

HOW TO MAKE THE INVISIBLE STAY INVISIBLE:  
THREE CASE STUDIES IN  
MICROPOLITICAL ENGINEERING

by

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## Chapter 0

### AGAINST VISIBILITY (IN ART AND ELSEWHERE)

These complex, distributed and highly networked times are witnessing a proliferation in artistic practices that have nothing to do with *making things visible*. Westerners are enmeshed in a long history of desiring to make things visible (the Age of Enlightenment meaning literally “to shine light upon”). Recently, there has been mention in contemporary art circles of *making the invisible visible* which can refer to diverse practices such as unearthing “hidden” interior thoughts and emotions (Roberto Matta), pointing out social problems for an art audience (Lucy Orta) or for a particular community (Krzysztof Wodiczko), or visualizing complex computer operations (Martin Wattenberg). Though interesting for various reasons, the problem with projects that make things visible is that they remain in the realm of the symbolic, the didactic and the molar. Their function is to describe reality and their assumption is that this is possible and/or desirable and/or the role of the artist in contemporary society.

This paper is interested in making a case (or three cases) for artistic practices that provide an open platform to experiment with reality as opposed to those that claim to represent a reality, however marginalized or minor. Instead of symbolic art objects, many contemporary artists are producing “technologies of emergent experience<sup>1</sup>” that I would like to term “micropolitical machines”.

Micropolitical machines are social technologies engineered by distributed agents to produce experiences of dissonance, complexifying encounters, qualitative difference, multiplicity, disrecognition and invisibility which counteract the quantitative, over-determining technologies of the Control Society. This is the

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<sup>1</sup> Massumi 2002, 192

territory of the micro-: instead of relying on representation, symbolism or didactics, these projects traffic in affect to effect social transformation.

Chapter 1

CASE #1: WHAT IS MICROPOLITICAL AND WHAT IS NOT

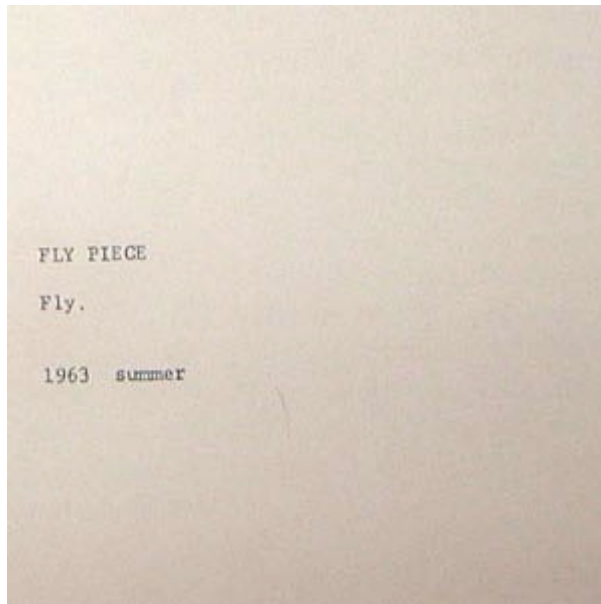


Figure 1 *Fly Piece* from *Grapefruit*

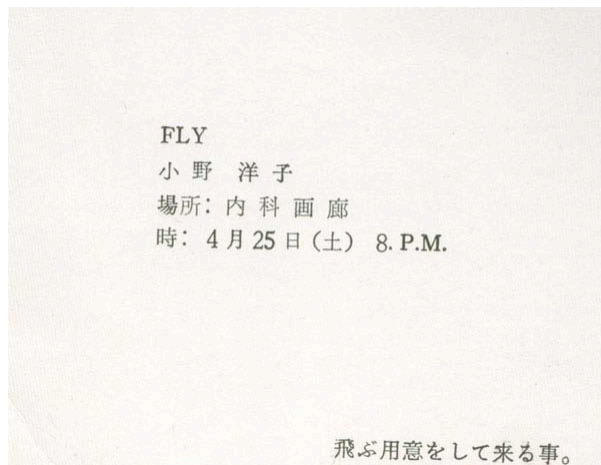


Figure 2 Postcard for the first performance of *Fly Piece*

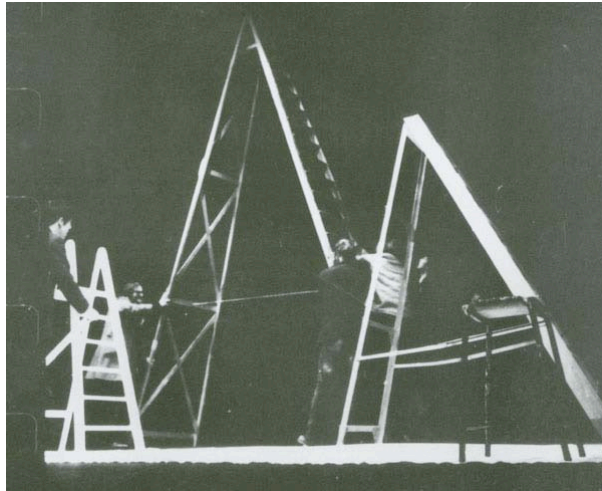


Figure 3 *Fly Piece* at the Jeanetta Cochrane Theater, London, 1966

*Fly Piece* is one of a number of Yoko Ono's instruction works that had a multiplicity of manifestations from instruction to performances situated in various contexts. Ono wrote the instruction in 1963 and published it in her compendium of instruction works, *Grapefruit*, in 1964 (Figure 1). Ono then created postcard invitations of *Fly Piece* (Figure 2) and mailed them to announce the first performance of *Fly Piece* at the Naiqua Gallery in Tokyo. At this performance,

