

Commentary (4.1.4.)

Sense-Event (4.1.4.1.)

**On Resonance, *Budhaditya Chattopadhyay* in conversation with Frans Jacobi
(4.1.4.2.) (see video for this)**

Sense-Event (4.1.4.1.)

"The point is thus not the shift in relations of power and domination between actual socio-political agents, the redistribution of social control, etc., but the very fact of transcending – or, rather, momentarily cancelling – this very domain, of the emergence of a totally different domain of 'collective will' as a pure Sense-Event in which all differences are obliterated, rendered irrelevant. Such an event is not only new with regard to what was going on before, it is new 'in itself' and thus forever remains new."¹

The term Sense-Event stems from this quote by Slavoj Žižek. It is from his introduction to 'Robespierre: Virtue and Terror'. The term immediately struck me as something useful for my research project. Žižek has it from Gilles Deleuze, for whom it is a central term, occurring as one of the main points in his book 'Logique du sens'². That is, I think it is Žižek himself who has given Deleuze's vast and highly complex elaborations on 'sens' and 'event' the simpler name Sense-Event. What I want to do here is NOT to use Deleuze's ideas about the Sense-Event to conceptualise, structure and analyse the performances inherent in this project, 'Aesthetics of Resistance'. It's not even to use Žižek's somewhat simpler, more direct version of it. What I intend is to appropriate the term and redefine it to my own means. Sense-Event.

Žižek connects it to some thoughts on 'revolutionary becoming', to the 'apoteosis of revolt' as I called it in 'Revolution by Night'. Also that term, 'revolutionary becoming', stems from Deleuze:

"They say revolutions turn out badly. But they're constantly confusing two different things, the way revolutions turn out historically and people's revolutionary becoming."³

So, both Žižek and Deleuze connects the Sense-Event to revolutionary situations, similar to the situations of riot and protest I have chosen as the subjects of my inquiries. For Deleuze though, it is a term that has far wider importance. It is central to his ideas on time, time and becoming, which again are central to his ideas on film and cinema.⁴

In Deleuze the Sense-Event has to do with the relationship between matter, light and images, thought of as based in time. It has to do with how the perception rests in the thin membrane between reality and language. In a 'thin depth', as he calls it. He operates with two concepts of time, Kronos and Aion. Kronos is the 'always limited present, in which bodies act'. The evolving time as we know it; future becomes present and present becomes past. There is a force that evolves time. Aion, on the other hand, is 'the essentially unlimited past and future, that collects events on the surface as effects'. Aion is eternal. The Sense-Event is inscribed in Kronos, the present is marked by it, but the event itself exists in Aion. If we call the event an image, this image rests in Aion, it stretches unlimited in time. We see this image from Kronos, from the passing time, constituted by the action of our bodies, by our interactions. The Sense-Event is the passage opening up between these realms of time. In the Sense-Event we are glimpsing the eternal. In the Sense-Event something is in the becoming.

Becoming image. It isn't necessarily something to do with us, with persons, individuals, human beings. It happens all the time in nature as well. The becoming is

a general condition. A tree becomes greener as spring turns into summer. It is this 'greening' that constitutes it as a tree. If the tree wasn't always 'becoming green' it wasn't a tree. Here the event is the 'becoming green', and it is a general quality for every tree. Still, it is something that happens with every particular tree at a certain time and at a certain place. The particular event of the particular tree becoming greener is happening in Kronos, but simultaneously it is the event that classifies the tree as a particularization of the image 'tree' that rests in Aion.⁵

So, there is a general image, stretching out in a kind of transcendental time, in Aion. Then there is a particular event happening in the passing of time, but because this event fits a general image in Aion, it opens up that 'thin depth' - the veil, membrane or film – that connects the two concepts of time. The event becomes a Sense-Event and there in the 'thin depth' it performs the 'becoming image'. It is only in the Sense-Events we experience the images, stretching out in Aion. In the Thin Depth, on the surface of the world, we sense the creation of the world, but we only sense it as temporary appearances on the surface.

Deleuze starts these elaborations in 'Logique du sens' by reading Lewis Carroll's 'Behind the mirror'.⁶ In 'Logique du sensation' Deleuze moves on to an analysis the paintings of Francis Bacon and the ideas later become a vital part of the two books on cinema, 'Cinema 1' and 'Cinema 2'.

