

**Commentary (1.1.4.):**

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### Verfremdungseffekt (1.1.4.1.)

“Brecht’s flexible realism is dialectical, in this radical, Marxist sense. The first test of dialectical realism is whether or not, in context, it produces this effect of de-reification or estrangement.”

(Gene Ray on the radical realism of Bertolt Brecht) <sup>1</sup>

‘De-reification’? In the dictionary ‘reify’ means to “make (something abstract) more concrete or real”. De-reification must be the opposite act: To make something real more abstract. Brecht’s own word ‘Verfremdung’ gives the same operation a kind of physical, experience-oriented aspect; to present the real as ‘fremd’, as strange, unfamiliar. The de-reifying or Verfremdung is to be experienced AND thought about. It is not only a metaphysical operation, but a metaphysical operation offered us in experience. On stage, in the theater. The de-reifying is performed to be experienced. Reality is shown to us as strange. Not in a psychedelic sense, as something extra-sensuous, but dissected into observable parts, as objectives to think about. Inherent in Verfremdung is a linking of experience and thought. By Verfremdung Brecht links the aesthetical experience with rational, materialist thinking. Verfremdung creates a double presence: We are in the experience AND in the thinking about it at the same time.

When I am using Verfremdung as a model for artistic research it is exactly this double I am interested in. Aesthetics dissected into objectives to think about. Inserting the figure of the artist/researcher into the performances is supposed to create the double presence. By having an intervening commentary running parallel to the aesthetic event we are constantly forced to evaluate our sensuous experience. Does it fit? Does this affect I am experiencing fit with what the artist/researcher postulates?

The flexible, experimental realism of Brecht is translated into a similar artistic research. Using a variety of tools to dissect the aesthetic elements of the 9 performances, comprising this thesis, the experiences are opened up to inspection. Each performance establishes an aesthetic reality and a set of distancing moments; a geometry of distances and objectives to be considered. This geometry or structure includes also the texts here - the script, the analysis and the commentary.

All performances, except this one, ‘A Short Course in Realism from the Perspective of the Police’, then again refers to an original event, also comprised of a sense-event and a level of discourse.<sup>2</sup> In their manifesto ‘The Coming Insurrection’ the french group of anonymous writers/activists The Invisible Comitee presents the double presence as ‘rage and politics’:

“All the incivilities of the streets should become methodical and systematic, converging in a diffuse, effective guerrilla war that restores us to our ungovernability, our primordial unruliness. It’s disconcerting to some that this same lack of discipline figures so prominently among the recognized military virtues of resistance fighters. In fact though, rage and politics should never have been separated. Without the first, the second is lost in discourse; without the second the first exhausts itself in howls.” <sup>3</sup>

Here too, the affect, the rage, is connected to a metaphysical layer, politics. Only when connected by being performed as one, the two elements make sense. Only

when being expressed as emotion - in the real, as gesture, as action - does politics make sense. Even here, in the common expression 'make sense', this dialectics between concept and action appear: A line of thought becomes real meaning when it makes sense, that is, when it is experienceable by the senses.<sup>4</sup>

This is the space I would like artistic research to convey: A nexus of ideas and actions to be experienced as an ensemble of performative gestures. A relational format opposed to the master narrative of the traditional academic dissertation.

### **Transcendence? Violence? The Aesthetics of Resistance (1.1.4.2.)**

”Highly controversial in their actions, the faceless saboteur elves of the infamous black bloc offered their actions of property destruction as a bit of transcendence.”<sup>5</sup>

The events, the writer Robert Herbst is here referring to, took place on November 30 in Seattle. As part of the protests of the Globalization Movements against WTO the Black Bloc attacked a series of shops, companies and other capitalist targets, smashing windows and ‘defacing’ facades. Herbst quotes a communiqué by the the ACME Collective, one of the groups in the Black Bloc, pointing to the ‘poetry of the action’; the poetry spring from the way ACME redefines the functionality of a range of objects, takes them out of their ordinary (capitalist) use and gives them new (revolutionary) functions. This is admittedly clear poetry, but what does he mean by ‘a bit of transcendence’? And why did I use this phrase as a main argument?