...she [Ono] was absent, but her artist friends – Anthony Cox, Nam June Paik, Shigeko Kubota, Akasegawa Genpei, and Kosugi Takehisa, among others – assembled at the gallery and “flew” from a ladder, each in his or her own way.

(Yoko Ono et. al. 2000, 154)

*Fly Piece* was performed more than ten times in other locations (in different variations, such as inviting the audience to jump off the ladder, see Figure 3); incorporated into exhibitions, and published as literature. *Fly Piece* was also manifested as a series of billboards, posters, and T-shirts for the Anderson Gallery in Richmond, VA (1996, Figure 4) and as an album (*Fly*, 1971) and a film (*Fly*, 1970) in which a fly crawls on a woman's naked body (Figure 5).



Figure 4 Billboard installed in Richmond, VA, 1996



Figure 5 Film still from *Fly*, copyright Yoko Ono

There are numerous entry points through which one can discuss this work, however I want to focus particularly on the virtual qualities of the instruction work and its relationship to multiplicity. Using a single word – *Fly* - as the instruction, Ono and others produced a series of diverse embodiments in mediums ranging from billboards to performances to promotional materials to film. The indeterminacy of the single word as a call to action affords a certain potentiality and produces an agency of its own that acts as an open door to future, concrete, embodied engagement.



While we often think of “art” as the product of a process, the end result of the artist’s engagement with a set of materials and concepts, *Fly Piece* functions as the beginning of multiple, perhaps infinite, processes that tend towards realization of its instructions. It is not even possible to discuss this work as an “conceptual idea” meant to be realized, for ideas have a form, a determination and an actuality that is absent from this work (contrast this piece to the work of conceptual artist Sol LeWitt, for example, in which all aspects of the work are determined in the idea). There is a flatness to this field of potentiality: no particular realization, medium or agent is privileged. Rather, those future events are all included as part of *Fly Piece* before they occur.

This is what makes *Fly Piece* into a sort of open-ended multiplication machine. Not only does the piece afford an indeterminate quantitative number of future realizations, but each individual realization of *Fly Piece* is qualitatively different from the originating instruction to *Fly Piece*. This qualitative multiplicity is an important component in Deleuze’s concept of the virtual. Deleuze argues that “the characteristic of virtuality is to exist in such a way that it is actualized by being differentiated and is forced to differentiate itself, to create its lines of differentiation in order to be actualized” (Patton 2000, 26). The notion of differentiation is linked to a difference in kind: a qualitative shift which “appears in pure duration: It is an internal multiplicity of succession, of fusion, of organization, of heterogeneity, of qualitative discrimination, or of difference in kind; it is a virtual and continuous multiplicity that cannot be reduced to numbers (Patton 2000, 26).

*Fly Piece* produces an encounter with the virtual through its call to indeterminate action. No matter how one chooses to realize the piece, it will be supremely different from the instruction piece itself: a singular departure that sets up a new trajectory, a new field, and a new series of affordances.

### **The multiplication of desire**

What is most socially and politically relevant about this kind of encounter with the virtual is its relationship to the multiplication of desire. Bio-power, specifically as manifest in the marketing machines and mass communication apparatuses of consumer societies, operate through the creation, codification and distribution of consumer desires. These are also multiplication machines. Their function is one of quantitative multiplication of desire: to increase the number of individual people that will buy a particular, defined product such as Tide or a pair of Manolo Blahnik sandals<sup>2</sup>. The realization of this desire, in each case, is overdetermined: a quantitative, statistical outcome which was the basis for the creation of the desire. And the sandals and the Tide do not deliver on the promise made or the desire incited.

*Fly Piece*, on the other hand, is the production of an encounter that multiplies desire qualitatively. Its simple system (instructional call-to-action) is entirely about the production of desire, for it calls for the establishment of new connections and relationships between the body that encounters the instruction and the surrounding world. As Deleuze & Parnet state, “Desire is revolutionary because it always wants more connections and assemblages” (Deleuze et. al. 2002, 79).

Deleuze and Guattari are careful to distinguish between “assemblages of desire that are fixed or delimited in particular ways, shut off from all but certain specified relations to the outside, and on the other, more fluid and open-ended assemblages in which new connections and new forms of relation to the outside are always possible, even at the risk of transforming the assemblage into some other kind of body.” (Patton 2000, 77) The former, fixed type of desire is akin to the production of consumer desires, which Deleuze might also label as a “multiplicity of magnitude” (Deleuze & Guattari 1987, 483). The latter, akin to

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<sup>2</sup> Many marketing companies actually refer to this as the “multiplier effect”.

how Ono's piece functions, is a multiplicity of distance where, "Distances are not, strictly speaking, indivisible; they can be divided precisely in cases where the situation of one determination makes it part of another. But unlike magnitudes, they cannot divide without changing in nature each time...Distance is therefore a set of ordered differences, in other words, differences that are enveloped in one another in such a way that it is possible to judge which is larger or smaller, but not their exact magnitudes" (Deleuze & Guattari 1987, 483).