There is wonderful logic in this development from talking of mirrors and 'the sharp edge between language and reality' over the 'thin depth', the 'membrane' and the 'surface' to 'film'. In this logic we detect the very material of cinema - the thin semi-transparent membranes upon which the images are appearing, the film-strip itself and the screen - as inherent and obvious manifestations of the 'thin depth'. On both these thin membranes the images appears as a modulations of light, that connects and separates reality and image. This is of course also the case in all lense-based images – photography and video – but the beauty of the film-example is that here the two different realities of reality and image, with their two separate time-frames, meets on a very concrete, thin surface or membrane. The role of light as the illuminating power is also very obvious in the case of cinema, both as the light that beams through the lenses of the camera and the film-projector and as the light that transports the images to the surface of the screen.⁷

The thoughts of Deleuze regarding the Sense-Event is obviously far more complex than the very limited condensation I have given here. My aim is in no way to give any kind of introduction to his thinking, rather to extract a few ideas that I can use for my own purposes in my definition of what a Sense-Event could be.

My understanding of 'sense' is connected to the senses. It is all that is experienced by the senses, all that is experiencable by the senses; sight, smell, hearing, taste, touch and move. The visual, the audible, the smell, the taste, the sensual, the spatial. This is the realm of the aesthetic. For me there is a tight correspondance between 'sense' and 'aesthetic'. The aesthetic is the entire field of experiences experienced by the senses. 'Sense' is of course connected to the body, it is the experiences of the body, but it includes the experiences of the body meeting the world; meeting other bodies, the landscape, the city, culture in its vast forms. In aesthetics a language of the senses arise, the sense is no longer individual, there is a whole field of collective experiences evolving, and a whole language of aesthetic references to be used in conjuring new meaning and dissecting established aesthetic meaning. 'Sense' is the

tool of aesthetics. It is with the senses we experience the aesthetic.

Of course 'sense' also has other meanings, i.e. as a reasonable or comprehensible rationale. 'In this sense' is a phrase often used in these texts. Here it links reason to the body, it is as if reason is only reasonable if grounded in the everyday experiences of the world. In 'sense-event' though it is the sensorial meaning of the word that is important.

'Event' is something that happens, it is temporal, it is happening in time, unfolding time. An event marks a specific moment in time. Event has vast and varied meaning in both philosophy and art; here I will focus on event as something that happens in time, something specific, that constitutes a certain moment in time.

'Sense-event' is an event consisting of an ensemble of sensorial experiences. It unfolds in time. It is specific. A specific ensemble of sensorial experiences unfolding in time.

'A specific ensemble of sensorial experiences' sounds very much like an image, but an image is not 'unfolding in time'. An image is stable in time, it is 'forever'. If we go back to Deleuze we could say that the image rests in Aion. It is something that stays the same over time. It lasts, all thru the past, the present, the future. Once it is created an image stretches time. It is permanent. An image can be interpreted differently in different epochs but the image stays the same, it is unchangable, even by opposing interpretations.

This characteristic of an image goes for all kinds of 'traditional' images; for painting, drawings, graphic prints, sculpture, all the various forms of images in the tradition of art, and before art in religious and other historic image-traditions. As soon as the image is created, we can look at it again and again. It also goes for the technical images, photography and other forms of singular images. As soon as the photograph is taken it is stable and stays the same. Of course it can be altered in the dark-room (or in Photoshop), but these processes must be counted as part of the 'taking', in each process a final image is processed and it is this image that stays the same.

With film, theater and music it gets more complicated. Here the images are sequenced and involves the passing of time. They are time-based. The experience unfolds in time. For the sake of the argument I will make a distinction here between timebased images, that are 'recorded' and presented as a stable, finished sequence of images - i.e. a film, that is always the same everytime it is shown – and those kind of timebased images that are evolving in time, always different each time they are experienced. As a work of art, a film or a recorded piece of music, has a lasting quality that is unchangable and permanent in the same manner as a singular image. It is the other category of images that are interesting to look at in connection with the sense-event. What kind of image production is at stake in art-forms that rely on temporal performative gestures?

The Sense-Event differs from other kinds of sensorial experience in that it is focussed in a certain way. It doesn't just pass like reality passing with time. In the sense-event a set of sensorial experiences are sampled and form an ensemble. The ensemble form something similar to an image, but this is an image evolving in time. If we say that the normal sensorial experiences are momentary and dissolves with the passing of time; if we say that images are stable and lasts beyond time – then the

sense-event is something in between. It is an image in becoming, unfolding. The sense-event might produce a stable image, but in the sense-event the image is still 'in the making', becoming.

The sense-event evolves in a time-frame in between the passing of time in everyday-life and the permanent time of images. It opens a passage between these two incommensurable realms of time. Again, we can compare with Deleuze - his idea of Kronos and Aion and the 'thin depth', the veil, separating them. Here, though, for the sake of simplicity, I will limit myself to talking about the time of images and the time of the everyday. The permanent stable time of images and the fluid passing time of the everyday. In between these the sense-event establishes a passage. A kind of time that is at simultaneously passing and permanent.

