

THE FORCE TO OWN TIME:

A Study of Tore Vagn Lid's 'The Prince—Machiavelli Variations'

theodor.barth@khio.no

PRESENTATION—Bern (15')

THE CALL (Session #369); chair—Vincent Paladino):

This session shall examine the relationship between material culture and rhythms, from visual art to music in an attempt to define and express common components. Rhythm in painting is expressed as pattern distribution. In sculpture, rhythm is locked temporally, fusing the expression of a moment with timelessness, bringing forth a new expression from movement and being. Musical instruments convey the rhythmic movement of the breath or the hands through their shape, illustrating that existence as we know it is meaningless without rhythmic cycles which power life and beingness. The rhythms of place, of architecture and urban planning, shall be considered here; objects divided by space are experienced as related through rhythm, and temporality as a sense is quantified as movement, beats and rests. The manner and methods through which rhythm is integrated with objects of creation is here explored. We invite archaeologists, anthropologists and artists to contribute to this debate.

“With the notion of ‘exposition’, we wish to suggest an operator between art and writing. Although ‘exposition’ seems to comply with traditional metaphors of vision and illumination, it should not be taken to suggest the external exposure of practice to the light of rationality; rather, it is meant as the re-doubling of practice in order to artistically move from artistic ideas to epistemic claims.”

(Borgdorff & Schwab, 2013:15).

The aim of the presentation is to determine whether and how—juxtaposing our practices of *artistic research* and letting them *interfere* with each other—it is possible to come up with something that is interesting, and even valuable, to *science*: that is, moving from *artistic ideas* to *epistemic claims*. The two artistic researches that were juxtaposed in this aim are: **a)** dramatist and director Tore Vagn Lid’s work on the use of *études* in theatre; **b)** my work on learning theatres.

The *étude* in question is a *macro-étude* on Machiavelli’s *The Prince* set up by Vagn Lid at the National Theatre in Oslo, on an “off-stage” within this institution called the *Malersal* (the Painter’s Hall). The musical concept of the piece is evident in the title he gave the play—*The Prince: Machiavelli variations*. It is the concept of ‘variation’ that provides the key to Vagn Lid’s queries in artistic research, rather than the manuscript as an authoritative gate to the play. Variations as a musical concept.

In fact, the play—as it turned out—is rather loosely hinged to Vagn Lid’s manuscript, while the ‘variations’ refer to both to the Jamaican tradition of dub-poetry and the variations in the sense of Machiavelli’s letter to Lorenzo de Medici (1513) in which the meandering path of a comparative study in state power and its popular basis, lines up a detailed historical precedent, in which the purpose of winning back Lorenzo’s favour by a Machiavelli in exile, is readily apparent.

THE FORCE TO OWN TIME:

A Study of Tore Vagn Lid's 'The Prince—Machiavelli Variations'

Machiavelli attempts to move from the cunning *plots* for power, to the comparatively wiser juxtaposition of *possible alternative plans*. In his extension from a *rhythmic rather than* a narrative take on what Machiavelli has to say, the Vagn Lid—the dramatist—develops a *score* where analog and digital stage-props become involved in the fashion of musical instruments. And thereby his role, when working as a stage director, resembles that of an 'orchestra director'.

Thus, a complex audio-visual—above all timed—compound is developed to convey a sense of *The Prince*: the extended letter from Niccolò Machiavelli to Lorenzo de Medici, specifically as a *political space*. One which, precisely from lack of closure, is *ongoing* rather than sealed in the *historical* past. It is *not* epic. Neither does it seek to represent a political space outside of the stage. Instead, a sense is conveyed where *politics takes place on stage*, and *among* the audience.

It resonates with anthropologist Edmund Leach (1964:15) wrote about *rituals* —"Ritual' is a term which anthropology uses in diverse senses. My own view is that while we only run into paradox if we try to apply this term to some distinct class of behaviours, we can very usefully think of 'ritual' as an aspect of all behaviour, namely the communicative aspect." This up-cycling of human behaviour correlates with an ontological turn in how we understand communication. It's *hit-and-impact*.

Aspects of what we understand as *communication* features unfolds beyond the cultural precincts of linguistic code-and-meaning; where acts of translation, according to Lotman (2005), cross a *semiotic border*. The transposition of **a**) the political suspended space, between Machiavelli and Lorenzo, unto **b**) the space where actors in the play queried the current state of politics, in tweets sent to named politicians through the messenger services of a real pigeon, is a case in point.

