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On Being A Medium. Bright gatekeeping in a dark era

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On Being A Medium.

Bright gatekeeping in a dark era

Philipp Schmickel

A person living in the so-called West in so-called 2018 is much more affected by mediated information than by first-hand-, first-eye-, or first-body experiences. Sources of information often remain unknown. The intention of this essay is to distinguish the phenomenon of mass media from the idea of being a medium –exemplified by THEORAL– and describe, from different viewpoints, its main characteristic: the sincere conveyance of information.

I – RASHOMON

This film by Akira Kurosawa from 1950 is an examination of the relations between truth –the facts– and individual standpoints towards this truth; it is about the subjective realities that interpret and adapt the facts for particular purposes. The task here is not to dig deeper into the web of accounts that are presented in the film in which the protagonists try to put themselves into the light they seem to deem appropriate for themselves (by interpreting the facts) in front of a judge. This essay is about a more modest element of the film, an auxiliary role, a woman who is assisting in court: the medium.

She is needed in order to convey the testimony of the samurai who is killed in the beginning of the film. She is the only one actually saying something about the incident without having her own interest in it. She just establishes a connection between the inaccessible realm of the dead and the world of the living. In Japanese, she is called Miko, which is “[a] general term for a woman possessing the magico-religious power to receive oracles from the kami [gods] in a state of spirit possession. Nowadays the term generally refers to a woman who assists shrine priests in ritual or clerical work.”¹

The Miko and her duties underwent continual transformations over the centuries but they did not alter the fact that her exceptional spiritual abilities place her outside, or on the fringes of the profane playgrounds of society. She does not take part in the games that are played in front of the judge, she does not claim her account to be correct, she has nothing to win and nothing to lose in the trial.

¹ From the online Encyclopedia of Shinto: http://k-amc.kokugakuin.ac.jp/DM/detail.do?class_name=col_eos&data_id=23353; April 16, 2018

II – THE MEDIUM AND THE MEDIA

This “medium-scene” in *Rashomon* is the point of departure for this essay. The nameless woman receives and transmits the words of the dead samurai which are transformed in and through her body into voice – like breath streaming through a shakuhachi. She serves as a vehicle, an amplifier, a translator [translations require the most accurate reading, I heard somebody say]. She does not judge or censor the words she reproduces. It is, on the one hand, a very humble role she plays, but also a very important one that requires certain skills and expertise². She is the embodiment of the time and space between reception and emission³ of information. She receives the samurai’s words from the realm of the dead and articulates them in the world of the living –in court– without manipulation for her own sake, in contrast to every other interrogated person. Usually, one does not know how much time and space lie between reception and emission of information – it is the dark territory where the processing takes place, where gates are opened and closed.

The non-manipulation of information in the time and space between reception and emission is a utopia that might only be achieved by beings with supernatural powers. Manipulation, intentional or not, negative, neutral or positive, occurs, has to occur, in this invisible space inside the medium, and concerns the contents as well as the form of the message.

Putting this in relation to our contemporary (mass) media, the “powerful one-way systems for communication from the few to the many,”⁴ a lot of things can be said about immoral editors and journalists or political data firms controlling the news (at least) on facebook or fascist middle-European governments starving their (quality) newspapers or even preparing them to be sold to business men.⁵ But for now, it should only be pointed to the fact that *the media*, informing us day by day, are being deceptive as they sell subjectivity (very often; intentionally or not) for objectivity. The main stream –and mass media are the main stream of information– has nothing per se to do with truth, but is subjectively presented as objective and therefore as true. Put in

2□ Marcel Mauss writes in his *Théorie générale de la Magie* that was published in *Sociologie et Anthropologie* (2010) that not everybody can be a magician and that there are characteristics that distinguish the magician from the common people. “N’est pas magicien qui veut: il y a des qualités dont la possession distingue le magicien du commun des hommes. Les unes sont acquises et les autres congénitales ; il y en a qu’on leur prête et d’autres qu’ils possèdent effectivement.” p. 19.

3□ This consideration was stimulated by Xavier Charles’ reflections about being an artist in THEORAL NO. 2: “un artiste, à mes yeux, est à la fois un récepteur et un émetteur. Quelque chose comme cela: un très bon récepteur ou un très grand récepteur, mais aussi un émetteur.” p. 41

Xavier Charles says that the artist is at the same time a receiver as well as an emitter and this is the interesting thing. It should be added that the difference between the artist and the medium is that the artist condenses and transforms what he receives whereas the medium just conveys it.