In a recent discussion on performance, the queer performance artist Mary Coble, talked of a situation in one of her performances, 'Fighting Cocks', where she was performing together with a young guy she didn't know and had not performed with before. The performance consisted of the two of them in the confined space of a locker-room, slapping each other with wet towels for three hours. In the midst of this performance the young guy see one of his friends in the audience and while continuing the slapping 'in' the performance he starts small-talking with his friend 'outside' in a casual tone, completely foreign to the tense atmosphere 'inside' the performance. This irritating moment when the young guy is slipping out of the performance marks exactly the fragile borderline between the sense-event and the everyday passing of time. Inside the performance a different mode of time is established and it is one of the basic rules of engagement that the performers respect this. By chatting with his friend the performer 'broke the spell', blending the two modes of time, whereby the conditions for the performance were confused.⁸

In the performance a specific situation is established. It is on one hand imaginary, in that it constitutes an image that is extracted from the reality of the situation it is grounded in – here the locker-room and the audience standing somewhere peeking in. On the other hand it is real in that it is evolving in time, undetermined and still unpredictable. Inside the parameters of the performance unexpected things might happen, and, since this performance is only done once, the outcome is not pre-defined. In the case of this specific performance, Mary Coble decided afterwards to present the recorded sound of the performance as another art-work, 'The Sound of Fighting Cocks'. Here, the sense-event of the performance is transformed into a permanent art-work, a stable image. This new art-work is in principle accessible for us forever, whereas the performance itself were only accessible in exactly those 3 hours in a sex-club in Toronto, where it was performed.⁹

An image in becoming. The sense-event is the event of creation. The moment of inspiration. Creation and inspiration; both terms are central to the idea of art and both terms are heavily exhausted as prime carriers of the myth of art. Here it not so magical or mystical. On the contrary, what I attempt here, is to instrumentalize these terms; to describe a situation where creation is a possible outcome of an organised conceptualisation, not the coincidental beam of inspirational light from above.

Sense-event covers the field of art-forms that rely on temporal performative gestures. It can be music (live), some versions of theatre, performance-art, the so-called relational aesthetics and other contextual and socially based art-forms within the sphere of visual arts. Performance is the central tool in the sense-event, whether it is

the artist(s), the art-work and/or the audience that performs. It is the performative gestures that defines the way time evolves in the sense-event. The performativity can take on many shapes and act in various ways. It can be discrete or expressive, slow, fast or explosive; the key feature is that it is somehow shaping and evolving time 'inside' the frames of the sense-event. The performativity is the 'becoming'. The sense-event is constituted by this becoming. The inherent performativity defines the frame, the platform for the sense-event.

A simple, schematic version would be that the sense-event is defined by:

(1): A conceptual frame-work that separates the event from the situation in which is occurring. This frame can be a temporal frame, a spatial frame or any other kind of frame and it can be defined from the outset or it can develop from within the event.

(2): A performative action that defines and evolves time within the event. Here action must be understood in the widest terms. It can entail everything from the tiniest micro-level occurrences to large-scale dramatic action, from completely computerized mechanic development to collective, social interaction.

The sense-event might produce a final, stable image as an outcome, but it isn't necessarily so. The image character might be suggestive or only underlying the event. It might be completely ephemeral. The permanence of image is of such a disposition, that even if the image only occurs as a fleeting sensation, a transient glimpse, it is still a permanent image. It exists in the outstretched eternity of image-time, no matter how extremely short it occurs in 'real' time, in everyday-time. This is the exciting thing about the sense-event; that it gives us a glimpse into the creation of images, into the vibrating matter of becoming, where things are still unresolved and in the making. In the sense-event an oscillation takes place between the fleeting everyday-time and the eternal image-time.

The sensorial input - the percepts as Deleuze call it – all that is experienced by the senses belongs to the everyday-time. The sensorial belongs to the body, to the senses. In becoming image these percepts are freed from the body, untied from the subject perceiving them. The percepts are arranged in an ensemble, composed. This process, untying the percepts from the subject perceiving them, is what we usually call artistic creation – aesthetics. The composition of percepts take on a life of itself, it becomes image. In this process the images is also freed from everyday-time; the percepts are untied from the sensation of subjective perception and become accessible for everyone as a distinct ensemble of sensorial data. As an image the sensorial ensemblage now rest in image-time, accessible forever.

