3.1 Noise as Device[145]

> The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects "unfamiliar", to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object is not important.

> - Viktor Shklovsky, *Art as Technique*

In the history of noise there have been riots, scandals, misunderstandings, excitement and misconceptions. Here I will try to address where I think the potential of noise actually lies. Noise is a very diffuse term. However, it has also been a musical practice within a specific tradition. What first attracted me to noise was the possibility for pushing the limits of what was acceptable: sonically, culturally, conceptually and socially.

Noise is not always disruptive, however. In order to be disruptive it needs to encounter negatively a set of expectations. Once the tropes of noise have been understood, its critical negative effect is no longer valid. Here I will identify some of the potential that noise- as musical practice- has for producing alienation and estrangement. In order to do this I want to use noise as a device in a similar way that the Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky used his concept of *ostranenie* (estrangement or defamiliarisation), and in so doing I will argue that noise needs to be understood both historically and contextually.

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[145] An earlier version of this paper was presented at *Noise and the Possibility of the Future* conference organized by Warren Neidich which took place at the Goethe Institute in Los Angeles on the 7th of March, 2015. Thanks to Warren Neidich, Ray Brassier, Anthony Iles and Sezgin Boynik.

Shklovsky was part of the Russian Formalists, which also included Boris Eichenbaum, Roman Jakobson, and Yuri Tynianov. The Russian Formalists were interested in breaking apart artworks into tropes, mechanisms or devices (*priem*). For Shklovsky this was done in order to roughen the surface of reality so as to defamiliarise automated perception. As he said, "The artwork is the the sum of its techniques."[146] Therefore, Shklovsky finds the structural dance of literary devices, as arbitrary and impersonal as the moves of chess pieces.

For Shklovsky, *ostranenie* is a device used in writing in order to counter the habituation of perception, to produce a sense of defamiliarization. In his famous 1916 essay 'Art as Device' *(*or other times translated as 'Art as Technique'*)* he takes an example of *ostranenie* from a moment in Tolstoy's *Kholstomer*, where the narrator is a horse which is puzzled by the belief of humans in the system of property and the lack of coherence with regards to what they say and their deeds. The passage is worth quoting at length (as Shklovsky does):

> But even then I simply could not see what it meant when they called me "man's property." The words "my horse" referred to me, a living horse, and seemed as strange to me as the words "my land," "my air", "my water." But the words made a strong impression on me. I thought about them constantly, and only after the most diverse experiences with people did I understand, finally, what they meant. They meant this: In life people are guided by words, not by deeds. It's not so much they love the possibility of doing or not doing something as it is the possibility of speaking with words, agreed on among themselves, about various topics. Such are the words "my" and "mine", which they apply to different things, creatures, objects, and even to land, people and horses. They agree that only one may say "mine" about this, that or the other thing. And the other who says "mine" about the greatest number of things is, according to the game which they've agreed to among themselves, the one they consider the most happy. I don't know the point of all this, but it's true. For a long time I tried to explain it to myself in terms of

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[146] Viktor Shklovsky, 'Art as Technique' (1916), in Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (eds.), *Russian Formalist Criticism Four Essays*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965, p.12

some kind of real gain, but I had to reject that explanation because it was wrong. Many of those, for instance, who called me their own never rode on me- although others did. And so with those who fed me. Then again, the coachman, the veterinarians, and the outsiders in general treated me kindly, yet those who called me their own did not. In due time, having widened the scope of my observations, I satisfied myself that the notions "my," not only in relations to us horses, has no other basis than a narrow human instinct which is called a sense of or right to private property. A man says "this house is mine" and never lives in it; he only worries about its construction and upkeep. A merchant says "my shop," "my dry goods shop," for instance, and does not even wear clothes made from the better cloth the keeps in his own shop. There are people who called a tract of land their own, but they never set eyes on it and never take a stroll on it. There are people who call others their own, yet never see them. And the whole relationship between them is that they so-called "owners" treat the others unjustly [...] And people strive not for the good in life, but for goods they can call their own.[147]

Here we can see how the displacement of the voice from the perspective of the horse makes us see reality differently, one that breaks the smoothness of the appearance of reality and goes on to describe a cruel reality for those who cannot express themselves.