From the room in the National Theatre's Painter's Hall (Malersalen) an arrangement with video-cameras—some carried by drones of the 100m stretch to the Parliament (Storting)—conveyed a credible illusion of the pigeon's coming and going, with the tweets and the politicians' responses to them (which were real), were going on *either* in real time *or* close to it: the public was seated in a greenery—a greenhouse environment—as political subjects. What is the connection?

A concept of political power—dividing *potentia* and *potestas*—where the population are constituted as citizens within the precincts of a territory: this is *one bid* (perhaps the fundamental one) on *controlled nature*. The polity defined as a green and everything in it: **a**) the power to act (*potestas*) and **b**) power as a potential (*potentia*): Lorenzo holds *potestas*, and Machiavelli holds *potentia*. It is suggested by Machiavelli that without *potentia* politics is reduced to *cunning*. But Lorenzo must decide.

THE FORCE TO OWN TIME:

A Study of Tore Vagn Lid's 'The Prince—Machiavelli Variations'

So, what does it take for politics to become *wise*—and what does it take to become *wise* on politics? In the wake of the play, we wanted to tease out the *learning outcomes* from Vagn Lid's *macro étude*, by conducting a Learning Theatre: that is, not reduced to a work-session in one of our school's seminar rooms, we ventured to *stage* the “harvest”, this act of *reception*, on a site that would put us *immediately* into the mode where the play was staged, worked, made and shown. In the green.

Our first attempt at this was at the Botanic Garden in Oslo: however, our attempts at this were dismissed by the Botanic Museum on the account that our project was “too removed from the subject matter of the institution”—which is *botany*. The problem of how the gardens might enter a study aimed at a power-critique appeared to be alien. It therefore was on a note of irony that we ended up conducting the learning theatre at a progressive municipal allotment garden.

Specifically, on the account that the earth used to develop this garden—as a public utility and an agent of a new generation of service design—came from the entire country, from Tromsø in the North to Stokke in the south, was ritually transported by 300 people from the gates of the Botanic Garden to be deposited in the new allotment garden (Losøter). This parade of farmers laid the foundations for the Flatbread Society Grain Field. All from 50 ecological farms around the country.

So, the idea of priming our working relationship by immersing ourselves somewhat anachronistically in the greenhouse of the Botanic Museum—specifically, the one for exotic plants called the Victoria House—turned out to be oddly *in sync* with the problems raised by Vagn Lid's play in the Painter's Hall, but unfolding in an *urban vista* of his subject matter: the potential sought by municipal entrepreneurs in gardening, in a vis-à-vis with the acting power of high cost construction projects.

This confrontation of the indebted to the debt-owners, again placed us in *medias res* as the two of us—the slightly comic epigones of Alexander von Humboldt and Goethe—placed *two foldable chairs*, one for the director (poet & philosopher) the other for the anthropologist, to tease out the learning outcomes from the play, pertaining to each our research practices. The force of the events that I have related, led us to consider rhythm as a vehicle of ontology, or *beingness* (cf. the #369 brief).

That is, the agent of the interconnection of events with similar epistemic claims—in the theatre and in the *open*—in which the open-ended pre-requisites of the variations not only applied on working from Machiavelli, but in working out learning outcomes *after* the play. A foray into the discussions on how bodies learn in the wake of the Internet, alongside the philosophical discussions—cast on the relationship between Brecht and Benjamin—that had made us “work-partners”.

THE FORCE TO OWN TIME:

A Study of Tore Vagn Lid's 'The Prince—Machiavelli Variations'

Listening in on each other: a the sonic interception—summoning the primacy of hearing, or aural, before the visual—going on at the outer rim of sense-perception with border-crossings through *haptic translations*. As Eleni Ikoniadou (2014: 22) wrote in a book on art, media and the sonic: “Rhythm, all in all, marks and irregular continuity between different bodies (human, machines, or other), dimensions (virtual or actual), and domains (aesthetic, technoscientific, or philosophical).”

But we are not content rounding up on a note of abstraction. What we want to emphasise is the *time spent* with materials, and concomitantly the effect this has on our sense of the *materiality* of the materials, brought to the fore a different focus on *The Prince* than what is regularly associated with the epithet “Machiavellian”. Namely, the transactions in knowledge in which the knowing party has no right to advise the powers that be, if not summoned. To advise, it must first abandon itself.

