

### Analysis (3.2.3.)

In the performance two assumptions inherent in the discourse on G13 of the artist/researcher are tested out in the temporal reality of the situation:

Is it possible to give a text a voice, to embody it in actual time, without retreating to fictional time? Is it possible to establish a collective body consisting of the actual persons present in the space of the performance?

Why these two questions?

The latter is quite obvious. The concept of the swarm as a strategic form of activism is based on the assumption that it is possible to establish some kind of collective body; that it is possible to connect a group of people, small or big, and that this group can act, not in unison, but like a body with different limbs. In the performance I wanted to test this by connecting the members of the audience and the 4 actors in a collaborative act.

The first question might seem less obvious. It has to do with the dialectics between physical/emotional action and politics I discussed in the commentary 1.1.4.1: *Verfremdungseffekt*. There I used a quote by The Invisible Committee:

“... 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>1</sup>

From this I argued:

“... 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>2</sup>

It is this double presence – something is present as text and as experience for the senses, as action – I wanted to test by embodying the four G13-manifestos.

What does this mean: Embodying a text?

Each manifesto is read up by an actor carrying a flag or a banner in the color of the respective block. The fact that these relatively short manifestos are read up by various persons creates a variation in the presentation of the texts and it situates each text in a different position in the space, thus creating a spatial distribution of the text. Most importantly it embodies the 4 texts: Each text is connected to a specific person, to a specific voice, to a specific body. The text is given a voice. The actors are asked to keep strictly to reading aloud, no acting is allowed. This accentuates that it is a text and the ready-made character of the texts. So there is a text and an embodiment of this text. It is imperative to keep this distinction alive in the performance – that the text is performed and not acted.

Working with actors recently in another production I experienced how the script was transformed in the process of rehearsing: In the beginning of the rehearsals when the actors still didn't know their roles and the dialogue perfectly, the text and the actor were still separate entities. The text was being performed by a voice and a body. As the acting process proceeded the text and the actor became increasingly united to the point of completion where text and actor became one. Now the text was internalized and the actor became a fictive persona. A kind of illusion evolved, a naturalism; all of a sudden you believed in the fictive person in front of you. In a sense it was a magical moment. I guess this is the magic of theatre. That a fictive situation is created and that you as an audience are led to believe in this illusion.

To me, performance is something different. It is grounded in the given situation; the space, the audience, the performers, the various objects or effects being part of the situation. It is real. Real, in the sense that all eventual illusions are revealed and the various elements constituting the performance are accentuated and objectified. This real has to do with time. The performance evolves in real time, it is happening now. In fiction the viewer - the audience, the reader, the listener - is taken to another time, outside of the present time. Performance is present. It constitutes a presence, a now. When it works, this now is shared by everyone present, the audience and the performers. It is this now I call a sense-event. In the various performances in this project I approach it in various ways, and it has different characteristics. Sometimes it is dramatic, sometimes it is contemplative; the mood changes according to the script and the problematics it is addressing.

A continuous problem in these performances is that they are each addressing a certain event, that happened at another time, at another place – a demonstration, a political action, an arrest etc. How to present this original event in the format of a performance, with the intention to create a presence, a present now, at the same time as referring to those other times and other places? This is a formal problem that fuels all these performances and the various inventions contained in them. It is also the basic quest of my artistic research: I want to test my ideas of the original events in a performative situation. It is my assumption that the original event is constituted as performance; that in the various original events various aspects of performativity are acted out by the activists and/or other active participants – the police, authorities or others. How to represent and test this original sense-event as a new and present situation? Instead of recreating the original event in a naturalistic manner - as in the tradition of realism in film or in the format of traditional re-enactments - I have chosen to perform the information gathered in my research process and the circumstances of the gathering of this information. Here a set of distances are established, and it is a premise that these distances are kept identifiable in the performances.