Can noise also produce this 'roughing of the surface'? Historically, yes. It is what noise has been doing: disturbing the order of things, making us aware that those things that we took as stable, those things that we took for granted, contain elements that we cannot decipher. In a similar way to Shklovsky's *ostranenie,* noise forces perception, but not because it "incorporates the sensation of things as they are perceived"[148] but because we don't know how to deal with it. It produces a mismatch between cognition and sensation. It is not only a question about sensibility, it is about our lack of conceptual categories to deal with the experience. Yet, this is only a matter of time.

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147 Shklovsky, 'Art as Technique', p.15
148 Shklovsky, 'Art as Technique', p.13

Noise pushes perception to the limits because there is in it something we cannot properly decipher. There is something that goes beyond our conceptual categorisation. It's not properly indexed yet and we don't have the right tools to deal with it. Either there is something wrong, or it actually shows our inadequacy to deal with reality. In this regard it brings us/our senses closer to reality and to our impossibility to ascribe meaning to reality. This is why noise, in some regards, is the most abstract yet the most concrete of cultural expressions. On the one hand it's abstract because it constantly forces complexity to reach another level which had not yet been explored and concrete because its specificity has to do with the unacknowledged residue that surfaced in a precise send-receiver situation.

So then, what would it mean to claim the possibility to use noise as a device? It would mean to incorporate and appropriate its own deciphering. While Shklovsky wants to prolong the 'artfulness' of the object as much as possible and by doing this, to prolong an aesthetic experience, I propose that the deciphering of noise could be a way to socialise the way its estrangement effect works. Inevitably this would mean the disappearance of this estrangement, but it would also allow us to understand how our cognitive and sensory capacities work. In doing so, we could translate the conceptual problems that are posed by noise into further techniques or devices.

Why not try to prolong the aesthetic experience? Because both terms, 'aesthetic' and 'experience' are problematic terms that should not be taken for granted, especially taking into

account the kind of understanding of subjectivity that history presupposes (with a strong

relationship to the notion of the individual). The philosopher Ray Brassier made an excellent

point regarding the potential of noise to not be subordinated to "aesthetics":

> I am very wary of 'aesthetics': the term is contaminated by notions of 'experience' that I find deeply problematic. I have no philosophy of art worth speaking of. This is not to dismiss art's relevance for philosophy—far from it—but merely to express reservations about the kind of philosophical aestheticism which seems to want to hold up 'aesthetic experience' as a new sort of cognitive paradigm wherein the Modern (post-Cartesian) 'rift' between knowing and feeling would be overcome. In this regard, I would say that there can be no 'aesthetics of noise', because noise as I understand it would be the destitution of the aesthetic, specifically in its post-Kantian, transcendental register. Noise exacerbates the rift between knowing and feeling by splitting experience, forcing conception against sensation. Some recent philosophers have evinced an interest in subjectless experiences; I am rather more interested in experience-less subjects. Another name for this would be 'nemocentrism' (a term coined by neurophilosopher Thomas Metzinger): the objectification of experience would generate self-less subjects that understand themselves to be no-one and nowhere. This casts an interesting new light on the possibility of a 'communist' subjectivity.[149]

Later on I will try to argue that noise in practice can often produce this 'rift between

knowing and feeling' and in so doing it will bring it closer to Shklovsky when he claimed: "I am

studying the unfreedom of the writer."[150] From the perspective of this chapter, the best thing that

noise can do is to question the constraints of what we consider freedom and how it relates to

what we understand as the production of subjectivity.

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[149] Ray Brassier, 'Against an Aesthetics of Noise', 2009. Available here:
http://www.ny-web.be/transitzone/against-aesthetics-noise.html (accessed 20th April, 2015)
[150] Shklovsky, 'Art as Technique', pp.8-9

3.1.2 Criticisms of Shklovsky: noise as a corrective

Jameson in his book *The Prison House of Language* criticises Shklovsky's notion of *ostranenie* on three grounds[151], which are connected to each other:

1. Shklovsky's notion of *ostranenie* is ahistorical.
2. For Shklovsky's theory to makes sense he needs to isolate the material that he is working with, thus allowing us not to see it as a text (in the Barthean sense) i.e. not being able to take the context into account.
3. One is unsure whether *ostranenie* resides in the form or the content or the perceiver.