If we consider the performance in question here, 'Clone Wars', in the light of these considerations, there is actually two sense-event at play. There is the 'central' event, the island on the green carpet, travelling across the immense floor of the City Hall, with its three performers carrying out diverse performative acts within this event. This sense-event is dominated by 'pure' percepts; the waves of resonating sound, the spatial moves of the dancer, the green balloon and the scattered debris produced by Atlas in his quest and the light in its various appearances. Most of these elements have references or literal meaning that adds to the meaning of the scenario, but they all have strong perceptual qualities, that becomes part of the ensemble of sensorial

experiences, the composition of percepts, constituting the sense-event. In the first part of the performance, these singular sensorial elements each performs their own string of actions. Each oscillating between the reality of their presence in the space and in everyday-time and the postulated imagery – Atlas, Buddha and Helena Christensen on a quest to save the world – in image-time. In short moments maybe touching upon something that could be part of such an image, but most of the time performing scattered and probing acts, not yet coming together as a specific ensemble. It is when the spot-light is turned on, that the scenario generates a specific quality. It is the beam of light that organises the various parts, gives the overall image a focus and structures the composition. The beam of light is the frame-work that constitutes the sense-event and connects all the singular performative acts to a specific ensemble. As the spot-light is turned on the scenario of scattered acts becomes an image and the sense-event is evolving. For awhile what is happening is happening both in image-time and in everyday-time simultaneously. The sound is crucial here; it is as if the resonating waves of sound pulsing in the enormous space, creates a resonant space, a certain mood, where the oscillating between the two time-aspects in the sense-event is rendered possible. This image evolving is certainly not a realisation of the postulated pseudo-image of Atlas, Buddha and Helena Christensen, it has a entirely different character of its own. The pseudo-meaning of the postulated image rather exists in the composition of the grander image as an ironic element performing its own irritating, little layer of meaning, adding to or rather relativating the religious overtones of the overall image.

The other sense-event to be considered in 'Clone Wars' is not as 'pure' sensorial. If we consider the entire situation, including also the audience, the guide, her assistant and the camera-man in the event, there is another sense-event evolving. Here the relative 'purity' of the image of the quest of the three activist on the green island is inscribed in a far more complex contextual situation. The event now includes a whole set of power-relations and representations, a complex set of social correlations, that performs a set of politically charged percepts. The image evolving in the sense-event of the entire situation is thus far more complex and has sharper edges than that of the green island seen as a separate entity. The temporal progress outlined in the description of the sense-event of the green island above - the idea that the sense event only starts when the spot-light is turned on – is here in the entire ensemble quite different. The sense-event starts at the very moment the artist/researcher says welcome to the audience and evolves in all its labyrinthine aspects all thru the performance until the spot-light is turned off at the end of the performance.

Now, these considerations spring from my practice as a performance artist, but the aim of this project, Aesthetics of Resistance, as a whole is to probe if these ideas about the sense-event make 'sense' if applied to contemporary political activism and protest events. Can we understand aspects of these riots and other activist-events in another way if we try to look at them as sense-events?

Deleuze, as well, starts his inquiries into the relation between 'sens' and 'event' by looking at some works in the field of aesthetics, namely the novel 'Through the Looking Glass' by Lewis Carroll and the paintings of Francis Bacon. For Deleuze the concept of sense-event though applies to nature as well, and is somehow part of the constant creation of the entire world. At various points he also applies these ideas to specific political events, such as the Iranian revolution¹⁰ or revolutions in general¹¹. Slavoj Žižek certainly uses the term sense-event with this purpose.

Here, in my own project, I have selected a string of events, that seems interesting to consider as sense-events. What attracts me in these specific events is that the imagery involved is not only strong, but seems to be the determining factor of the events. It is through the imagery the political 'content' is communicated, fought about or simply happens. The political content happens. Elsewhere in these commentaries I argue that the form is the message – a similar idea is that the content is what happens during an action. The imagery, or the images, appear in different ways in the various events chosen, and the role the images play in these conflicts is different, but the thread running through the 8 specific events I inquire is that it is the inherent imagery that defines the events.

Political action. Direct action. Take action. Be active. Activism. Activist. The words act and action are central to the understanding of radical political thought. In the kind of political activism I have been interested in it is not enough to present or represent an argument in the public sphere as in the more traditional forms of demonstrations. The political activist has to act upon the problem or issue in question. She has to do something about it. It can be as a re-action to a certain problem or it can be as a positive manifestation of a political or even philosophical idea. It is crucial though that these ideas are expressed as active gestures. That they are performed and not presented as an argument.

Already in the word 'act' this double meaning is present; it means 'to do something', but it also means 'to perform a fictional role in a play or a movie'. In between these poles the word 'act' can be used in a whole variety of interpretations of those meanings, but already in the opposed meanings of the word the basic structure of the sense-event appears: 'To do something' is happening in everyday-time, while 'to perform a fictional role' is happening in image-time. In the events I am interested in, it is not either or, it is not a choice between 'to do something' or 'to perform a fictional role'. It is both at the same time, it is to do both simultaneously. The 'fictional role' though has to be understood in a quite broad way as to 'perform an image'.