4□ Morley, David (2005). *Mass Media*. In: Bennet, Tony; Grossberg, Laurence and Morris, Meaghan. *New Key Words: A Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing. p. 212

5□ In this essay no appropriate differentiation is made between quality media, social media, radio and television or rainbow press, etc. The term mass media, or *the media*, designates an entity that, unlike the medium, depends strongly on the market and politics.

another way: mass media use the hidden space between receiving (or inventing) information and the broadcasting of it for their own purpose and profit.

III – GATEKEEPING

The gatekeeper, in the media and in mythology (as well as on the passages between strata in society), is operating in this dark territory mentioned above. His techniques and practices can be neither seen in every-day-life, nor can they be understood by those who are affected by the gatekeeper's decisions. He is guarding (watching and protecting) something that is not accessible, he neither lets anybody in nor anybody out.

Cerberus was a monstrous, many-headed dog (the number of heads varied from three to one hundred), with a dragon's tail and a back bristling with serpents' heads. He barred the way to the Underworld to the living and prevented the dead from escaping it.⁶

In the mass media, the gatekeepers (editors) decide what is going to be published, and what is not. These presumably pluricephal characters sort out and adapt information from the massive and endless stream of information that is produced by private individuals, journalists, news-agencies, algorithms, etc. The decisions about which information can pass in what way are made in the dark territory between reception and emission and are guided by considerations that serve the advancement of the publisher.

The medium has no gatekeeper, it *is* the gatekeeper, but one that opens the gates and does not process and bias the information that springs from the well, it solely serves as a channel. The medium may be also called a *bright gatekeeper*. A bright gatekeeper is operating in the Visible, in contrast to the *dark gatekeeping* that, like Cerberus, operates in the Invisible serving the interests of a few – or, if one looks at the mythological definition below, the forces of evil.

Following mythology, the evil is invisible and very powerful. It cannot be destroyed but it can be suppressed –temporarily– by strength (Herakles, for example) and by the spiritual forces of art, embodied by Orpheus.

It should be observed that it was with no weapon other than his own strength that Herakles succeeded temporarily in taming him [Cerberus; the character of Herakles unfortunately won't play a role in this essay] and that it was by the spiritual effect of his music that Orpheus calmed him, again temporarily. These two instances strongly support the neo-Platonic interpretation of Cerberus as an in-dwelling daemon, the spirit of evil. This spirit can only be tamed above ground, that is to say by a sudden – and ascensional – change of environment and by the individuals spiritual strength. To conquer, one has to rely upon oneself.⁷

It is the artist who relies on herself and has the strength or the urgency and commitment to look at the Invisible, like Orpheus did:

Through the magic of his music he succeeded in persuading the gods of the Underworld to set free

⁶ Chevalier, Jean & Gheerbrant, Alain (1996). *Dictionary of Symbols*. London: Penguin Books. p. 175

⁷ *ibid.*

his wife Eurydice who had died from snake-bite when fleeing the advances of Aristaeus. But one condition was laid down – Orpheus was not to look at her until she had returned to the light of day. Half-way there, in a fit of anxiety, he looked back and Eurydice vanished forever. ... Jean Servier compares the ban laid upon Orpheus and Eurydice in the Underworld with certain taboos ... in the eastern Mediterranean. '[M]embers of a funeral procession are not allowed to look back. Invisible powers are there who could be insulted by an inadvertent word or annoyed at being seen by a sideways look or glance over the shoulder'. Orpheus is the man who broke the taboo and dared to gaze at the Invisible.⁸

The Invisible, the dark gatekeepers, are not looked at, they operate in what is hidden and they pass unseen. What mythology tells us is that in order to tame the evil powers, one has to journey to where they reside and gaze at them. Being seen and having their practices revealed annoys the dark gatekeepers, disturbs them, jeopardizes them. It is the uncynical⁹ artist with exceptional abilities who is assigned to execute this task because only she can gain power over the dark forces, even though only temporarily.