In this knowledge-transaction with *potentia*, the *potestas* would *first* make the knowledge his/her own—claim it!—*before* giving it back to where it came from, adding a *privilege* of the person who passed on the knowledge in *potentia*, *to provide council upon request*. This was clearly what Machiavelli was hoping for during his exile at his estate at Sant’ Adrea, writing his letter to Lorenzo. At the same time Vagn Lid’s and my effort yields a power critique on a similar note.

At a general level, the aim of the paper is to tease out some of the practical prerequisites of an archaeological fieldwork, through their application to a contemporary material. That is, a *third party readability* based on the notion that the materials under study—in this form of research—are *found* without the prerequisite of prior acquaintance with what is found, *negotiated* within a contemporary framework of resources & requirements, and the *unknown* (or, non-conscious).

I gather this triangle—the *found*, the *negotiated* and the *unknown*—under the notion of *contingency*. The query is conducted within the scope of the *learning theatre*: a contingent arrangement juxtaposed to the principal field of inquiry, to see of the opportunities for learning can be obtained by adjoining a theatre—in the *natural history* sense of the term—adjacent to the primary level of inquiry, defined *contingently* in relation to it (here, the Machiavelli Variations). This is the *design*.

The purpose is to determine whether these *two* levels of contingency—the one linked to the field of research, the other to the fieldwork—are communicative and generative of knowledge. Essentially, the learning theatre is pledged to do *fieldwork on fieldwork*, instead of jumping from fieldwork directly to theorising. It is an experimental approach to determine what is going on in field-research and develop a model understanding of it, assisting the principal work in hatching new repertoires.

THE FORCE TO OWN TIME:

A Study of Tore Vagn Lid's 'The Prince—Machiavelli Variations'

By re-doubling the practice of inquiry, a *dual* case-work is developed in such a way that the “blind-spots” in *each*—given that the affordances of interception need to be ‘caught in the act’ in order to appear—reveal themselves as *mediations* (in a situation where a synthesis between the two practices is pointless). In the paper, the first level of query is **a)** that of a theatre play on Niccolò Machiavelli’s *The Prince*, while the second is **b)** the learning theatre. Working co-generatively.

I have limited myself to discuss the conclusions relating specifically to the topic of *rhythm* in material culture—in the extended sense of the call #369—at the *junction* between **a)** propositions of rhythm in material culture and **b)** the actual fact of the rhythmic event, where the *growth* of real-time aggregates, the interception of singular instances constitutes *rhythm* in its presented, *rather than* its represented aspects, to a *third reader*, where artistic research as a “normalising” agent (cf, #366).

By this I mean an agent that can reveal and discuss *political power* at a *design level*. The ‘force to own time’—in the relation between **a)** Machiavelli vs. Lorenzo, **b)** the ‘bare activity’ of the allotment garden vs. the urban vista of ‘signal architecture’—as acts of *priming*, in the semiotic border where interception of enfolded memories and emergent repertoires (none of which are our own), comes to instantiate what Brian Massumi has called *ontopower*—the State of Perception.

*

Bibliography

- Berntsen, Bredo (2006). *En grønnstrømpe og hennes samtid: Hanna Resvoll-Holmsen: botaniker, Svalbard-forsker, fjellelsker, fotograf of naturvern pioner*, Oslo: Oseania Vitenskapsapsteori.
- Borgdorff, Henk & Schwab, Michael (eds. 2013) Introduction. *The exposition of artistic research: publishing art in academia*. Leiden university press.
- Ikoniadou, Eleni (2014). *The rhythmic event—art, media, and the sonic*. London & Cambr. (Mass.). The MIT-Press.
- Lotman, Juri (2004). *Culture and explosion*. New York & Berlin. Mouton de Gruyter.
- Machiavelli, Niccolò (2015 [1513]) *Le prince*. Une œuvre du domaine public. Kindle.
- Massumi, Brian (2015) *Ontopower—Wars, powers and state of perception*. Durham & London. Duke university press.
- Vagn Lid, Tore (2017). *Fyrsten—Machiavellivariasjoner*, Oslo national academy of the arts & Norwegian artistic research programme (manuscript).
- Vagn Lid, Tore (2018). *Reflexive dramaturgy—Études for the (performing) arts I a time of change*. Oslo. Cappelen Akademisk.
- Vinje, Petrine (2016) *Antologi—Aatomisk teater*, artist book (supported by the Arts Council Norway).