As a corrective proposition for criticisms of Shklovsky Jameson finds in Brecht an updated historical understanding and use of the estrangement effect:

> The effect of habituation is to make us believe in eternity of the present, to strengthen us in the feeling that the things and events among which we live are somehow "natural" which is to say permanent. The purpose of the Brechtian Estrangement-effect is therefore a political one in the most thorough going sense of the word; it is as Brecht insisted over and over, to make you aware of the objects and institutions you thought to be natural, were only historical: the result of change, they themselves henceforth in their turn became changeable (the spirit of Marx, the influence of *The Thesis on Feuerbach* is clear.)[152]

Noise is always historically and contextually understood. There is only one exception which has always been considered noise and that is gride (like the sound of nails on a blackboard).[153] Or as Jacques Attali puts it "Noise, then, does not exist in itself, but only in

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[151] Frederic Jameson, *The Prison House of Language*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972, p.47

[152] Jameson, *The Prison House of Language,* p.58

[153] Hillel Schwartz interviewed by Sonic Acts, 'Schwartz Interviewed', available here: https://vimeo.com/113593758 (accessed 17th May, 2015)

relation to the system within which it is inscribed."[154] With regards to individuation, noise is always within the frame but also at the margins of the frame. In fact noise constantly undermines its own framing. Or as Miguel Prado puts it: "What noise interferes in is the assumption of closed autonomy or independence within a system."[155] The individual instances challenge their own process of individuation by always pointing out that there is something missing. If the estrangement effect is still taking place, if there is still some noise going on, this means that our conceptual understanding is not fully able to grasp what is going on. This means it's difficult to individuate something precisely.

In the history of western music noise has always been put aside but it always comes back because it actually exists in the essence of western music (i.e. in the tone). In a recent conference on noise where this section was first presented, Ulrich Krieger, explained very well how "the tones that we actually hear contain some noise because a mathematically perfect tone would actually sound strange to our ears."[156]

Finally, on the issue of whether estrangement takes places in the form, content, or in the perceiver (with regards to noise) Attali answers this from the perspective of information theory: "noise is the term for a signal that interferes with the reception of a message by the receiver, even if the interfering signal itself has a meaning for the receiver."[157]

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[154] Jacques Attali, *Noise: the political economy of music* , Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985, pp,26-27
[155] Miguel Prado, 'Schelling´s Positive Account on Noise: on the problem of entropy, negentropy and anti-entropy', unpublished paper, 2015.
[156] Ulrich Krieger, 'Noise – A Definition', presentation, Noise and the Possibility of the Future, LA, March 6-7, 2015.
[157] Attali, *Noise*, pp. 26-27

3.1.3 TENSION

If there is no such thing as silence, then what is there?

There is information but within this information there is noise, a noise that we still do not define as something specific (i.e. music). Because it's very difficult to situate specifically where the noise resides within the context that I am talking about, I will refer here to noise in the general sense that Jaques Attali referred as the "signal that interferes with the reception of a message by the receiver."[158]

This would allow me to not necessarily focus on the phenomena of sound but on the general 'material' that can interfere with the receiver when they are trying to decode a message, which in the context that I am talking about would be a concert. In this sense, that would include non-phenomenal elements such as expectations and projections of the people involved and the general atmosphere that can be produced.

How do we know when noise is producing the estrangement effect? In concert situations we can perceive the estrangement effect when there is some tension in the atmosphere. This tension is produced because there is a set of expectations that are not being met. At the same

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[158] Attali, *Noise,* pp. 26-27

time, people project onto what is going on, but without having clear references. There is confusion but at the same time there is concentration.

If there is tension (because noise is producing this critical potential i.e. a reconsideration of what critical means) this is because the safety mechanisms that allow us to 'get it' are not working. Different logics are taking place. People think differently of what is going on in the sense that there is no possible unity of thought that can be used to describe the situation.