Although they share an uncynical attitude, the medium should not be confused with the artist. In Rashomon, she is in contact with the Invisible, the realm of the dead, but not in order to interfere with it. The medium does not take sides, it conveys testimonies of individuals who are caught up in the *Sturms und Drangs* of human life.

IV – SHAMANISM

The medium in Rashomon is a bright gatekeeper that opens the gates. She does not have to deceive in order to make a living or accumulate wealth. Unlike *the media*, she does not manipulate. She *can* be humble. She only transmits what she receives from the dead samurai who cannot speak for himself anymore. In the dark and obscure space between reception and articulation of the message, she does nothing, her ego is put aside. In this way she fulfills a particular role in her society. She personifies a phenomenon that very likely exists in all societies in their respective forms. Her social position is that of a shaman, a character who is in touch with the spirits. She might as well be called bruja, Zauberer, witch, magicien, and so forth.¹⁰ As already mentioned, being a medium is certainly part of the practices and duties of the shaman. Therefore, the medium, if she (the embodied it) is not a shaman herself, fulfills to a certain extent the same services as the shaman does in the social structure wherein she dwells.

8□ *ibid.* p. 725-6

9□ The idea of the uncynical versus the cynical comes from the fact that individuals are forced to be cynical in every-day-life in order to stay a part of society and/or or “succeed” in it. The uncynical is the non-accumulating, the sincere, the fragile, the fearless, the ephemeral, the non-perfect, the poetic.

The cynical fears its finitude, its dissolution and the loss of property. This thought is elaborated by the author somewhere else: *Linernotes to Katharina Klement, Drift. Chmafu Nocords.*

10□ Marcel Mauss (2010): “... le magicien est défini par ses relations avec les animaux, de même, il est défini par ses relations avec les esprits, et en dernière analyse, par les qualités de son âme.”- p. 32. Translation, P. S.: The magician is defined by his relations with the animals, as well as by his relations with the spirits, and, lastly, by the qualities of his soul.

According to the Routledge Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology,

the ‘shaman’ (man or woman) occupies a central position in ritual and religious practices. He or she is the mediator between the human world and the world of spirits, between the living and the dead, and between animals and human society. Endowed with clairvoyance and assisted by helper spirits, a shaman fulfills many social and religious roles including those of soothsayer, therapist and interpreter of dreams. ... At major transitions in the life cycle and in the cycle of seasonal activity, as at times of crisis, disorder, war, famine or illness, the shaman give services to the group (freely), and to individuals (with some expectation of return).¹¹

And,

The shaman, a mystical, priestly, and political figure, ... can be described not only as a specialist in the human soul but also as a generalist whose sacred and social functions can cover an extraordinarily wide range of activities.¹²

These descriptions may also be accurate or partly accurate for some musicians and artists. And they also apply for the medium as a social institution. The shamanic side of the medium translates from other worlds into the comprehensible –whereby translation does not imply alteration with any other goal than comprehensibility– in order to provide a basis for decision-making, in times of peace and in times of terror. The shaman as a bright gatekeeper is trustworthy because her social position lies outside the hierarchies of society.¹³ In this way, too, the medium is shamanistic.

V – THEORAL

Theoral, as a medium between improvising artists and the receptors,¹⁴ is related to shamanism not so much in its social significance; the relation rather stems from the fact that it uses the shamanistic technique of being a medium, albeit, in analogy: the intensity of the trance is very different. The task of the theoralist is to create information through the conduction of conversations as well as to organize and/or create spaces where ideas can be formulated, invented and dreamt up. The speaker should be comforted and encouraged to speak about his or her philosophies, worldviews and visions. This is the ideal version of how the reception of information happens. In the dark space between reception and emission, the theoralist practices the philosophy of getting out of the way, comparable to Michael Zerang’s approach to playing music.¹⁵ When a book is conceived, the theoralist is possessed by the thoughts of his

11□ d’Anglure, Bernard Saladin (2002). *Shamanism*. In: Barnard, Alan and Spencer, Jonathan (2002). *Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology*. London and New York: Routledge. p. 505

12□ Fiona Bowie cites Joan Halifax in: Bowie, Fiona (2006). *The Anthropology of Religion. An Introduction*. Malden and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing. p. 177

13□ Marcel Mauss (2010): “Nous appelons ainsi [magique] *tout rite qui ne fait pas partie d’un culte organisé, rite privé, secret, mystérieux et tendant comme limite vers le rite prohibé.*” p. 16 Translation, P. S.: We call magic every rite that is not part of an organized cult, private rite, secret, mysterious and tending towards the prohibited rite.