The noun 'action' supplies us with the last basic element of the sense-event, the frame. By defining a certain set of acts as an 'action', as a specific action, a frame is defined. The acts being performed inside this frame, inside the action, is forming an ensemble, an image to be performed. In the commentary 'On Style' we saw how activists communicate their intentions to each other by describing the style of an action. Style indicates a certain set of guidelines for the participants to follow – it is the format in which an action takes shape, in which it is conceptualized. Style defines the frame-work for a political action beforehand. Within this frame certain acts are performed and an image or a set of images emerges. This is how the political content happens.

In the various activist events selected the sense-event is defined differently and the inherent action plays out differently. Sometimes the set-up is quite straightforward as in the occupation of Refshalevej (On Water), sometimes it is extremely complex as in G13 or the Climate Justice Action (G13greenredturquoiseyellow and Climate/Kettle), sometimes it is even arguable if the event in question is even a political action as in Hopenhagen (Clone Wars). Sometimes the acts performed are overtly emotional, stemming from sadness and aggression as in the first sequence of the Youth House Movement (Revolution by Night), sometimes they are creative acts of collectivity as in G13 or on Tahrir Square (G13greenredturquoiseyellow and Silent Stand), sometimes they are conceptual redefinitions of what politics can be as in the

Tiananmen Square Occupation and in the Egyptian Silent Stand (Ghost Choir Karaoke and Silent Stand). In most cases the opponent – the police, the politicians, society at large – is an inherent part of the game, active participants in the sense-event, either in complete control as the police-forces in Copenhagen on December 12th, 2009 (Climate/Kettle) or unwillingly staged/framed by the activists as in G13 (G13greenredturquoiseyellow). In all these events, though, a specific frame-work is defined, a series of acts are performed and something that can be termed as an image, or a sequence of images, emerges.

The radical feature of the sense-event is the inherent conceptualisation of time. Whereas mainstream politics – i.e. representational democracy - is firmly rooted in the pragmatism of everyday-time, direct action and the related forms of political activism, opens up image-time. As Slavoj Žižek states in the quote above, "...it is new 'in itself' and thus forever remains new."¹² Through the evolving imagery, direct action deals with world-views, other ways of thinking and acting existence, often far beyond what is normally perceived as 'possible'. By creating sense-events, the riots and the direct activism, manifests other world-views. Not as proposals or arguments for a different order or a "shift in relations of power and domination between actual socio-political agents, the redistribution of social control"¹³, as Žižek puts it, but as direct manifestations of those other worlds; acted out, performed in temporal redefinitions of time.

The sense-event creates a rupture in time. The rupture can be apocalyptic as in Stine Krøiers interpretation of Never Thrust A Cop, orgiastic as in The Bernadette Corporations film on the Black Bloc or existential as in the Silent Stands of the We Are All Khaled Said Movement.

In my inquiries on the sense-event I have encountered a set of other ideas, circling around the same complex field of activism, namely the concept of 'Active Time' in the writings of Stine Krøijer¹⁴, the concept of the 'Eros Effect' in the thinking of George N. Katsiaficas¹⁵, the 'Temporary Autonomous Zone' invented by the Hakim Bey¹⁶ and the concept of 'Exodus' by Paolo Virno. Even though these concepts vary from my idea of the sense-event as the constituting factor of contemporary activism, these terms have been decisive inspiration in various stages of the project and some of the scripts/performances in this project builds directly on these concepts.¹⁷

In the research inherent in this project I have used the idea of the sense-event not only as an analytical tool in analysing a series of specific events, but also as an artistic tool to re-enact or contemplate those same events as new sense-events. As probings of my thoughts on the original events I have set-up a series of performances – one for each original event – where I try to create new sense-events based on various ideas, data, information, images from the original events. This idea – to research an event by creating a new sense-event – of course creates a set of problems I have tried to overcome by various means in the different performances. The basic claim is that in this new sense-event we are able to contemplate the original event in an artistic manner. The research and the inherent thinking is artistic, or maybe the word aesthetic is better – aesthetic thinking. The sense-event is the laboratory where I claim to be researching. My idea is that only by establishing a situation where we are immersed into a sensorial experience of the problematics at hand, we are able to consider these problematics in an aesthetic manner – by aesthetic thinking. The sense-event is, thus, my bid on how artistic research can materialise.