Thus, where the marketing and consumer apparatus produces a closed, metric system of desire, *Fly Piece* is a qualitative multiplication machine grounded in difference, distance and duration that articulates an open-ended desiring based on the capacity of a body to form assemblages, forge connections, and create new relations with the world. This, as we will see, is the basis of a micropolitics.

### **And what is not micropolitical?**

It is perhaps useful to discuss micropolitics and multiplication in contrast to an example of something that does not function at all micropolitically. Standing in contrast to the multiplicative properties of a piece like *Fly Piece* is *Bunker Hill Monument*, a 1998 work by Krzysztof Wodiczko. Wodiczko was disturbed by the Charlestown, MA, neighborhood's high murder rate and began interviewing mothers from Charlestown whose children had been murdered. Fear of retribution kept many residents from even reporting the murders to the police and so Wodiczko asked them to speak about their personal experiences of freedom and tyranny. He edited the interviews into a 30-minute video that he projected for three consecutive nights in December 1998 on the Bunker Hill monument, the last stop on Boston's "Freedom Trail", and a symbol of Charlestown's history.

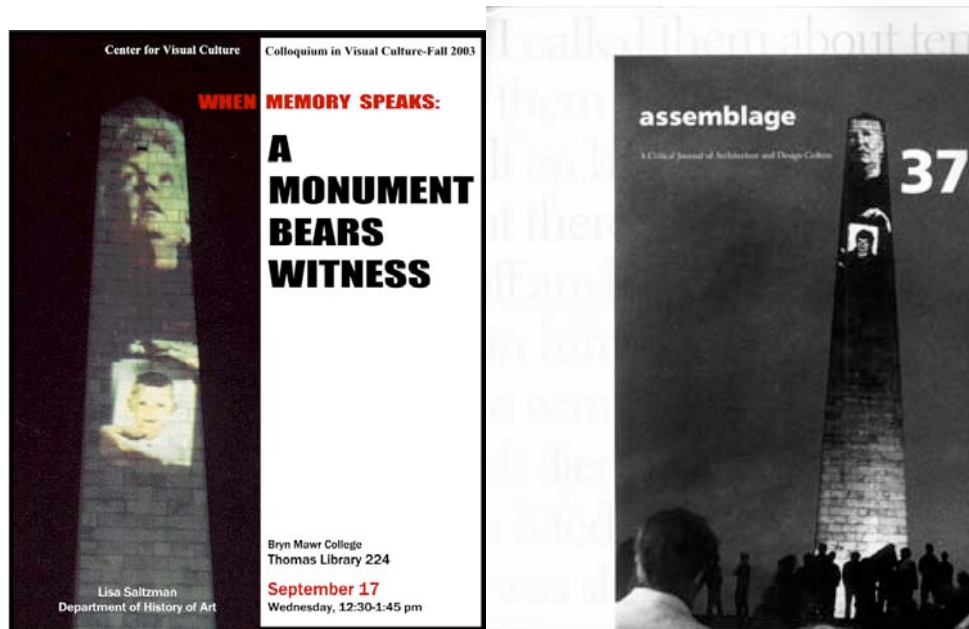


Figure 6 Two images from Bunker Hill Monument

Wodiczko explains the project in terms of a battle against silence, invisibility and oppression:

For several hours on three consecutive evenings in September the southern face of the *Bunker Hill Monument* in Charlestown is illuminated with video image projections. These projections add motion images of the human face, human gestures and sounds of the human voice to the abstract shape of the obelisk. It becomes the gigantic human figure of a private citizen, and actual person -- a Charlestown or South Boston resident -- who speaks freely and boldly of her or his personal experiences and struggles for 'life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness' and for 'justice for all.'

This historic monument, dedicated to the heroes of a Revolutionary War battle, becomes a contemporary memorial to the present-day heroes or heroines who continue another battle on the same (sacred) ground. This battle against tyranny and oppression continues still, inflicted now by murderous and unpunished urban violence and perpetuated by speechlessness and silence, imposed from without and from within. For three evenings, the Bunker Hill monument asserts its First Amendment rights and speaks of what it has seen and of what it has heard<sup>3</sup>.

It is certain that this project was moving and transformative for many of the parties involved, however, I want to discuss it here as a counterpoint to the multiplication machine of Yoko Ono. Though both pieces operate in the social and political realms, they do so in a fundamentally different way.

Mathematically speaking, *Bunker Hill Monument* operates at the level of the symbolic, which is to say that one thing in the world corresponds to one other thing in the artwork. So, one monument equals one private citizen, one Revolutionary War battle equals one contemporary battle, one set of heroes & heroines equals one set of modern day equivalents. Manipulating these symbols with skill and drama, Wodiczko literally monumentalizes these women's personal experiences by equating them with the monument in order to call attention to social issues such as violence and fear in the Charlestown neighborhood.