Reading the ACME Communiqué in full length<sup>6</sup> doesn’t give a real clue. Here the attacks by the Black Bloc has a double meaning: They are at the one hand real; real attacks on real capitalist businesses. On the another level they are a ‘shattering of assumptions’; an exorcizing of ‘that set of violent and destructive social relationships which has been imbued in almost everything around us’. This shattering and exorcizing of the capitalist spell is both real and symbolic, but the two levels are dependent on each other. The real action can only be justified because it has a symbolic meaning, and the symbolic meaning only has an effect when it is actualized by being performed in the real.<sup>7</sup> The shattering and exorcizing of meaning and the poetic re-claiming of functions are about recreating the world around us, reclaiming it. It is about creating another world, another society, not a transcendent world, but a very real, new reality. In the Communiqué it is manifested in very simple, basic ways; i.e. ‘a newspaper box becomes (..) an object to improve one's vantage point by standing on it’.

In ‘On the Phenomenology of Giant Puppets’ David Graeber also refers to the ACME Manifesto, describing the tactics of the Black Bloc and how destruction and violence is instrumentalised as a political attack on globalized capitalism, ‘demonstrating just how fragile it really is’.<sup>8</sup>

In the dictionary transcendence is defined as ‘beyond or above the range of normal or merely physical human experience’.<sup>9</sup> This is not what is going on here. The poetry of the Black Bloc is very physical, in its performance, but also in its aim. The way Herbst use the word transcendence or at least the way I understand it and re-use it, is in another, perhaps quite loose sense, as something that is out of the ordinary, out of the normal, out of the norm. In my version it points to the aesthetic rather than to the immaterial. The aesthetic being a world of the senses, still experienced in the physical, material field. In this performance, it is an attempt to describe the moment when the aesthetic experience takes over, when the viewer is overwhelmed by sensual experience. The moment when the performance destroys the meaning of the text – the police-manual – and it becomes sound, resonance and emotion. I call this this moment a ‘sense-event’.<sup>10</sup> This sense-event is admittely NOT ‘something beyond the physical human experience’, and the transcendence is too be understood differently.

In their text, '...As a Science of Apparatuses', the french philosophical collective 'Tiqqun' (named after the magazine they produced in two issues in 1999-2001), discusses the manner in which Western metaphysics predicates reality. How we tend to perceive the world only by identifying the things we already know what are. How language designates experience. How we only experience what we already know. And how these metaphysics has has been developed by Empire into enormous control apparatuses, covering the entire globe.<sup>11</sup> If the 'range of normal or merely physical human experience' as mentioned in the dictionary definition of transcendence above, has degenerated into the oppressive metaphysics of Empire – where experience is limited to a normalized set of identifications, defined by language – then transcendence from this range of normalized experience becomes revolutionary aesthetics. As Tiqqun writes:

“It is striking to see, year in, year out, how beings increasingly slip between their predicates, between the identities that THEY give them. (...) Everything becomes indistinguishable. THEY find it increasingly difficult to make "an intellectual" of those who think, "a wage-earner" of those who work, "a murderer" of those who kill, "an activist" of those who engage in activism. Formalized language, the arithmetic of the norm, has no hold on substantial distinction. Bodies no longer allow themselves to be reduced to the qualities that THEY intended to assign to them. Bodies refuse to incorporate them. They silently slip away. Recognition, which first designates a certain distance between bodies, is overrun at every point. It can no longer account for what is really happening between bodies. Thus the need for apparatuses, more and more apparatuses: in order to stabilize the relationship between predicates and "subjects" that stubbornly elude them; to thwart the diffuse creation of complex, asymmetric, perverse relationships with those predicates; to produce information, to produce the real as information.”<sup>12</sup>

It is as this 'slipping away' 'a bit of transcendence' must be understood. An aesthetic transcendence. The poetic re-claiming of functions are recreating the world around us, making it accessible for direct experience. This is the aesthetics of resistance.