The research done in this project is of course more extensive than that. There is a long process of selecting, observing and analysing the original events, another process of reading and thinking about other thoughts in the field, but these processes are quite similar to the research an academic researcher would have undertaken. I.e. it has been an interesting and revelatory experience for me to read the PhD thesis of Stine Krøijer – ‘FIGURATIONS OF THE FUTURE Forms and temporality of left radical politics in northern Europe’ – since it is dealing with almost the exact same events as I have chosen to research, but from her viewpoint as an anthropologist. Of course my viewpoint is artistic already in the initial process of selecting, observing and analysing the original events, which means that I see other things, other things seem important to me and most importantly, my analysis is based on my artistic knowledge and references. Still, it is in the probing of the collected material my research really claims to be artistic. Choosing to do this probing as performances, as new-sense events, is the crucial point in this process. This is where the artistic/aesthetic thinking is put to the test: Does it really produce any relevant results?

For artistic research to make sense, the main conclusions in the process of evaluating the material at hand has to be based on artistic/aesthetic thinking. In scientific research a laboratory experiment is a test of a theoretical question. Out of a theoretical analysis a question arises: We think that this is what is going on in a specific sector of nature, but is it really so? Then an experiment is set up, nature is put to test. The experiment will either prove the hypothesis right or wrong. In an artistic experiment, such as the sense-event, an answer like that is not possible. At least not in the case of my project here. There is not even a clear question asked. The sense-event rather creates a complex image where the answers are multiple and open-ended. The sense-event produces a temporal image, that can be considered and contemplated, but it doesn't produce a straight answer. As with all images the meaning is open, it is to be interpreted by whoever who wants to engage with it. To me, this is a fundamental feature of artistic research. It doesn't produce a straight answer.

What kind of answer is then produced in the sense-event? Well, let's look at the problems it create first.

First of all there is a problem of past and present. The original events – the riots and the activist events – happened in the past. The new sense-event evaluating the original event happens now. This is a question of representation: An action can never be repeated. The imagery it creates, happens in correspondance with the given context; the political circumstances, the spatial situation etc. This means that the imagery is both temporal and contextual. It happens there, once and for all. It is not possible to re-actualise such an image again. In a sense it is already always there. It exists as an image forever. How to evaluate this?

One possibility would be to re-enact the event in question. To re-create it as realistically as possible. This would in the best case create a situation, where the original event could be considered without the temporal context that constituted it as an event. In 2007 when I initiated this project, re-enactment was in vogue on the art-scene. Jeremy Deller's 'The Battle of Orgreave' and Mike Figgis documentary on it, both from 2001, had made a big impression and a string of other artists were using the format of re-enactment to re-visit past events, often controversial political events

is the near past. It was my initial intention to use re-enactment as the performative tool to inquire into the original events I were to chose as my case-studies. To create a kind of lab-situation where the original event could be re-enacted and studied in detail. This idea was founded on the presumption that there would be a form and an aesthetic style in the activism in question, that could be re-created and then analysed in its visual and performative appearance.

I gave this idea up for two reasons:

First of all the events I started investigating revealed themselves as so complex that a re-enactment would only scratch the surface of the inherent problematics – the imagery in a certain event evolves out of the given context and a given reality that is tied intricately to a specific moment in time . It involves the political momentum of a certain period and a certain temporal sequence of previous events. It involves an intense emotional and aesthetical role-play between the opposed participants in a conflict, also build up in an exact moment of time. I seemed to me that a re-enactment would isolate the aesthetic features of an event from its constituting temporal context and that this would be a misunderstanding of the role of aesthetics in those events.

The other reason has to do with my ideas of artistic research. What I wanted to do with this project as a whole was to test art as a research tool. Early on I took the decision not to use any kind of image-based documentary footage; no photos, videos or other kinds of documentary representations of the events chosen as subject for my investigations. These are all techniques of image reproduction based on a direct technical relation between the subject of the image and the resulting image. By omitting the documentary aspects of art, I wanted to focus on the creative act as a performative characteristic of art. I wanted to use the creative act as a research tool. Contemplating this I found that a strict re-enactment of an event would be too technical, in a documentary sense. If I had used these documentary techniques – photo, video, re-enactment – as my visual tools, the analysis would come after the documentary re-production. The scheme would be:

Event ----- visual documentation -----analysis

Of course documentary isn't as simple as I here describe it. A lot of analysis is included already in the process of documenting, but using it would lead me into a complex inquiry and postioning in the field of documentary that I felt would sidestep my intentions. What I was interested in establishing was a scheme like this:

Event-----data, information-----event/analysis

To test arts ability as a research tool, I thought it necessary to define the analysis as art, as aesthetic. What does this mean? A rational analysis of something is founded on a logic founded in language. In reason. Aesthetics aren't founded on the same kind of reason. The logic of aesthetics is founded in imagery. In sensorial information. What I wanted to do was to create aesthetic analysis. To establish a situation where the reasoning in the analysis is substituted with an aesthetic analysis. This aesthetic analysis takes the form of an event, of an image evolving in time. It is rather an interpretation than a strict analysis. This is the restriction that working with imagery instead of argument creates, but instead of a strict reason it offers analysis based in the sensorial.