Wodiczko does not replace the grand narrative of the monument or create a line of flight in relationship to it, but rather uses it strategically to assert that the mothers of murdered children in Charlestown deserve an equally grand, noble narrative. Leveraging history and public perception, the piece works to highlight a social issue that had remained invisible. "Silence and invisibility are the biggest

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<sup>3</sup>The Strictly Architectural, "Krzysztof Wodiczko's Bunker Hill Monument Projection," *Assemblage: A Critical Journal of Architecture & Design Culture*, no. 37 (1998).

enemies of democracy," Wodiczko told the New York Times. "...If you cannot speak, none of your other constitutional rights can be exercised<sup>4</sup>".

Rather than operating as a multiplication machine of micropolitics, *Bunker Hill Monument* functions in the macropolitical dimension, the realm of "conflicts between molar entities such as social classes, sexes and nations" (Patton 2000, 43). Wodiczko's project seeks to pull the molecular (the particular mothers of Charlestown, the particular children who died, the particular reflections on the Charlestown climate) into the realm of the molar, to universalize their confessions into a discourse about freedom, fear, tyranny, and democracy. Instead of remaining specific and singular, these particularities are transformed into didactic symbols that function to comment, warn and instruct society. Rendering the invisible "visible", then means displacing the micro- to the macro: the particular to the universal, the specific instance to the symbolic instruction.

In the realm of the symbolic, there is no room for qualitative difference or open-ended multiplicity. Things are too busy representing other things. These representations and correlations correspond to the quantitative multiplicity described by Deleuze and Guattari as "arborescent": "Arborescent systems are 'hierarchical systems with centres of signification and subjectification' (Deleuze & Guattari 1987, 16). They are 'unifiable' objects in the sense that their boundaries can be clearly defined and their parts connected according to an invariant principle of unity" (Patton 2000, 43). *Bunker Hill Monument* is exactly such an arborescent system. Its parts – interviews, projection, monument, artist, showings, audience – have clearly defined connections and relationships. There is little to no room for a process of open-ended reconfiguration: the interviewees cannot, for example, project images of their refrigerators onto the artist; the

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<sup>4</sup> web.mit.edu, "Wodiczko's Bunker Hill projection opens", 23 September 1998, available from <http://web.mit.edu/newsoffice/1998/bunker-0923.html>; Internet; accessed 29 August 2005.

monument and the artist cannot transform each other except in specific ways; the audience cannot make a small monument to the history of projection, etc. I am not asserting that any of these would be in any way “better” than what Wodiczko did (all much worse in fact), but simply trying to make the point that the relationships amongst the parts of this system are closed.

The realm of qualitative multiplicity exists, in a certain sense, in the potentiality of decisions that are deferred to a future process, a future agent, a future audience or circumstance. This is when and where the abstract machine of multiplication begins to produce a micropolitics, a micropolitics which, moreover, always remains in and functions in the realm of the “invisible”. In the case of *Bunker Hill Monument*, no decision is deferred, no relationship left open-ended. This is not a multiplication machine. This is not a micropolitics.

## Chapter 2

### CASE #2: INFINITELY SMALL AGENTS

Lecce - New York, 1999

In November 1999 I was invited to take part in the exhibition “Out of the Blue” in Lecce, Italy. Being unable to go, I sent the following statement to be exhibited.

“Cesare Pietroiusti is an artist who, for family reasons, will spend the next months mostly in New York. Every visitor to this show can ask him (anonymously or not) to do something in New York. Anything can be requested to be done, except for acts that could be offensive to others or to the artist himself”.

Forty six requests were made, and between March and November 2000, they were carried out (Cesare Pietroiusti 2001, 28).

During the realization of *Lecce – New York*, Pietroiusti spat from the top of the Empire State Building, made a visit to Tom and John, delivered a message of love to David, and spent seven minutes with his eyes closed in the place where John Lennon was shot. These were four of the forty-six requests that were made to him by gallery visitors in Lecce, Italy, and communicated overseas so that he could act on them in New York City.





Visit Tom (a pediatrician) and John (a set designer).  
Request n. 5, by Maria.



Go to the top of the Empire State Building  
and spit into the void.  
Request n. 25, anonymous.

Figure 7 Two of the forty-six requests for the project *Lecce-New York* by Cesare  
Pietroiusti

In a seemingly unrelated project, *The Institute for Applied Autonomy* released a piece of software called *txtmob* just before the Republican National Convention (RNC) in New York City in 2004. Activists with cell phones signed up to a text messaging list serve. Once they had signed up to be part of a text list serve, each member could send messages to the group. The software was used during the RNC to alert protesters to police arrests at particular locations, to broadcast strategic meeting points (e.g. a message like “18:15:50 Tue., Aug 31: A31 party mtg at SE corner of Union Sq.” would appear on one’s cell phone), and to coordinate foot traffic.