This tension does not allow for a total subjective experience, you can't just immerse into what you are perceiving because there is a friction between the reality that we're experiencing and our ability to deal with it. I will try to explain this through my own practice. I come from years of experience of making noise and improvised music with a computer, but at some point it was clear that noise had become a genre of music with specific tropes that were becoming a parody of itself (loud volume, aggressive frequencies, total movement or total stasis...). So, I became interested in a different approach to noise, one that has to do with silence, but silences that are full of expectation because one does not know what might happen next. This technique came from a shift in my understanding of improvisation: not as an act of interaction between the musicians and their instruments but as a collective social interaction happening in a given space without neutral positions (such as, one of the spectator). Therefore, assuming, after Cage's *4'33"* , that there is no such thing as silence, and that the audience might well be producing the sounds, I incorporated a Marxist perspective in trying to understand and expose how social relations are produced in a given space.

Social interaction occurs easily if the performers don't use instruments. Instead, through generic gestures, available to all,such as speech or movements in the space, it's possible to generate unprecedented reactions from both the audience and the performers . It's no longer an interaction anticipated by a musician or director beforehand (like in Brecht's case) but elements that're put there in order to generate the unexpected: the desire to produce a tension and estrangement in everybody involved, including the performers themselves.

The precondition for producing tension has to do with suspending the contract and consensual presupposition between audience and performer. If this tension occurs we do not relate to each other in the form of consensus because the elements necessary for constituting consensus are being taken away. In this sense, the situation ungrounds itself. It makes everyone think without a totally prescribed role and in this process a collective self-consciousness emerges. We lose the ability to relate either to one's self or to each other. It forces people to think about the relations to one another without prefiguration. It is no longer the bad sociality of the consumer nor of the emancipated spectator. It just means a suspension of clear cut roles where people experience and explore their own conditioning, their unfreedom.

Your role as auditor cannot be taken for granted and by doing this it undermines capitalist socialisation: you are not just consuming something - you are part of it. Through enforced participation, where you're not consulted in advance, you're reminded that you're not a sovereign individual, that you do not have a choice to remain neutral, that you're not free. This in

contrast to our lives in the money-economy where you can 'always' negotiate your situation in capital. As the old story is said to go, 'the more money you have, the more power and the more you can choose your situation.'

Marx wants freedom for the individual but this is possible only in and through the community. The condition of my freedom is the condition for everyone's freedom. Now my freedom seems to be purchased at the expense of others. My ability to consume comes at the cost of others to produce goods in terrible circumstances. Systemic alienation cannot be negated just by discursive participation or making noises together. We have structural and systemic exploitation and this means there is no possibility for a kind of immediate negation in the whole network of mediations. There is no immediate negation of mediation as such. *False immediacy has been too present in noise and in free improvisation.*

We need to think about our conditions of experience, but not as indeterminate thinking but as determinate thinking. We need to find a specific point to focus on and noise can be this focus because it's precisely what we have no control over - what questions our conditions of experience. 'What am I witnessing?' 'How do I behave given the suspension of the audience performer relation?' 'How do we relate to each other once we are no longer passively consuming?'

Some people reassure their individuality through the reassertion of themselves. I refuse this position, I refuse to take for granted a notion of the individual fermented under capitalist

conditions. Many people might try to reconcile this experience as a prank or a joke, reestablishing normality as if they cannot tolerate having to think about what is going on and why it's going on. In my experience, when a tension is produced it can go in two directions: 1.) people reassert themselves, their knowledge and authority, pretending to be clever by making a joke or behaving as if they have seen it before. This attitude kills the tension. 2.) people follow the tension and when this happens, a certain honesty emerges where the individual contributions become part of a collective rational agency that tries to makes sense out of the situation, understanding that there is some undecipherable noise going on. There are certain techniques that can help the acceleration of tension and estrangement such as: spiking space (organise the furniture in unconventional ways), human sampler (sampling and repeating things that have been said in the space), glitching voice (malfunctioning discourse), anti-social realism (collapsing the impotence of changing the social conventions in the performance space with the impotence to change reality in the general sense), ungrounding the situation (tear apart these social conventions), going fragile (sharing deep insecurities and doubts), daring together (doing the ungrounding collectively).