Choosing the sense-event as the medium for my inquiries and my interpretations of the original events created another problem of representation; if not a realistic re-enactment of the original event, then how to incorporate the narration of that first event in the new sense-event? Here, I chose to perform the information I had gathered, all the documents and various statements found in my attempt to figure out what happened in the 'first place'. The information wouldn't point as directly to the past as a realistic re-enactment would. I.e. a manifesto is not bound to a specific moment in time, it works a text and a statement at any given time, it can thus be used as an element in a new ensemble, establishing a new situation. Using the information as elements in a new composition, marks a distance to the original event; we are here, now – and we cannot go back to the past, we are bound to look at the past event from a distance, a temporal distance. The new performance is thus able to establish a new situation, a new sense-event, in which a new now happens. This new situation refers back to the original event in various ways, but it is not an attempt at re-creating it. There is no attempt to go back there. Instead we can contemplate a new ensemble of percepts relating to the problematics of the first event. We can contemplate them directly in a new ensemble of sensorial experience, now. Not as a futile attempt at going back.

In the new sense-event an image evolves. It is not the same image that evolved in the original event. The first image happened there, once and for all. It is not possible to re-actualise such an image again, but by performing various information from the original element and carefully sampling this information into the presence of the new situation, grounding it in the present context, a new image might emerge. The new image is an actualisation, not of the first image, but of the problematics inherent in the first image.

Imagery is slippery. It is open for interpretation, and it doesn't produce a straight answer. Even a strong image might not reveal what it is an image of; it has a life of itself. In 'Revolution By Night' when I scratch the lacque of the car with a large knife, a strong image evolves – it is an obvious symbolic demolition of one of the prime symbols of private ownership – but it is not so obvious that this image is part of an interpretation of a certain sequence of riots that happened right after the demolition of the Youth House in Copenhagen in 2007. To narrate this connection and similar connections throughout the nine performances comprising this project, I have invented the figure of artist/researcher. This meta-voice introduces the references and guides the audiences through the performances. The artist/researcher even offers analysis and interprets what is happening on-the-go.

This figure is both an attempt to solve the problem of the slippery image and to manifest this problem as an inherent obstacle in artistic research. If we are to take the concept of artistic research seriously this problem arises unavoidably. Imagery is slippery.

The artist/researcher takes on different roles throughout the nine performances. In some she is strictly outside the event, commenting. In others, like here in 'Clone Wars' she is part of an intricate roleplay between audience, performers and artist/researcher that becomes part of the sense-event of the performance. The artist/researcher is even played by various persons throughout the performances. Sometimes it's myself, sometimes it's an actress, sometimes it's a voice-over. These various personas position the artist/researcher differently in each performance and the relation between the sense-event and the meta-text is thus modulated to fit the

specific content of each performance.

The figure of the artist/researcher is not always as straightforward as she appears. Especially here in 'Clone Wars', there is a kind of pretense at play. The artist/researcher pretend to introduce the audience to the performative quest of the three figures on the green island. Instead she is abducting the audience, staging them as passive participants in an act controlled by someone else. This play with the distribution of roles between the artist/researcher and the audience throughout the performances is also an ironic play with the concept of artist research; In this respect the artist/researcher takes on and experiments with different modes of what such a role can imply. In a slightly humoristic way she acts out the various obstacles of artistic research.

In general the voice of the artist/researcher creates a meta-text that is accompanying the sense-event. We are in two places at once; we are inside the sense-event experiencing it as sensorial impulses, as aesthetics, and we are simultaneously outside of the sense-event, contemplating it from the outside, as an illustration of the problematics presented in the meta-text. These two levels of information doesn't necessarily fit. Sometimes the imagery is a fitting illustration of something in the meta-text, sometimes it doesn't fit at all. The discrepancy between these two levels is a point in itself. The aesthetic interpretation occurring in the sense-event is never equivalent with the analysis presented in the meta-text.