There are many entry points to talk about these two projects: *txtmob* and *Lecce-New York*. For the purposes of this of this paper, I want to focus on the way in which both works make complex assemblages possible through the distribution of agency and the production of new circuits of desire. This is what Deleuze and Guattari call a “war-machine” (note that it has nothing to do with waging actual war).

First, however, let us look at what is going on in these projects. In *Lecce-New York*, Pietroiusti has developed a set of behavioral protocols for himself, the Gallery space in Lecce and other indeterminate spaces and people in Italy and New York. This sets up a circuit of desire that travels through an unknown Italian person in the gallery space, to the gallery space and its administration, to Pietroiusti in New York, to the unknown place, person or action he is to accomplish in New York. All of these things together constitute a complex assemblage with a distributed agency and set of desires all its own. When Pietroiusti spits off of the Empire State Building, he is not simply a proxy or “stand-in” for another person in a 1-1 relationship, but operating with the agency of this entire assemblage or circuit. Just as Yoko Ono’s *Fly Piece* produced things and actions that were qualitatively different from the original instruction work, Pietroiusti’s behavioral system produces results that are qualitatively different from just the structure alone. Built into this behavioral system is an abstract machine or an open platform to structure desire (People in Italy will submit actions. The gallery will communicate them. Pietroiusti himself will do them. People in New York will welcome him or at least not stop him). However, the assemblage is not constituted by this abstract structure, but by the singular acts, such as Pietroiusti’s spitting off the Empire State Building, that enact and express this structure. So when Pietroiusti throws a rose off of the Brooklyn Bridge, it is the assemblage, as a complex of structure, desires, and particular events that throws a rose together as many parts.

### **Social Protocol, Software Protocol**

Where Pietroiusti sets up an open system based primarily in protocol for human behavior, *txtmob*, a web application by *The Institute for Applied Autonomy*, uses software protocol as a platform for the production of new circuits of desire. Though *txtmob* as software is free and open for use in a variety of contexts, it was developed explicitly for the Democratic National Convention (DNC) in Boston

and the Republican National Convention (RNC) in New York City in 2004. I want to focus particularly on its use during the RNC in 2004.

Through various means, including partnerships, press releases, word-of-mouth and email, the Institute disseminated information about *txtmob* to activists before the RNC. The Institute partnered with activist groups in New York such as the NYC Comms Collective, the A31 collective, Times Up! NY, CounterConvention.org, Openflows, City College radicals, and the 12th Street church crew. Approximately 6000 people signed up to use the service. The text messages sent through *txtmob* notified activists of police locations and moment-to-moment changes in the location and configuration of protestors. A single text message could produce two hundred new protestors in a location in a matter of minutes. Using *txtmob*, activists bypassed radio and broadcast media reporting but still leveraged the power of a one-to-many broadcast format for the purposes of grassroots, real-time political organization in physical space.

*Txtmob* also constitutes a complex assemblage or circuit of desire, with loosely-grouped individual agents (organizations, people, cell phones) in a particular, located context (New York during the RNC). The software and the context function as an abstract machine structuring this assemblage and supporting a multiplicity of expressions of it. It is important to note that the *txtmob* software did not tell protestors where to go or what to do, rather the software created a channel, a passage, or a circuit through which organizations and activists could produce these messages themselves and create new linkages between themselves. The software should in no way be considered a “neutral” technology, however, for it has an agency of its own as its creation, dissemination and usage were grounded in a politics of resistance that cannot be separated from the technology itself.

Politically speaking, *txtmob* and *Lecca – New York* both function, in different ways, as war-machines with important connections to the production and distribution of desire.

There are no internal drives in desire, only assemblages. Desire is always assembled; it is what the assemblage determines it to be. The assemblage that draws lines of flight is on the same level as they are, and is of the war-machine type. Mutations spring from this machine, which in no way has war as its object, but rather the emission of quanta of deterritorialization, the passage of mutant flows (in this sense, all creation is brought about by a war-machine) (Deleuze & Guattari 1987, 229).

### **What's a War-Machine?**

A war-machine “in no way has war as its object” if we take “war” to mean the imposition of violence on a land or people. Rather, as Patton states, “The real object of Deleuze and Guattari’s war-machine concept is not war but the conditions of creative mutation and change” (Patton 2000, 110). Patton suggests that “metamorphosis machine” might be a better term to use in this context: “A metamorphosis machine would then be one that does not simply support the repetition of the same but rather engenders the production of something altogether different” (Patton 2000, 110). A metamorphosis machine leverages *connections* against apparatuses of capture or domination, such as the State, and can consist of varied things: “an ‘ideological’, scientific, or artistic movement can be a potential war-machine, to the precise extent to which it draws, *in relation to a phylum*, a plane of consistency, a creative line of flight, a smooth space of displacement” (Deleuze & Guattari 1987, 110, italics mine).

The “phylum” in relation to which the war-machine draws its line of flight, as quoted by Deleuze above, is understood to be an ordered, normalized social system, such as the State (which is the example that Patton and Deleuze & Guattari use most frequently). However, the phylum need not be exclusively the

State. In the case of *txtmob*, for example, the phylum might consist of an assemblage of the State (in the form of police formations, rules & regulations for protester activity, permit-granting systems from the City, physical barricades, et al) in conjunction with the mass media apparatus (journalists, news organizations, broadcasting equipment, satellites, and listeners) present to cover the convention. These two groupings – State and mass media presences – form a conjunction of forces that will oversee, regulate and disseminate the event of the protests in a codified manner. These forces ultimately play a major role in producing the event for the people present and for society at large.