14□ It should be noted here, that the author will not analyze the meta-information and paratexts that are transported by THEORAL. This task may be undertaken by someone with a certain distance to the project.

15□ On the stage, the highest form is when you have people that are really just out of the way – get out of the way

interlocutors, he writes everything down as he was told. He has to obey as if he was taking part in a magical rite.¹⁶ The shaman in Rashomon serves as an archetype for THEORAL which sees its main task in conveying voices – even though the theoralist was not able yet to establish a connection with the realm of the dead.¹⁷ The objective is to amplify as much as possible – however humble the means– the voices of artists who ventured to and gazed at the Invisible as well as others that are not heard as much as the loud and hypocritical voices broadcasted by the mass media. THEORAL as a medium has no intention of making a financial profit. The social and cultural capital that was earned on the way is enough to continue the bright gatekeeping that widens the spectrum of overtly subjective, and therefore true, information.

VI – INTERDISCIPLINARITY

The theoral way of working does not only correspond to techniques of shamanism but also to another “archaic” practice, that of improvising music. The conversations that are the basis of the reception of information are taking their course like a concert, never like a rehearsal; they start *au hasard* or with a certain question (in its third to eleventh version). The most important thing is listening. Questions and statements arise out of the context that is created by all speakers. They are improvised in the sense that they are expressed spontaneously based on knowledge, experience, work and the vision of one’s own art (or life or politics or whatever).¹⁸

The fields of shamanism and improvised music are not only corresponding in certain ways with methods of THEORAL, they also correspond with each other concerning certain practices as well as their social significance. How close they can get in the end depends on the self-conception of the ones involved. A deeper analysis of this connection will not be targeted here, but can be started with Tim Hodgkinson’s article *Shamanism and Improvisation*,¹⁹ in which he speaks primarily about the performing side of the connection. For the purpose of getting closer to the similarities between a medium and a musician, listening to Hamid Drake is very illuminating:

“[T]he musicians are involved in the active inactive process of the awakening of other beings. They’re active because they have the conscious awareness of it but they’re inactive because they know that they themselves aren’t necessarily the doer. They’re being done, it’s been done through them, they’re open enough, they allow that energy to flow through them, they don’t try and control the energy, it flows through them. And then the energy does whatever it has to do. But the energy

and let the music happen. Then it shows you where to go. You don’t show IT.” THEORAL NO. 7, p. 44

16□ Alexandro Jodorowsky writes about the Mexican healer Pachita, that if one wanted her treatment to work, he or she had not so much to believe in her magic but rather to obey her instructions however far out they seemed: “Alors, plutôt que de parler de « foi », utilisons le mot « obéissance ».” Jodorowsky, Alexandro (2001). *Le théâtre de la guérison*. Paris: Éditions Albin Michel. p. 173.

17□ This may change with time; when reading the first edition of THEORAL, some people still can hear the voice of Marco Eneidi, who disappeared in 2016.

18□ This characterization might seem very naive, but if one listens to conversations or speeches broadcast by the media –of course, never all of them– one gets the impression that what is said was prewritten somewhere else or – when the speakers really use, or try to use, their own words– that they just don’t have a vision of what they are talking about, neither knowledge nor experience sometimes.

19□ https://www.academia.edu/3356249/Shamanism_and_Improvisation; May 2018

is flowing through the people who are listening too, because it's one energy, it's the same energy."²⁰

The energy that runs through the medium engages the thoughts of the speakers as well as what those thoughts can do to the reader: stimulation and inspiration. As was said before, THEORAL does not control what it publishes, the theoralist gets out of the way and the information is let through. Even if it is not true what is published –in the sense that it never happened or was not said or done that way or another– the medium preserves his sincerity. It is true to the initial reception of the information and it conveys what the speaker wants to say. The medium in Rashomon is apparently transmitting a lie from the realm of the dead because the samurai is struggling to save his honor, which is much more important to him than truthfulness to what actually happened. This is another, much more powerful, truth.