For these reasons it is important that the 4 manifestos in G13 are performed, read, and not acted. To keep the distance between the text and its embodiment observable. In a sense this is my version of Brecht's *Verfremdung*. As viewers we are not transported to another place and another time; we are still here in this space, together with the actor reading up a text, and that happens now. The text is given a body, it has a voice and it is connected to a specific person, to a specific body. It is present in this space, now.

The presence of the voice-over is different. It is already hinted at by the word 'voice-over'. The voice lies over something else. The voice is hovering in the space above

everything else. It doesn't come from a specific position in the space, it doesn't come from a specific body present in the situation. This voice is not part of the situation in the same sense as the actors, the performer, the audience, the banners, the flags and the web of color-lines. The voice-over is over, above the situation. It is a meta-physical voice. It is commenting on the situation, narrating it from outside, from above.

It is precisely this - commenting from the outside of the situation - that is the intention with the figure of the 'artist/researcher'. It is a device intended to give the audience a double layered experience; to give them the possibility of being a part of the situation and at the same time to consider it from a distance.

This performance, G13, is special because it is the voice-over that carries the central narrative. In this sense it is a kind of performative essay. The other elements are either illustrations or inserts in the text of the voice-over. But these illustrations and inserts are performative; in contrast to the voice-over they are grounded in the temporal presence of the performance.

In the periods where we hear the voice-over a performer is constructing/performing the main visual element of the performance: a growing net or maze of lines in the 4 signature colors. This 3-dimensional web is carried by members of the audience; as the performance and the colored web evolves Jacobi is fastening parts of the strings to almost every member of the audience. In this way the audience is becoming part not only of the web of strings, but also of a collaborative network, participating in the event by holding up the web of lines. The participation is easy and passive but it is a central point that the web of strings is only kept up in the air by the participating audience.

The web is of course a very obvious symbolic representation of the swarm and the inherent lines of communication constituting the collective body of the swarm. It works as an illustration to the description of the swarm in the voice-over, but the web has another function too: By engaging the audience as participants in the network a collective body is established, here in the space of the performance. It is a soft and passive version of the collective body, but it is there, present. The maze of colored lines connect the persons in the audience and each of them has a small responsibility in keeping the network floating in the air. No one do actually let go of the string they are holding. The web of colored lines is not only a symbolic representation of a collective body, it is also an actual realisation of it.

This is how the performance works as a research experiment. Now, the G13-performance is done before I developed the format of 'performance followed by discussion' that later became the standart format of the last series of performances. Hence there is no organized discussion following the performance, and I have only my own impressions and some scattered comments, to evaluate how the two questions or tests were answered, not by the audience, but by the development of the performance.

Both tests are carried out discretely while the main narrative of the performance develops as a performative essay. In both cases the action or performativity involved in the test is stripped of any dramatic gestures. It is simple, very neutral acts that constitutes the two tests. The act of reading up a text. The collective act of holding a

set of strings up in the air. Furthermore, both acts are already containing the approval of the tests in themselves:

When a person reads up a text, this text is embodied; it is 'experienceable by the senses', by hearing. Already in the simple act of reading up a text, the double presence I am looking for is manifested. We are simultaneous in the actual space where the person is reading up the text, and in the space inside the text - wherever that is.

When a group of people are holding a set of strings together, when these strings connect them, they become one large entity. Together – their individual bodies and the connecting strings – they make up one organism, a collective body. Because the connections are simple and physical – it is constituted by the strings of yarn that connects one person to the next and so on – the collective body is in a physical sense a simple fact. The members of the audience are connected by colored strings of yarn and thus they become a collective body.

So both test are actually already confirmed positively, just by acting them out.

In the performance these very simple acts of physical presence are interlaced into the narrative of the political action G13. The texts the four actors are reading up are activist manifestos from G13 and the web of colored strings of yarn, that connects the members of the audience, is a 3-dimensional, symbolic representation of the swarm, that is the main strategic figure in the G13 action. By this the two acts establishes the double presence of now and then, too. We are right here in the space of the performance, and at the same time we are contemplating something back then, on the day of G13.