In this case, the State/mass media apparatus, conceived of as a “phylum” or an “apparatus of capture” activates and produces a fundamentally different kind of space than that which is produced by *txtmob* operating in the same context. Again, as in the case of Yoko Ono, there is a distinction between quantitative and qualitative characteristics. The State/Mass-Media apparatus of capture uses a linear, metric means of yielding power. As a body whose connections and relationships are highly regulated, it can only increase its power through the formal addition of more bodies. This might consist of adding police, helicopters, satellites, commentators or camerapeople, however, the potential relationships between these entities are pre-determined in many ways, which is to say that it is highly improbable that police would invent a new way to utilize satellites or that commentators and helicopters would form new partnerships with camerapeople. The channels between these groups and entities are simply not open in an apparatus of capture.

Read against the phylum of the State/Mass-media apparatus, *txtmob* draws a line of flight that operates not in a one-to-one reaction against the apparatus of capture (The purpose of *txtmob* is not to protest the mass-media coverage of the event or the police presence, for example), but rather as the producer of a

qualitatively different kind of space in which a multiplicity of new relationships, usages, partnerships and connections become possible. Diverse protestor groups with specialized interests, individuals, journalists, alternative news organizations and organized marches signed up and used *txtmob*. Instead of an identity-based phylum, *txtmob* constitutes a “machinic phylum” – an abstract structure composed of non-similar parts – that operates in a fluid, distributed space to produce new channels, circuits and emergent outcomes.

Pietrojusti’s *Lecce-New York* project also functions as a war-machine that produces a line of flight in relationship to a phylum, however, the apparatus of capture in this case is the codified space of the art gallery as an institution of cultural presentation. The presentation of visual art is, typically, a normalized experience: There are art objects in a physical space selected by an arbiter of culture (say, a Curator, Gallerist, Collector, Panel of Experts, or Artist); visitors go to the space and look at the objects.

As in the case of the State-Mass Media apparatus of capture, the Art Gallery also functions through regulated, metric relationships between collectors, gallerists, museums, curators, archivists, libraries, auction houses and more. *Lecce-New York* not only functions at the level of institutional critique, but also as an affirmative commitment to utilize the space of the institution and the system of the “art world” to produce a multiplicity of new relationships and connections through it. *Lecce-New York* draws a line of flight to physical spaces and temporalities altogether outside of the gallery space and exhibition duration, but which nonetheless utilize the gallery space and exhibition format in entirely new ways. Instead of presenter of objects, Pietrojusti transforms the gallery into something qualitatively different: a link in a chain of distributed communications, people and events. And instead of the gallerist or curator or other “cultural expert” operating as an arbiter of contemporary culture, Pietrojusti invites visitors to the gallery

space to submit social actions for remote performance. The project functions as a war-machine in that Pietroiusti, the gallery visitors, the Gallery, the curator, the exhibition, Lecce, New York, and certain New York spaces and residents actively produce connections and relationships that are qualitatively different from those circumscribed by the “art world”.

*Lecce-New York* and *txtmob* create new circuits of desire – new reasons and drives for people, places, and things to assemble with each other – that stand outside of the apparatuses of capture in a given environment/context. Though they may begin with irony, resistance or institutional critique, these projects are not engaged in a macropolitical revolution or a utopian project but rather in the production of a new, open configuration of the world: the production of virtualities. As Deleuze and Guattari state: “*Imitation is the propagation of a flow; opposition is binarization, the making binary of flows; invention is a conjugation or connection of different flows*” (Deleuze & Guattari 1987, 219). These projects produce inventions, micropolitics, beginnings through the distribution of agency and the development of open platforms of action and communication.

### Chapter 3

#### CASE #3: HOW TO MAKE THE INVISIBLE STAY INVISIBLE

S. Maria delle Croci, Ravenna, 23 Dicembre 1995

I opened all the doors in a 17<sup>th</sup> century church in the center of Ravenna, now used as an exhibition space. These were the main and secondary entrances, the doors that open onto adjacent spaces from the nave (boiler room, toilets, storage spaces, and hallways), and, finally, the doors that open onto a small garden, a nearby gym, and again onto the street. (Cesare Pietroiusti 2002)

There is a difference between an experience of recognition (“I see”, “I get it”) versus the production of an experience of dissonance (“What is this? Where am I? Who are you?”). Where Wodiczko’s work produced a symbolic type of recognition in order to make visible perceived social problems, pieces like *txtmob* produce an experience in which what was previously visible is clearly contested and repositioned through the engineering of a complexifying encounter. Instead of making the invisible visible, these projects work to make the *visible invisible*.