Once we have identified that there is tension, then we try to measure its critical potential. Noise can be transformative precisely because it makes you connect to other aspects of reality that are not necessarily sound. In doing so it foregrounds its historical specificity. It's in the socialisation process of this deciphering that I can see the potential of noise understood as a device.

3.1.4 THREE LEVELS

There are three levels from which we can measure the awareness that noise can produce: *awareness*, *awareness as* and *awareness of* the mechanisms that makes you aware as.[159]

1. **Awareness:** this would be noise understood as an absolute immersion in sound required of the listener, which would also mean the most phenomenological approach to noise. It's not surprising that people who claim this approach often imply a very individualist emphasis. As, for example, in Francisco Lopez[160] or in VOMIR. In fact with VOMIR we can see this connection between noise as absolute autonomy and the individualist politics in his *NOISE WALL MANIFESTO: "*The individual no longer has any alternative but to completely reject contemporary life as promoted and preached. The only free behavior that remains resides in noise, withdrawal and a refusal to capitulate to manipulation, socialization and entertainment."[161] I find this approach the most problematic precisely because it would be the most aestheticised one and because it implies a certain agency of the individual which under these conditions would be a very questionable claim.

2. **Awareness as:** Here the context would need to be taken into account: you have the map and you identify other references. It already takes you away from the total immersion of sound. A couple of examples come to mind: Cage *4'33"* - even though Cage would want to deal with the sounds just as sound in themselves, it makes you question what music is, and tears apart previous value judgments the audience needs to question themselves and their roles (are they producers of sound or/and the perceivers?), Junko and her extreme vocals which sonically trigger the most disturbing imaginary situations. Nevertheless, her

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[159] This triadic understanding of the potential of noise comes from a conversation with Ray Brassier in May 2015.

[160] As you can read from his bio on what he is trying to produce: "transcendental listening, freed from the imperatives of knowledge and open to sensory and spiritual expansion." Francisco Lopez, 'Biography', available here: http://www.franciscolopez.net/ (accessed 13 May 2014)

[161] VOMIR, 'HNW MANIFESTO', available here: http://www.decimationsociale.com/app/download/5795218093/Manifeste+du+Mur+Bruitiste.pdf (accessed 17th May 2015)

delivery is the most neutral one without any of the clichés of noise: aggression with such as references to serial killers or concentration camps or simply pure expression as if it was an act of freedom. I would say that her work produces the rift between knowing and feeling because it tears apart any reconciliation between your cognitive abilities to deal with it and how it makes you feel. Here we can see how noise no longer relates to just sound but it takes into account other aspects that have to do with the context, the historical reception of the material and our ability to deal with it.

3. **Awareness of the mechanisms that produces an awareness:** This last level is the most transformative because it makes you reconsider your relationship not only to the context but also with the mechanisms that you have in order to deal with this context. This inevitably would not just be about aesthetic experience but questioning what experience is, how it's produced; but more importantly, how subjectivity is produced. It would not only force conception against sensation (like in the case of Junko) but it would also force the process of objectification in which you would have to see yourself from a third perspective point of view because the means to feel and see yourself as an individual are being undermined. For example, your condition as audience or performer is not totally given so there can be an element where positions shift to conditions that are not yet described. This would resist the fetishism of the singularity of a unique experience.

3.1.5 SOCIALISATION OF NOISE AS DEVICE

Why would it be important to try to socialise the estrangement effect that noise has on us? We have to take into account that both formalist and noise strategies are being recuperated for very nasty purposes. Anthony Iles in his text, 'Studying Unfreedom: Viktor Shklovsky's Critique of the Political Economy of Art' discusses how some of these formalist strategies are used in Britain:

Disturbingly, we discover recently, in the reform of both Higher and Primary Education in the United Kingdom – a 'formal aesthetics of behavioral psychology ' – a troubling reformulation and deployment of formalist techniques to the ends of producing an automatic subject appropriate to crisis capitalism's instrumental needs.[162]

