganda

The Copenhagen Free University therefore developed what it called propaganda for the exhibitions. The propaganda consisted of slide shows, posters, billboards, videos and sound pieces, all of which were presented as installations. The propaganda works represented the ideas surrounding the Copenhagen Free University in a polemic, agit-prop-like way that was inspired by earlier revolutionary art movements such as Constructivism and the Situationist International. The propaganda works were presented at







museums and exhibition spaces all over the world, including San Francisco, Seoul, Moscow, London, Milan, Vienna and Hamburg.

The Exhibition

It is this archive of propaganda works that forms the raw material for the new staging at the Museum of Contemporary Art. The exhibition will not represent the Copenhagen Free University in terms of conventional art or cultural history, where one would try to create a clear picture of the activities in the apartment in Nørrebro. The propaganda works will function as indicators of the intentions of the Copenhagen Free University in the period 2001-2007 in an interaction with the narrative, which will re-actualise the ideas in the present.

The Script

In connection with the creation of the script the five artists have gone back through their own social history and created connecting lines between personal experiences and more general historical events in the period 2001-2011. Here their collaboration and their ideological and artistic conflicts are described in relation to the work around the Copenhagen Free University. The conflicts are viewed in the context of larger events such as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the various financial crises. The script was created in an experimental process involving the five artists. The development of the script was based on a number of meetings. Each of the artists has testified to how he or she has personally experienced the past ten years as

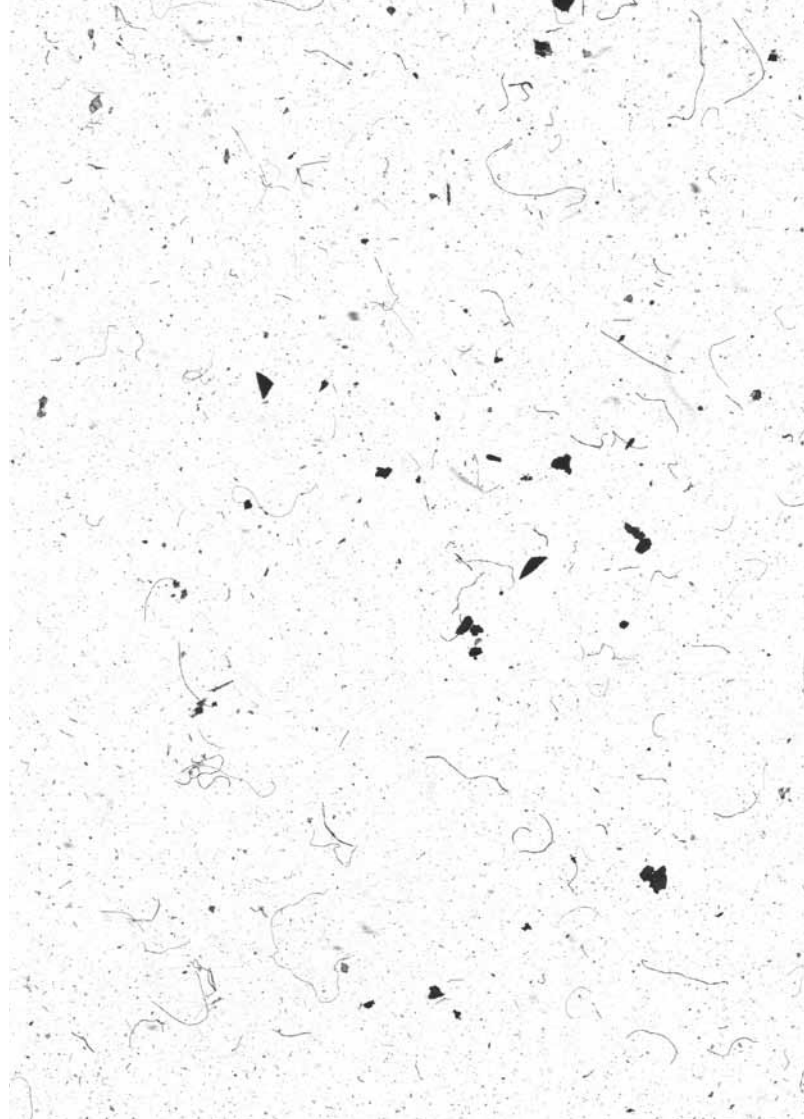
viewed from a present-day perspective. As in psychoanalytic treatment, the verbalisation of trauma is viewed as a form of forward-looking treatment which opens up paths for new possible actions and perspectives.