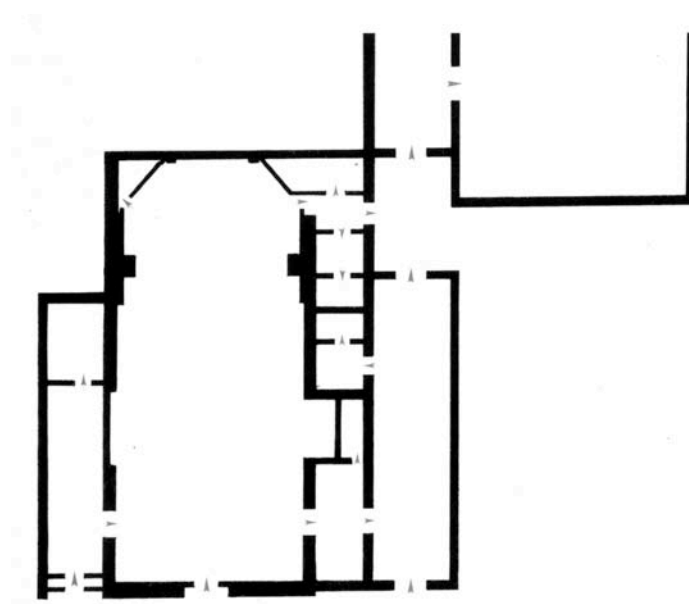


Figure 8 S. Maria Delle Croci, floor plan of the church with all doors open

But what about projects like the simple one above in which Cesare Pietroiusti opens all of the doors inside a church in Ravenna? Without fanfare or announcement, the visitor might not notice a thing has changed. She would walk in, walk around, walk out, perhaps never realizing that she did not push open a single door. Can we talk about the micropolitics of a project that functions in the realm of the invisible? Is it possible to discuss the efficacy and affect of a project that makes what is invisible *still-invisible-but-in-a-different-way*?

Performer Paul Couillard uses the term “liminal performance” to describe the kind of performance work that takes place on, near, or beyond the boundaries of conscious experience:

It is a phrase I sometimes use to talk about performance work that sits at the edge of "notice-ability". In other words, the actions of the performance are subtle in the sense that they may or may not be recognized by an audience as a performance. Many people may come upon the action and not realize that anything out of the ordinary is going on. Others may notice something as out-of-the-ordinary without recognizing it as a performance -- which suggests that they would have to do some mental work to integrate the actions or behaviour witnessed into their view of the world.

I've also used the phrase "liminal performance" in reference to work where the action may be nearly invisible, but its effects can be felt. Using the word "liminal" points to the idea that these are performances that play with the borderline between what is sensed and what is not sensed.<sup>5</sup>

We have been speaking of terms such as visibility and invisibility, as if these are terms with clearly demarcated boundaries and common understandings, but here Couillard refers to an action that "may be nearly invisible" and a borderline between "what is sensed and what is not sensed". This begs exactly that question, what *is* sensed and what *is not* sensed? And what are the implications for a micropolitics? Why might opening all the doors to a church constitute, in fact, the production of a line of flight in the same way that *txtmob* constitutes a line of flight from the State/Mass Media apparatus at the RNC or in the way that *Corporate Commands* by the Institute for Infinitely Small Things constitutes a line of flight from the corporate apparatus.

### **Microperceptions are recursive**

What is sensed, according to Brian Massumi, is not at all the same as what is visible. "The vast majority of the world's sensations are nonconscious" (Massumi 2002, 16). These sensations constitute "microperceptions" – felt relations that are too small to enter perception. While the physiological details are outside the scope of this paper, the basic idea is that there is a half-second delay between the

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<sup>5</sup> Email interview between Paul Couillard and kanarinka. January 27, 2005.

onset of brain activity and a *conscious* awareness of the event. The delay is called the Libet Lag after the scientist who discovered it in the 1970s. Not only is there a half-second lag between stimulus and awareness, but further studies showed that stimuli that occurred *during* the half-second lag (post-initial stimulus but before the conscious recognition of it) qualitatively affected the outcome of the lag. The implications of this are enormous. As Massumi states, “Experience smudges” (Massumi 2002, 196), and it does not just smudge cleanly, but it smudges recursively:

Say at .01 seconds a second loop begins even before the half-second loop that began at .00 has had a chance to run its course. At .02 seconds another begins, but at .015 seconds there will have been an intervening beginning, and also at .0125. You’re left with an infinite multiplication of recursively durational emergent awarenesses, madly smudging each other. You get an exponentially self-complicating relational mess (Massumi 2002, 196).

This infinite multiplication of awarenesses constitutes a veritable sea of microperceptions – non-conscious sensed experience, “gnats of potential experience”. This is a perceptual space of qualitative multiplicity, a topological space as opposed to a Euclidean space. Instead of a discrete set of elements (this thought, then that thought, then that thought) we have a continuity of transitions (thisthouthisthenthoughtthatthithotheis). Once an experience becomes conscious and is finally actualised, it constitutes a doubling back on the initial microperception, smudged over the half-second lag. A conscious experience, then, “is already, virtually, a memory. Perception is an intensive movement back into and out of an abstract ‘space’ of experiential previousness” (Massumi 2002, 197).

So what?