Thus, in the so-called West in so-called 2018 where so many “agents”²¹ try to be the doer and achieve something or climb a ladder or knock others off the ladder, or just try to escape the precariat, at least the medium does not take part in this scheme because the medium knows it is not the doer. Its busy (mass-) brothers and sisters and cousins and half-cousins, however, are blinded by competition and with their miserable behavior they leave brown stains on the white dress of the shaman. In other words, the medium has its place outside the hierarchies and does not strive and manipulate. It keeps its integrity and acts with the lucidity of a stranger (dignity of an outsider).

VII – ANTHROPOLOGY

The fundamental difference between the discipline of social and cultural anthropology and the medium is that the average anthropologist, like any other social scientist, is usually caught up in the ups and downs of corporate society or fierce academic competition. What they have in common theoretically is the idea of conveying the received or gathered information as truthfully as possible. The anthropological task is first of all description, and not interpretation or measurement.²²

In an article on human rights and multi-culturalism, the anthropologist Jane K. Cowan expresses something very fundamental of the discipline.

Anthropologists, even more than other social scientists, are concerned with ‘WHAT IS.’ Our

20□ THEORAL NO. 12, p. 65

21□ “An agent is a person who is the subject of action. Agency, then suggests intention or consciousness of action, sometimes with the implication of possible choices between different actions. The concept of agency has been employed by anthropologists and social theorists, especially those influenced by Max Weber, in contrast to structure, which implies constraint on action.” Barnard, Alan and Spencer, Jonathan (2002). *Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology. Glossary*. p. 595. The contrast that is made here between structure and agency is problematic. Structure and agency are rather complementary than exclusive.

22□ Of course, the theoralists are taking part in society and have to make a living, but this does not affect THEORAL. The difference is that THEORAL as a medium does not tend towards so-called success in this society; it tends towards being a medium. The anthropologist, like any other social scientist, may rather tend to adapt his or her projects in order to succeed in academia. But this is mere musing.

foremost task is descriptive: We address the empirical, although this cannot be grasped except through the terms of a prior social theory. There is, thus, necessarily a dynamic back-and-forth movement between theory and data, requiring incessant critical reflection on our conceptual tools. ... anthropologists investigate how rights and cultural claims *actually* operate in the real world, not how they *should* operate, Political philosophy, in contrast, is concerned primarily with “what ought to be.”²³

From its beginning, THEORAL was driven by this idea of presenting *what is*, what people have to say and not what their words *could* or *should* mean. It was never about a larger concept, that uses the voices of others, or *the other*, for its own preconceived narrative. It always was and will be a medium that conveys the voice of a certain person²⁴ at a certain time in a certain environment.

VIII – VOICE

In his articles about the urban poor and slum-and-shack-dwellers in Mumbai, the anthropologist Arjun Appadurai refers, among other things, to the notion of voice as a means for self-empowerment.²⁵ Before digging deeper into that idea, a poem by W. H. Auden:

September 1, 1939
...
All I have is a voice
To undo the folded lie,
The romantic lie in the brain
Of the sensual man-in-the-street
And the lie of Authority
Whose buildings grope the sky:
There is no such thing as the State
And no one exists alone;
Hunger allows no choice
To the citizen or the police;
We must love one another or die.²⁶

The idea of having a voice of one’s own and to re/claim and use it leads to larger political contexts. In his essays, Appadurai describes strategies and practices of the urban poor as well as the NGOs that grew out of these societies, of how they work for an improvement of the appalling situations in the slums. Appadurai describes several principles of self-empowerment, like the capacity to aspire and the idea of a politics of hope that depend to a certain extent on having a voice, because

... the very poor, in any society, tend to oscillate between “loyalty” and “exit” (whether the latter

23□ Accentuation P.S.. Cowan, Jane K. (2006). *Culture and Rights after Culture and Rights*. American Anthropologist. Vol. 108, No. 1. Arlington.

24□ THEORAL finds its interlocutors mainly among artists who practice improvisation. This choice is, of course, biased and very important. See chapter IX – Improvisation.