This is the point and the problem – both in the original events and my research events. The imagery produced in the sense-events communicates as form. As Stine Krøijer states: "The form is the message."¹⁸ This form has a logic of its own. It is based in the sensorial and it is aesthetic. The message of the form is not an illustration of a content formulated elsewhere as political theory – it IS the message in itself. That is why all the theory, all the text and all the discourse produced on the direct activism – by me, by Stine Krøijer, by Mikkel Bolt, by everyone else discussing activism from a distance – is only approximate. There will always be a discrepancy. The images evolving in the sense-events of activism speaks in a language of their own, emerging in their specific contexts and their specific temporal circumstances. The politics of these images is a politics of the senses.

On a smaller scale my research events share these features. The core of the research is the series of sense-events attempted in the nine performances. The meta-text of the artist/researcher is sometimes inside and sometimes outside of these events. The analysis and the commentary texts – here in this written part of the project – can only be approximate. These texts surround the sense-events, discusses them, but they can never be anything but approximations, estimates. The sense-events can never be described thoroughly. They are to be experienced, either as a temporal event or as an image afterwards. The analysis and the reflections are only approximations. The answers produced in the sense-events have to be experienced.

**On Resonance, *Budhaditya Chattopadhyay* in conversation with Frans Jacobi
(4.1.4.2.)**

Please see the video-documentation of this conversation.

Notes:

- ¹ Slavoj Žižek : "Robespierre or the "Divine Violence" of Terror" in: Robespierre: Virtue and Terror (London: Verso, 2007), p. xxxv
- ² Gilles Deleuze: *Logique du sens* (Paris: Les Édition de Minuit 1969)
- ³ Gilles Deleuze: *Negotiations* (New York: Columbia University Press 1995), p. 171
- ⁴ Again, it is not my intention here to give any kind of comprehensive introduction to Deleuze's version of the Sense-Event, just a hint on the premises for my appropriation and transformation of the term. I owe my very short and superficial presentation of Deleuze's ideas on the Sense-Event to the danish interpreter of Deleuze, Bodil Marie Thomsen and her highly informative essay '*Alt stof udsender billeder. Om det visuelle som begivenhed*' (All matter projects 'images'. On the visual as event), in '*FLUGTLINIER. Om Deleuzes filosofi*' (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanums Forlag 2001), p. 217-244.
- ⁵ This example with the tree is taken from Bodil Marie Thomsen's text, she refers it to Deleuze and Husserl.
- ⁶ In Bodil Marie Thomsen's introduction to this thought-complex, she starts with a discussion of the phenomena of the mirror, taken from a classic text by Lucrezi.
- ⁷ This elaboration on the film-strip and the screen are my own responsibility, misleading as it might be.
- ⁸ '*Maneuvering*': A panel discussion on performance and performativity with Dominic Johnson, Mathias Danbolt, Al Masson and Mary Coble. Overgaden, Institute of Contemporary Art, Copenhagen. August 2nd, 2012
- ⁹ *Fighting Cocks* was part of *Commitment Issues: A Night of Performance*, FADO Performance Art Network, Toronto, 2011. *The Sound of Fighting Cocks* were presented as part of Mary Coble's solo exhibition *Maneuvering* at Overgaden, Institute of Contemporary Art, Copenhagen, 2012
- ¹⁰ see note 1
- ¹¹ Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari: 'Qu'est-ce que la philosophie?' (Paris: Les Édition de Minuit 1991), danish translation 'Hvad er filosofi?' (Copenhagen: Gyldendal 1996), p. 223
- ¹² Slavoj Žižek : "Robespierre or the "Divine Violence" of Terror" in: Robespierre: Virtue and Terror (London: Verso, 2007), p. xxxv
- ¹³ Slavoj Žižek : "Robespierre or the "Divine Violence" of Terror" in: Robespierre: Virtue and Terror (London: Verso, 2007), p. xxxv
- ¹⁴ see Stine Krøijer: *FIGURATIONS OF THE FUTURE Forms and temporality of left radical politics in northern Europe*, PhD thesis (Copenhagen: Department of Anthropology, University of Copenhagen 2011)
- ¹⁵ George N. Katsiaticas: The Eros Effect (<http://www.eroseffect.com/articles/eroseffectpaper.PDF>)
- ¹⁶ Hakim Bey: The Temporary Autonomous Zone (<http://www.t0.or.at/hakimbey/taz/taz3a.htm>), included here as Appendix 3.3.5.4.
- ¹⁷ For further introductions to these concepts see the commentaries to specific scripts/performances where they are used. Active Time is used in 'Revolution By Night' (3.1.), the Eros Effect in 'Silent Stand' (5.1.) and Exodus and the Temporary Autonomous Zone in 'On Water' (3.3.).
- ¹⁸ Stine Krøijer: *FIGURATIONS OF THE FUTURE Forms and temporality of left radical politics in northern Europe*, PhD thesis (Copenhagen: Department of Anthropology, University of Copenhagen 2011) p. 226