### Resonance (1.1.4.3.)

"Power centers obviously involve rigid segments. Each molar segment has one or more centers. It might be objected that the segments themselves presuppose a power center, as what distinguishes and unites them, sets them in opposition and makes them resonate. But there is no contradiction between the segmentary parts and the centralized apparatus. On the one hand, the most rigid of segmentarities does not preclude centralization: this is because the common central point is not where all the other points melt together, but instead acts as a point of resonance on the horizon, behind all the other points. The State is not a point taking all the others upon itself, but a resonance chamber for them all. Even when the State is totalitarian, its function as resonator for distinct centers and segments remains unchanged: the only difference is that it takes place under closed-vessel conditions that increase its internal reach, or couples "resonance" with a "forced movement." On the other hand and conversely, the strictest of centralizations does not eradicate the distinctiveness of the centers, segments, and circles."<sup>13</sup>

Deleuze & Guattari on Resonance

In physics, **resonance** describes the oscillation inside a system. In such a system there is a tendency to oscillate at a greater amplitude at some frequencies than at others. At these frequencies, even small periodic driving forces can produce large amplitude oscillations, because the system stores vibrational energy.<sup>14</sup>

In its radical form resonance can produce disaster. If vibrations are induced exactly at a systems resonance frequency, the system will oscillate ever more strongly and as the 'load limit' of the system is reached the system will swing so much, that the oscillations will cause it to break down. Such radical resonance can break whole buildings or large scale constructions.<sup>15</sup>

#### Resonance Chamber

Using resonance as a social and political metaphor is a way of translating the inherent emotional energies in a social structure into a poetic physical language. What oscillates in a social group, in a group of activists or in a whole movement, is a collective emotion; the individual feelings of each participant is 'tuned' and a collective emotional state emerges. This emotion oscillates at a certain frequency, it has a certain quality – anger, determination, happiness, triumph – and it creates a certain emotional resonance, that is shared by everyone in the group.

Used in this metaphorical way, resonance have various modes; certain systems resonate at calm and stable frequencies, others are induced by periodic excitation and transfers into disaster. When The Invisible Committee talks about insurrections as resonance – it "resonates with the shock wave.." – it is the disastrous version of resonance that is paraphrased. Various protest movements, separated by geography and maybe even by ideology, is vibrating at similar frequencies, their resonance mutates into one greater vibrational force. It takes on density, oscillate deeper, until it shatters whole societies. In this sense the resonance of 'The Coming Insurrection' is a weapon, by keeping in sync, by being fuelled by similar emotional frequencies, the scattered movements and the atomized cells of resistance, are united in one big vibration, that eventually will destroy the ruling order.

Deleuze and Guattari frequently use the word 'resonance' in describing the structure of the State in their major opus 'A Thousand Plateaus'. For them resonance is the way that the State synchronizes all the different aspects in a nation; the various segments and power-centres. The State is not one point of power centralising all other powers, but a chamber of resonance for all points of power within the State. In this sense the State is defined by resonance. All different elements in the State – different classes, various smaller power-structures, different cultures, different businesses and economies – all resonate in the State. Also this use of the word resonance is metaphorical. Here, too, the oscillating energy, that binds all the different elements of a state together, has an emotional, symbolic character. A variety of cultural symbols and characteristics, belonging to the different social and structural elements of society, produces a range of emotional frequencies, that are united in the resonance-chamber. Here, in the chamber a common chord, an emotional expression of the State, is produced. This emotional expression emerges for instance as the inherent emotional aspects, connected to the symbolic representation of the nation - the national feeling so to speak – but it permeates society on all levels.

This can seem a contradiction to the way The Invisible Committee talks about resonance, but if we consider the idea of 'resonance disaster' it actually makes sense. The State or the ruling order, is already vibrating at a stable frequency, or rather, it is a stable ensemble of resonating systems. In the words of the Invisible Committee it is "a rhythm that imposes itself, a way of dispensing and dispersing reality. Less an order of the world than its sad, heavy and militaristic liquidation". When being induced by additional vibrations in the right frequency, by periodic excitation, the load limit of the system is exceeded and the system becomes unstable, the resonance exceeds the levels that the system can contain. The system becomes disastrous and it breaks down. The revolutionary movements build up a vibrational force, a collective emotional chord, that induces energy into the resonance-chamber of the State. Here the resonance oscillates to disastrous levels and the system as a whole disintegrates.

In the performance we try to build up a similar resonance by distorting the text of the police-manual being read by adding echo, repetition and reverb, thereby reducing it to a rhythmic series of noise-waves. This deranged rhythm is supplemented by the blinding light being mirrored and moved around the space and in the face of the audience, and by the aggressive moves and continuous swing of the purple flag and the chains by the dancer. These three elements, all characterized by aggressive affects, resonate in the dark, black space, creating a strong, emotional vibration.