In the sequence of actions undertaken by The Youth House Movement in 2007/08, G13 was by far the largest and in one sense the most ambitious. G13 was basically about restraint. At the time it was important to change the image of the movement from 'violent youth' to 'creative smart mob'. By refraining from violence and keeping to the overall plan the activists shows the necessary restraint and thereby changes the direction of the conflict with the authorities, opening up for negotiations that was until then completely unimaginable.

The development of the colored web of yarn in the performance reflects this restraint on a small scale. As the web gets more complex and fills up larger parts of the space, the performer is increasingly restrained maneuvering in and out of the web as he adds more and more lines to the web. In the collective body of the audience a certain level of restraint and trust is taken as a given too: If one or more persons let go of their piece of string, parts of the web will fall to the floor and the general impression of a network of lines occupying the entire space will falter. The theme of restraint is in this sense embodied, too. Not represented as an image, but grounded in the situation of the performance by small and relatively neutral gestures. By taking part in the small scale acts of restraint, the audience are able to consider the larger acts of restraint performed by the thousands of activists on G13-day. Thus it is not only the image of the colored web that is an illustration or symbolic representation of the swarm; the participatory process of creating the web is a performative reflection on the concept of the swarm, too.

What about the aforementioned 'bridges' in between the various parts of the performance? The small bits of time-coded reports from the G13-action read aloud by the performers in between his work on the web. This is where the performance becomes unclear. These small reports are descriptive like the text in the voice-over, but ready-mades and read up like the 4 manifestos; their position in the relationship between the present space of the performance and the past space of the G13-action is unclear. Intended as bridges between these two realms they blur the intricate relationships between the various types of texts, voices and presences in the performance. Still, they pace the narrative by introducing the progression of the time codes - but this is also confusing since it is the time of the past event they refer to and not the present time of the performance.

Also part of these bridges is a feature I call 'the camera as performer': After experiencing numerous times how the filming of a performance becomes a very dominant part of the aesthetic situation - unintended the cameraman becomes an active performer - I decided to let the camera become an integrated part of this performance. This idea also relates to how the press and an army of photojournalists and cameramen are an active part of the demonstrations and activist events I am interested in; one of the aspects of 'performative activism' is that the media and its representatives are one of the main audiences of the demonstrations and actions. It is partly for the media activist images are created and this logic counts just as strong or maybe even stronger for the opposite part, the police and the authorities in general. To incorporate this 'logic of the camera' as an active part of the performance I decided to let the filming, the documentation, of the performance become a self-reflective performative feature in itself. In the bridges the performer repositions the video-camera and the tripod, directing it towards the action to come in the next sequence. On a conceptual and performative level this works quite well, but as documentation of the performance it has quite disastrous consequences: Crucial parts of the performance happens off screen and the resulting video-footage is more or less useless. The concept is interesting though and I have tried to develop it to a more well functioning device in the later performances. Taken to its full consequence this principle should become a guiding structural element in the editing of the video-footage afterwards.

These two more or less faltering elements in the performance are minor problems. The overall impression is that the performance accomplishes the intended goals. The audience is taken back to the G13-action, a presence is established to ground the tale of G13 in the present moment and a some kind of collective body is established. As an research experiment though, this performance lacks an organized feed-back. To a certain extend I am still guessing how the audience experienced the situation; if a sense-event really evolved. This performance differs a bit from most of the other performances in this project, by being mainly essayistic and in that the performative elements are relatively discrete. This makes it slightly harder to detect the reactions of the audience. This problem of reception and feed-back, that was a part of my set-up for the first three performances in this project, led me to develop another format for the last part of the performance-series, including a discussion-session with the audience after each performance.

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**Notes:**

<sup>1</sup> The Invisible Committee: THE COMING INSURRECTION (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e) 2009), p. 110-111

<sup>2</sup> from commentary 1.1.4.1: Verfremdungseffekt