



AKSIOMA
Institute for Contemporary Art
Ljubljana

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Ljubljana, 13 August 2012

PRESS RELEASE

Aksioma – Institute for Contemporary Art, Ljubljana, in collaboration with Bunker Institute and Glej Theater, presents:

Reverend Billy & Savitri D

Screening, workshop, sermon and public intervention

www.aksioma.org/reverend_billy

in frame of the **Mladi levi Festival**

www.bunker.si



Images available for free download:

<http://www.aksioma.org/press/reverend.billy.zip>



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PROGRAMME:

Screening: *What Would Jesus Buy?* (2007).

[Stara mestna elektrarna](#) – Elektro Ljubljana, Slomškova 18

8 August 2012 at 9 pm

Free entrance!

Workshop

[Glej Theatre](#), Gregorčičeva 3, Ljubljana

21 August 2012, 5pm – 8pm

22 August 2012, 5pm – 8pm

23 August 2012, 4pm – 7pm

24 August 2012, 4pm – 7pm

Participation is free. Applications and additional information: samo.selimovic@bunker.si

Public intervention

24 August 2012. The exact hour and location will be revealed just before the beginning of the action.

More information will be posted on our [Facebook](#) and [Web page](#)

Sermon:

Glej Theatre, Gregorčičeva 3, Ljubljana

Friday, 24 August at 7.30 pm

Ticket reservation: +386 51 269 609 or info@bunker.si

Related event:

Bani Brusadin (Festival The Influencers, Barcelona)

Lecture: *Communication Guerrilla Revisited*

<http://www.aksioma.org/bani>

Aksioma | Project Space

Komenskega 18, Ljubljana

Thursday, 23 August 2012 at 7pm

Free entrance!



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Reverend Billy & Savitri D

www.aksioma.org/reverend_billy

Performance:

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“Why do I shout? Why do I preach? Because I think I hear something. As you listen to me, I hear a shout in you. Oh, let me preach. Let’s stand up! Let’s shout like we do when we are loving, like we do at a peace rally, like we shout in a church when the spirit tells us to give it up. Amen? We’re safe from shopping now. How quickly our shouting becomes a kind of singing that gives the product nothing to say!”

Reverend Billy was born in the late 90s on a sidewalk in New York’s Time Square out of an impelling need to speak up against consumerist frenzy and the dysfunctional, sad and inhumane society that was growing around it. A waiter’s white jacket, a cardboard collar and a bleached, Elvis-like hairdo were enough for actor and playwright Bill Talen to give life to the street-corner persona called Reverend Billy.

He then became a visionary, a solo pseudo-evangelist who passionately urged people to stay away from “consumer narcosis” and “affluenza”, warning against the “shopocalypse”, the vast collective drift towards personal anxiety, worker exploitation, environmental collapse and the destruction on a human-scale of the social fabric.

Soon, what might have looked like yet another end-of-the-century eccentricity started revealing itself for what it really was: a crazy adventure into the sacred space of shopping and a contagious call to action. Reverend Billy was then joined by other activists, and together, they mutated the preacher’s antics into a virus aimed at collapsing the fake allure of brands. Malls and franchise stores were turned into an invisible, undeclared stage for a “fictional” folk hero to engage a fight with a bigger consensual fiction, the credit-card reality of the incessant economic growth. It was the turn of the millennium and *The Church of Stop Shopping* was born.

By the time director Savitri D joined the *Church*, the mainstream and commercial media were already starting to pay attention to Rev. Billy, probably in consideration of the wave of creative activism that was fueling resistance to top-down globalization all over the world. At that point, the Reverend could have started a successful parody-based career, but that never happened.

Reality was getting more and more compelling: the September 11 attacks on the US, the growing delocalization of production and the implosion of the national economy in the early 2000s, the collapse of credit and financial markets, the unrestricted exploitation of the environment and the ever-growing evidence of a global climate change. “Lift your hand from the product,” as Rev. Billy used to chant in his sermons, was not an imploration anymore, but a fact.