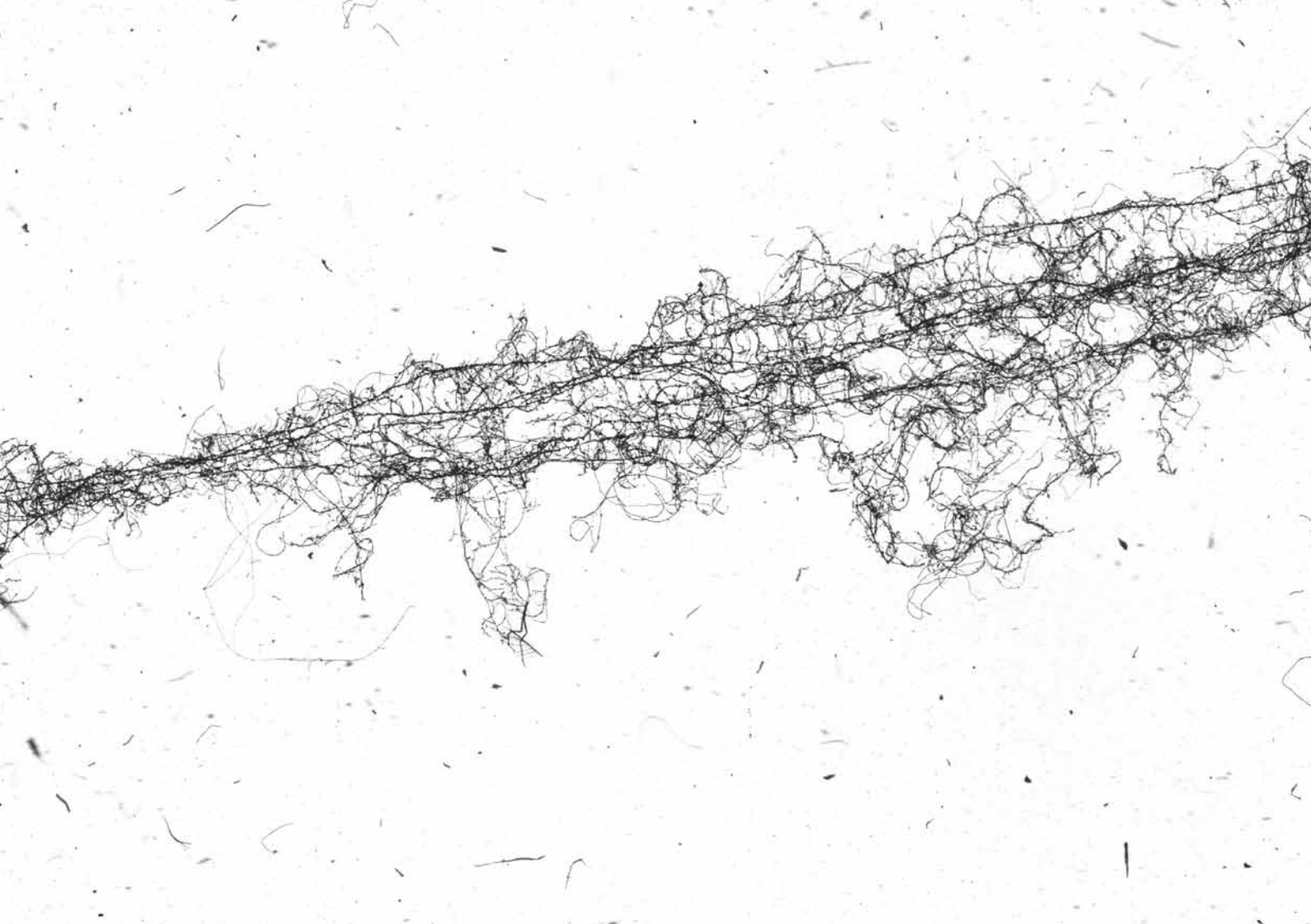
Trauma and History

The narrative starts in 2001, which was the year of the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, as well as the year of the Danish change of government. And it was also the year when the Copenhagen Free University was founded in Nørrebro. Traditionally history is an account of a succession of great achievements and victories. In connection with the exhibition *Trauma 1-11*, however, history is an account based on a succession of losses and defeats in the struggles that have typified the decade from the artists' point of view. In this sense the narrative is an anti-history based on traumas, falls and struggles rather than a history characterised by great conquests.

An Artistic and Political Imagination

Trauma 1-11 can as a whole be seen as a personal re-working of the past, its events and its objects. In the juxtaposition of propaganda works that represent the past and the interpretation of the past in the script, the exhibition presents a reflection on history in which a language is developed. Through this collaboration the artists hope to create a basis for a new artistic and political imagination.





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Stories about the Copenhagen Free University and the surrounding society in the last ten years

Script: Henriette Heise, Emma Hedditch, Howard Slater, Anthony Davies and Jakob Jakobsen

Exhibition design: Henriette Heise, Emma Hedditch and Jakob Jakobsen

Propaganda works 2001- 2007: Henriette Heise and Jakob Jakobsen

Programming: Raphael Solholm

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Trauma 1-11 is an exhibition based on the Copenhagen Free University, a self-organised institution that was established by artists Henriette Heise and Jakob Jakobsen in 2001. This exhibition is made in collaboration with Emma Hedditch, Howard Slater and Anthony Davies who have close links to the Copenhagen Free University. *Trauma 1-11* will be a personal journey through the period 2001 to 2011. It will be a staged interpretation of events in and around the Copenhagen Free University in a dramatised sequence of acts.

The Copenhagen Free University unfolded as a space for research and knowledge sharing within the domestic settings in a small flat in Copenhagen. The institution was dedicated to the production of 'critical consciousness and poetic language' until 2007 where it ceased its activities. In 2010 the Heise and Jakobsen received a letter from the Ministry of Science noting them that if they ever wanted to conduct educational activities under name the Copenhagen Free University it would be breach a new law outlawing self-organised universities. This new law will in August be challenged with the opening of a new free university in a flat or in a park or in a square.