This is done in order for students to develop better information acquisition and 'encourage' the cognitive 'development' of the individual student."[163]

In regards to noise, we can see how it's being used in the battlefield, in torture and the city in order to disperse demonstrations. James Parker recently delivered a great lecture "Towards a Jurisprudence of Sonic Warfare"[164] in which he points out how the use of sonic cannons like LRAD 500X-RE (the model that appears to have been present at the Ferguson demonstration but also in Gaza and other places) slip through juridical loopholes - being very helpful for governments, as they cannot be proven responsible for the damage; given that there is no physical impact which can be proven to have caused the damage (it could have been loud music on headphones). Or from another perverse form of recuperation Parker points out that the band Skinny Puppy is trying stop the U.S. Government from using his music for torture.

These examples are of course the most perverse forms of the negative critical potential of noise. However, what is argued here is that there is a critical negative potential in noise which can push our thinking and our perception to points where we don't know what 'our' means. This

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[162] Anthony Iles, 'Studying Unfreedom: Viktor Shklovsky's Critique of the Political Economy of Art', published in *RAB-RAB Journal for Political and Formal Inquiries in Art*. Issue -2, Volume B, Helsinki 2015, p.72
[163] Iles, 'Studying Unfreedom', p.74
[164] James Parker, 'Towards a Jurisprudence of Sonic Warfare', presentation, Liquid Architecture Festival, Melbourne, September 11, 2014. Thanks to James Parker for sending me his material and Danni Zuvela and Joel Stern for letting me know it.

approach to noise would go against the absolutisation of experience as a reservoir for agency. To do this a socialisation of the alienating effects of noise through rational understanding would be necessary in order to understand how it functions. To use noise as a device would be to use it's alienating potential to produce fucked up experiences that would make us question ourselves as subjects. If it reaffirms yourself as subject (I get it or I like it) this would not be noise as device. This noise is to be contrasted with noise as taste, which could not expand much further from the mere 'experiencing self'. The important thing is to identify whether noise has its estrangement effect and if it ceases to have this alienating effect, to recharge its critical negative potential constantly so as not to become a parody of itself in the worst sense.

3.2 Improvisation after Brecht

> In setting up new artistic principles and working out new methods of representation we must start with the compelling demands of a changing epoch; the necessity and the possibility of remodelling society loom ahead. All incidents between men must be noted, and everything must be seen from a social point of view. Among other effects that a new theater will need of its social criticism and its historical reporting of completed transformations is the A-effect.

- Bertolt Brecht, *On Theater*

A-effect, alienation effect, defamiliarisation effect, V-effect, or in its german original *Verfremdungseffekt* might be the most powerful technique developed by Bertolt Brecht. He started to use the term in the mid 30's, after a visit to Moscow. It was probably Tretiakov who introduced him to the term; who was himself influenced by Shklovsky's concept of *ostranenia*. Interestingly enough John Willets, in his collection and translation of Brecht's

writing, decided to translate it as alienation effect. However, as Fredric Jameson on Brecht and

Method[165] and Sean Carney in Brecht and Critical Theory[166] point out, *Verfremdung* is not

Entfremdung (the usual term that Marx's alienation is rendered)[167]. The prefix *ver* has different

connotations in German:

- removing

- vanishing

- misleading

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[165] Jameson will stress the problem of Willet's translation in details, "what is misleading about his translation (through the volume just mentioned) of Verfremdungseffekt as 'alienation effect'. The Marxian concept we identify as 'alienation' is however, Entfremdung in German, so that his one had better be rendered 'estrangement' in keeping with its Russian ancestor (ostranenia 'making strange'). In any case, the V-effect will be thus translated through, despite some support for the more aesthetic term 'defamiliarization'." Found in, Fredric Jameson, *Brecht and Method*, London: Verso, 2011, P. 107

[166] Carney follows Jameson's commentary, "In his editorial notes in *Brecht on Theater*, John Willets gives every indication that he knows that *Verfremdung* is not *Entfremdung* (see Brecht 1964: 76 in particular); the fact that he translates *Verfremdung* into 'alienation' anyway remains an intriguing puzzle, especially considering Willet's insightful connection." Found in, Sean Carney, *Brecht & Critical Theory,* London: Routledge, 2005, p.788