25□ Appadurai, Arjun (2013). *The Future As Cultural Fact*. London, New York: Verso. p. 115-214

26□ <https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/september-1-1939>; April 11, 2018.

takes the form of violent protest or total apathy). Of course, the objective is to increase the capacity for the third posture of “voice,” the capacity to debate, contest, inquire, and participate critically.²⁷

It should not be much of a surprise that, like most other things in society, voice is distributed unequally. The machinery of mass media is *covering* the planet with information that is produced to keep and develop the status quo. The natural striving for monopoly of each mass media complex results in strategies to mute its rivals. The voices that are raised from below in order to alter the circumstances remain unheard or are actively suppressed. Trying to make his or her own opinions and views of the circumstances heard, is resistance and a strategy for self-empowerment as well as a means of change. Of course, the sun of change will never rise, but there will always be people who disagree and oppose the darkness. It is to them that THEORAL serves as a torch.

In Appadurai’s account of the designs of self-organization and self-empowerment in the slums of Mumbai, an analogy to THEORAL shows itself in the way that a basic principle for self-empowerment is the belief that oneself, as part of a community –as the ones affected– is suited to speak as a specialist for change. In other words, it’s the people, the poor themselves, and the local NGOs that grew out of these societies, that have legitimacy: the shack dweller knows how to fix his shack better than anybody else. Appadurai gives the example of Dharavi, one of the largest slums in Asia.

Dharavi today has a vast array of housing forms, alleys and paths, spaces of leisure and worship, work and play, all in the absence of full municipal recognition, legal security, or good infrastructure for sanitation, water, or power. Yet, over almost a century, the urban poor have gradually constructed a complex network of dwellings that has been directly produced by their actions of building. Thus, the value which Heidegger and Levinas have argued for, in terms of the metaphysics of human life, of being at home in the world, and of resisting the “enframing” of all human life by exploitative technologies, is in such informal settlements enacted in dwelling-through-building and building-through-dwelling.²⁸

To bring this to an adventurously audacious comparison with the experimental music scene, where the artist usually is fed before and/or after the performance, it has to be pointed out that the scene is functioning in an analogous way, parallel to the institutions that distribute the money to more commercial enterprises: most artists are existing-through-playing (and playing as a consequence of existing. One can exchange playing with improvising.).²⁹ The above-mentioned analogy between the attitude described by Appadurai and THEORAL is due to the fact that it was born in a milieu, the milieu of the experimental music scene, which it serves as a voice, or as an amplifier of voices, and that it uses its techniques: existing-through-publishing and publishing as a consequence of existing (in this environment).³⁰

27□ Appadurai, Arjun (2013). *The Future As Cultural Fact*. London, New York: Verso. p. 189

28□ *ibid.* p. 124-5

29□ Although experimental and improvised music is a stepchild of the institutions that distribute the funds, from time to time musicians get the chance to reach (temporarily) into so called high and relatively well funded culture, which is not the case for the poor.

30□ Two important books on artists in relation to their communities are Isoardi, Steven (2006). *The Dark Tree. Jazz and the Community Arts in Los Angeles*. Los Angeles: The University of California Press; and Lewis, George E. (2009). *A Power Stronger Than Itself. The AACM and American Experimental Music*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

The approach of THEORAL to being a medium was exquisitely expressed by Henry Threadgill a long time before the first issue saw the light of day:

Who else ... would be better suited to speak about this product [the music] than the instrument through which it appears? Surely, if such highly creative music can come from such minds, the same minds can give some insight about it and themselves in relationship ... not just by being its creators and performers.³¹

In conclusion, it can be said that THEORAL –a publication that grew out of a community of experimental artists– is the medium for the voice of artists who have the capacity to look at the Invisible and who consider improvisation a central tool for their artistic practice.³² It uses the notion of voice in the sense of Appadurai (and Hirschmann) as “the capacity to debate, contest, inquire, and participate critically.”³³ Through the reflections on the relations of the individual artists with society, arts and politics, THEORAL conveys alternative ways to cope with the suffocating social circumstances most of us are living in, or how art can be a model for everyday life, very often in the poetic and subversive spirit of improvisation.

IX – IMPROVISATION

Apart from being a technique in life that grows in intensity with the degree of precarity, improvisation is also a method, in the sense of Michel Foucault, not let oneself be governed so much or to *such an extent*.³⁴ It is a way of expressing oneself spontaneously *and* artistically (or vice versa), based on knowledge, experience, work and the vision of one’s own poetry.

Improvisation isn’t something that is not well done or well thought out or something that is simply thrown together with the means at hand –it is not bricolage in the Lévi-Straussian sense³⁵– like everyday language seems to suggest. Let us not be deceived. Improvisation is an art form and holds great subversive potential.