While Reverend Billy was entering the mass media stage through, astonishingly, the unlikely doors of Fox News, CNN Money and even right-wing talk shows, the *Church* – now called “*The Church of Life After Shopping*” – was starting to reach new corners of a country going through a deep crisis of self-confidence. Up till then, Reverend Billy had preached to the converted, gathering a family of fellow activists, genius part-time musicians, amateur choir singers and creative subversion lovers. But now, grassroots janitors’ unions, Christian groups, radical environmentalist bikers and even unemployed



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housewives were knocking at the door of the *Church*...or rather...filling Rev. Billy's email box.

From then on, a vertiginous new phase of the Reverend Billy Project started, beginning with 2007's *"What Would Jesus Buy"*, an internationally applauded movie produced by Morgan Spurlock and directed by Rob Van Alkemade, who told the story of the Church as a long, crazy road tour into the heart of disillusioned consumerist America. In 2009, Reverend Billy officially ran for mayor of New York, and though he was never a serious threat to the multi-millionaire candidate Michael Bloomberg, the campaign was no fiction and it actually lay the ground for new collaborations with NY State-based groups of citizens concerned with the collective issues of environmental exploitation and the banks' backing of unethical commercial activities.

In 2011, Billy, Savitri D and the *Church* whole-heartedly embraced the growing "Occupy" movement and have still not stopped continuing to organize, perform, teach, get people involved and produce their own media (such as the overwhelming videocast *"Reverend Billy's Freakstorm"*, whose installments are available on the [Church's website](#)), while at the same time opening up a dialogue about what the *Church* is doing and discussing it in public.

As Alisa Solomon wrote, *"Reverend Billy snatches pleasure from rampant consumerism – and indeed, recalls the loneliness and passivity one experiences when her life revolves around a series of advertisers-manipulated purchases – and reclaims it for the live, communal satisfactions of theater and action. This church's pious practice is not one of abstinence and self-abnegation, but of agency."*

Documentary: What Would Jesus Buy?

Stara mestna elektrarna – Elektro Ljubljana, Slomškova 18, Ljubljana
Wednesday, 8 August 2012 at 9 pm

An examination of the commercialization of Christmas in America while following Reverend Billy and the *Church of Stop Shopping* Gospel Choir on a cross-country mission to save Christmas from the Shopocalypse (the end of humankind from consumerism, over-consumption and the fires of eternal debt.) The film also delves into issues such as the role sweatshops play in America's mass consumerism and Big-Box Culture. From the humble beginnings of preaching at his portable pulpit on New York City *church*, but a national movement.

Workshop and Public intervention

Glej Theatre, Gregorčičeva 3, Ljubljana
21 and 22 August, from 5 pm – 8 pm / 23 and 24 August from 4 pm to 7 pm

The workshop is a four day long exploration of creative resistance with Reverend Billy & Savitri D. They will discuss their work and previous campaigns and then, with participants, develop an action around an issue chosen by the participants. A public performance of the action will be the final culmination of the workshop. People of all ages are invited to participate. For any additional information and to confirm your participation write to samo.selimovic@bunker.si.

Related event:

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Lecture: *Communication Guerrilla Revisited*

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Aksioma | Project Space, Komenskega 18, Ljubljana
Thursday, 23 August at 7 pm

Provoking ambiguity and confusion in collective imagination, communication guerrilla promotes a radical use of fiction which strains the mechanism of ideology and social control. But what happens to subversion of mass culture when it hits a networked society? Do impostors, heroes and trolls have anything at all to do with social change? How is pranksterism evolving in the era of cynicism, information overload and digital disorder? Inspired by the 10-years experience of the Barcelona-based "The Influencers" festival, *Communication Guerrilla Revisited* is an open conversation through images and real stories (believe it or not) presented by Bani Brusadin, researcher, activist and founder of The Influencers.

Production: Aksioma - Institute for Contemporary Art and Bunker Institute, Ljubljana, 2012

Coproduction: Glej Theatre

Executive Producers: Samo Selimović, Marcela Okretič

Thanks: Bani Brusadin and The Influencers festival

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