If perception functions like this, then what are the implications for artwork that functions *almost* entirely in this abstract, virtual dimension? Would it be possible to develop sociopolitical machines that function almost entirely through the production of microperceptions in contrast to conscious experience? How do we know if they function at all? Technologically speaking, how do we deploy and test them?

### **How to Deploy Beginnings**

It may be possible to speak of this kind of work as a “technology of emergent experience” that explicitly stakes its claim in the social and the political. Massumi details an abstract outline for how a technology of emergent experience might function:

To do this would require somehow integrating logics of perception and experience into the modeling. Processes like habit and memory would have to be taken into account. As would the reality of intensive movement... Techniques would have to be found for over-filling experience. The methods would have to operate in a rigorously anexact way, respecting the positivity of the virtual's vagueness and the openness of its individual endings. Never prefiguring (Massumi 2002, 191).

Never prefiguring, in the case of the church doors, does not mean making the invisible visible (Pietroiusti does not place a map of all the open doors at the entrance to the church, for example), nor does it constitute staging a consciously complexifying encounter with the visible (Pietroiusti does not stage a church service in the boiler room, for example). Rather, the open church doors float at the limits of sensation and affect, memory and habit in a risky territory where one might *notice* nothing but *micronotice* something else that might or might not grow into an actualized perception. The insertion of open church doors (as experienced but not noticed) into the realm of microperception constitutes the deployment of a beginning or the beginning of a beginning or a beginning many times over removed from a conscious beginning.

In Chapter 1, we discussed the work of Yoko Ono and Krzysztof Wodiczko work in relation to the number and quality of decisions deferred to a future influx of unfolding experience. Where Ono's *Fly Piece* constituted a multiplication machine through the potentiality of its future instantiations, Wodiczko's *Bunker Hill Monument* remained more or less closed to future transmutations. *Fly Piece* left decisions, like small invitations, open to future assemblages and connections where Wodiczko's piece yielded a finite number of ways in which one could enter into and connect with the work. Very few decisions were deferred and the work remained in the realm of the expressive, the symbolic and the didactic. *Fly Piece*, on the other hand, serves as a clear but abstract call to future action. It produces (and thus constitutes a technology of) emergent experience.

In *S. Maria delle Croci*, Pietroiusti produces a qualitative multiplicity or potentiality that exceeds that of Ono's *Fly Piece*, for it operates almost purely in the dimension of the micro-. Where Ono's piece is a decided beginning of many potential future actions, Pietroiusti's piece *precedes* such a determined beginning. It is not even the beginning of a specific but undetermined action (such as *Fly Piece*). It precedes such specificity with an elusive vagueness, choosing instead to be a potential of a potential, a beginning prime. Deployed like this, the agency of the artist becomes more and more imperceptible, melting into a realm that is felt but unnoticed, producing an experience that might initially yield only vague, inchoate sensation but that might constitute the beginning of the beginning of a total and radical social transformation.

How is that possible? Let us imagine for a moment that the piece produces a quasi-imperceptible line of flight in relationship to its deployment in a church. The Catholic Church has a long history of secrecy; from the burning of heretical literature in the days of its inception to the recent cover-up of sexual abuse. One could interpret Pietroiusti's piece purely symbolically – as a metaphorical call to

“open the doors of the church” in the service of addressing scandals past. However, I argue that instead of functioning in the realm of the symbolic, it constitutes instead the concrete, embodied production of the beginning of an entirely new church. Rather than reflecting on open doors and reading them as symbols of hope or transparency, Pietroiusti’s piece serves to produce another church through its operation in the affective dimension. What would open church doors produce? What kind of microperceptions occur when the air from the boiler room mixes with the air from the chapel? How would this experience transform churchness as lived social experience? The piece functions as questions and conditionals, not in the realm of thought but in the realm of affect: questions meant to be explored proprioceptively, experientially, potentially.

In the end, we see that it matters a great deal that the doors have been opened, not because of how many people notice and reflect upon the symbolism of open doors in the Catholic Church, but because *this constitutes a microtransformation of the lived experience of churchness*, the use of this space to produce a line of flight, the beginning of the beginning of another way to be in a church. It matters little whether visitors “noticed” that the doors were open and there is little or no hope of assessing the transformative “impact” in some kind of quantitative way. The invitation is extended in the realm of microperception and the dimension of affect. Most of the bodies that connect with this, that enact this invitation, do so in a dimension that is difficult to articulate and impossible to measure quantitatively. But if what Massumi describes is indeed the case, then this is the realm from and through which all of our perception and actual experience arises. It does not seem untenable that we could begin to design for this realm just as we have designed for metric, Euclidean space. This realm is the space of beginnings. And *what has been done*, in the case of the church doors, is the deployment of a beginning, many times preceding a conscious beginning.

## *Chapter 9*

### VERY SHORT CONCLUSION

As Deleuze states in regards to the Control Society, “It is not a question of worrying or hoping for the best, but of inventing new weapons” (Deleuze 1992, 178). Micropolitical machines, social technologies engineered by distributed agents to produce dissonance, complexifying encounters, qualitative difference, multiplicity, disrecognition, and invisibility are just such weapons.

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