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**Notes:**

<sup>1</sup> from Gene Ray: Radical Learning and Dialectical Realism: Brecht and Adorno on Representing Capitalism (First published at Historical Materialism 18.3 (2010), found at: [http://www.chtodelat.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=1024%3Agene-ray--radical-learning-and-dialectical-realism-brecht-and-adorno-on-representing-capitalism&catid=241%3A10-34-in-defence-of-representation&Itemid=490&lang=en](http://www.chtodelat.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1024%3Agene-ray--radical-learning-and-dialectical-realism-brecht-and-adorno-on-representing-capitalism&catid=241%3A10-34-in-defence-of-representation&Itemid=490&lang=en))

<sup>2</sup> The content of this performance, A Short Course in Realism from the Perspective of the Police, is derived from a string of coincidental findings: As described in the introduction I stumbled into a mysterious silent demonstration on November 23rd 2006 in Gothenburg. This demonstration turned out to be false – it was a police-exercise. The Swedish police were using instructors from Denmark to teach them how to use dialogue based strategies of communication in order to avoid violent confrontation with radicalised activists. By coincidence, around the same time as I was contemplating my misreading of the situation, I was offered a copy of a police manual by an artist colleague. He had gotten this copy of a copy from someone with connections at the police-school in Copenhagen. The police manual, Operation, proved to be highly interesting, offering a range of obviously aesthetical tools for crowd-control, spatial staging of city space and encountering riots and violent demonstrations. This manual might very well have been part of the instructions that the Danish police-instructors offered their Swedish colleagues that day in Gothenburg. In any case I decided to use the manual as the text to be destroyed in this performance, thereby following up on the trail of coincidental findings starting up my research in this project as a whole.

<sup>3</sup> The Invisible Committee: THE COMING INSURRECTION (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e) 2009), p. 110-111

<sup>4</sup> The same quote from 'The Coming Insurrection' is used with different aim in the script/performance 'Aesthetics of Resitance?' (Commentary 4.2.4.1.).

<sup>5</sup> Robert Herbst: 'My friends are the Universe (Globalization's Protest Expand the Political)' in The Journal of Aesthetics & Protest, volume 1, issue 1 (Los Angeles 2002), p. 6

<sup>6</sup> see Appendix 1.1.5.2.

<sup>7</sup> The difference between 'performed in the real' and 'performed as art' is one of the themes in the script/performance 'On Water', AoR 3.3.

<sup>8</sup> David Graeber: 'On the Phenomenology of Giant Puppets: Broken Windows, Imaginary Jars of Urine, and the Cosmological Role of the Police in American Culture' in David Graeber: POSSIBILITIES, Essays on Hierarchy, Rebellion, and Desire' (Oakland: AK Press 2007), p. 375-417

<sup>9</sup> New Oxford American Dictionary:

Transcendent

adjective

beyond or above the range of normal or merely physical human experience : *the search for a transcendent level of knowledge.*

• surpassing the ordinary; exceptional : *the conductor was described as a "transcendent genius."*

• (of God) existing apart from and not subject to the limitations of the material universe. Often contrasted with immanent .

• (in scholastic philosophy) higher than or not included in any of Aristotle's ten categories.

• (in Kantian philosophy) not realizable in experience.

New Oxford American Dictionary

<sup>10</sup> See commentary 4.1.4.1: 'Sense Event'

<sup>11</sup> The term EMPIRE stems from the seminal book EMPIRE by Anthoni Negri and Michael Hardt. EMPIRE is a metaphorical way of describing the entire western hegemony, the neo-liberal late capitalism, as covering the entire globe. In contemporary activism EMPIRE is now used as a general term, denouncing the system as such as the enemy. Here in the text quoted below, Tiqqun, transfers a kind of subjectivity to EMPIRE by using the word THEY as the operative subject of EMPIRE. Hardt, Michael and Antoino Negri: EMPIRE (USA: Harvard University Press 2000)



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<sup>12</sup> Tiqqun: '*...As a Science of Apparatuses*' in *Tiqqun: This Is Not A Program* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e) 2011), p. 161-162

<sup>13</sup> Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari: *A Thousand Plateaus* (London/New York: Continuum 2004), p. 247

<sup>14</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Resonance>

<sup>15</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mechanical\\_resonance#Resonance\\_disaster](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mechanical_resonance#Resonance_disaster)