31□ Lewis, George E. (2009). *A Power Stronger Than Itself. The AACM and American Experimental Music*. Chicago: Chicago University Press. p. 191

32□ Improvisation is a way of looking at the Invisible. See chapter IX – Improvisation.

33□ see footnote 27

34□ This is Foucault’s first definition of critique in his speech on May 27, 1978 before the Société Française de Philosophie, What is Critique? or Qu’est-ce que la critique?: “L’art de n’être pas tellement gouverné.”

35□ The following quote from *La Pensée Sauvage* (1962) illustrates Lévi-Strauss’ view of the difference between ingénieur and bricoleur: “On pourrait être tenté de dire qu’il [l’ingénieur] interroge l’univers, tandis que le bricoleur s’adresse à une collection des résidus d’ouvrages humains, c’est-à-dire à un sous-ensemble de la culture.”

Translation: “It might be said that the engineer questions the universe, while the ‘bricoleur’ addresses himself to a collection of oddments left over from human endeavours, that is, only a sub-set of the culture.”

He calls bricolage a “science « première » plutôt que « primitive »” (a prior science rather than primitive) in contrast to the real science of the ingénieur.

An improvising musician cannot be a bricoleur in that sense, because she also questions the universe and does not content herself with the leftovers of culture. The young and radical Peter McTrum from Edinburgh, who is based in Berlin, told THEORAL in 2017: “I am fed up with improvising in the idiomatic ways – or should I say idiotic ways? There is nothing new, everything has been played, every fucking color, pitch and volume! So I go up north to Whitehall and listen to what the universe tells me.”

—— In improvisation, one's OWN comes into play, or at least, one's own interpretation of something that was already thought or done before. This might also be true for any given composition. However, what makes the difference –and what makes it subversive– is that improvisation happens spontaneously. Improvisation affirms the individual identity inside a community as well as the potential and the voice of the individual. Imagine an orchestra in which one musician, or the whole string section, suddenly and intuitively, decides to improvise instead of following the score or the conductor's lead. Or the light man in a theater; or a bus driver; or a newscaster – and everybody else doing something which is not an expression of herself.³⁶

—— While improvising, one tries to control as little as possible and follow as closely as possible the thoughts and impulses that come from inside the body. In other words, the artist tries to look at the Invisible. Improvisation thus stands in outright opposition to most practices of our societies, which are predominantly ruled by control, domination and surveillance impacting *on* the body.

—— Improvisation is a technique of self-empowerment because it can help to avoid external determination. It is a way of trying actively to keep a balance between our (innermost) wishes, desires and ambitions and the chains that surround us: the ideological, economic and possibly religious constraints we suffer from. In that sense, improvisation is a tactic –or a practice– to defy surveillance and control and to feel free for a moment.³⁷

X – CONCLUSION

The so-called West in so-called 2018 is ruled by dark forces. Gatekeepers are invisible, they reside in the shadows of society and are serving their own interests. They rule via the media, and by police or military forces (mainly outside their own territory). On the other side, although first-hand experiences are scarce, faith and confidence in the media are very low.

The individual cannot escape –except every now and then for moments of improvised freedom– but it can disagree and think or even say “no”. The idea of the medium as a bright gatekeeper may help to disagree. Its work of conveying information happens in the visible: the receptor can comprehend its methodology. Bright gatekeeping means an opening of gates and sincere transmission of information without serving a purpose other than informing. Of course, there is no impeccable medium (except supernatural ones), but what is brightly mediated, is inclined to be as true/truthful as possible, in the sense of being unaltered and not processed.

36□ This is not a question of happiness. Many people are happy not expressing and/or looking for their *innermost wishes* (term from the subtitles of *Stalker* by Andrei Tarkovsky) and very often it seems not to be necessary, or their innermost wish is to serve and/or just be part of a more or less functioning society.

37□ One can improvise *inside* society but won't change it. A widely known word of wisdom tells us that one can only change oneself and not society. Improvisation can help the change, like McTrum concisely asserts: “It's only through improvisation that I found out about the importance of listening. Listening is really the first thing. If you want to change anything, first thing you have to do is listen. What's there?”

(auf wunderbare Weise FLASCHENPOST)

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