[167] Andrew Chitty gives a precise account of Marx's uses of *Entfremdung andEntäusserung* in regards to what in English is usually translated as alienation or estrangment: http://marxandphilosophy.org.uk/reviewofbooks/reviews/2014/959 (accessed 23rd May, 2017) : "My sense is that, in 1844, in talking about the process in which human products come to assume a life of their own and to dominate their own makers, Marx uses *Entfremdung* (translated Penguin *Early Writings* and the *Collected Works* as 'estrangement') in a fairly uncomplicated way to describe a psychological experience of becoming or being 'cut off': cut off from our own products, from our own productive activity, from our own essence as species beings and from other human beings. By contrast he uses *Entäusserung* to describe an underlying process of humans producing in such a way that they come to be dominated by their products, which gives rise to this experience. He uses the word so as to suggest a philosophical understanding of this underlying process, by drawing on the resources of Fichte's and Hegel's concepts of *Entäusserung*. Accordingly the difference between *Entäusserung* and *Entfremdung* is a difference between essence and appearance, and *Entäusserung* is the key term. Eliding the two concepts, as Sayers does, makes it impossible to see this difference. This leads me to my third comment, which is on the fate of the ideas of *Entäusserung* and *Entfremdung* in Marx's later work. By 1845 he has given up on the ambition to use *Entäusserung* to provide a philosophical understanding of the underlying process, and accordingly he stops using *Entäusserung* altogether, except in the everyday sense of 'relinquishing ownership'. He shifts from the idea that human products dominate their makers to the idea that human social relations do, and he changes his terminology. In the *German Ideology* he talks of the *Verselbständigung* - literally the 'becoming independent' - of social relations, and in *Capital* of the way that relations between persons take the form of relations between things that are autonomous of their owners. (Incidentally I must differ with Sayers when he describes this process as 'commodity fetishism'; for Marx commodity fetishism is the cognitive error of naturalising what are in fact social properties that *results* from the process in which social relations between persons take the form of relations between things.)"

- negating

- resulting

- reinforcing[168]

For our purposes -taking alienation as a constitutive part of subjectivity- the notion of *Verfremdung* is very helpful because it not only explores our alienation, it also forces us to address forms of social displacement which then in turn need to be negotiated. It helps us to understand alienation beyond its common usage as a separation from the social. *Verfremdung* instead has estranging and defamiliarising qualities. If we take improvisation as a starting point, but we put it through the notion of *Verfremdung*, then we need to reconsider both what freedom is and who are the subjects of freedom. This means that *Verfremdung* is a very powerful tool for dealing with these issues.

There are different levels of alienation -such us labour, language, unconscious, technology and selfhood - however all these levels are to a large degree determined by capitalist relations. This mean that when we want to assess these forms of alienation and try to understand them, our understanding is also tainted by how we conceive ourselves, which is in turn shape by

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[168] Carney continues his analysis of the confusion with emphasis on the prefix ver-, "In his analysis of Brecht's linguistic turns, Rainer Nägele observes the uses to which Brecht puts the prefix *ver-*, and finds a Freudian strategy: 'The German prefix *ver-* imposes here, as usual, its Freudian slips on the verb. Meaningless in itself, it twists verbs vertiginously and displaces agents. It is one of the morphemes of the discourse of modernity' (Nägele 1991:147). On Freud's part, the prefix *ver-* provides him with the central defence mechanisms of the psyche: *Verdrängung* (repression), *Verleugnung* (disavowal), *Verneinung* (negation), and *Verwerfung* (foreclosure). Brecht's *Verfremdung* is a cousin to these terms. Although *Verfremdung* cannot be entirely understood as any of these psychic events, I do think that it can be illuminated by reference to another Freudian concept (although one not nearly so important for Freud himself, who sees it almost exclusively in aesthetic terms: the *Unheimlich*. Carney, *Brecht & Critical Theory,* p,789. And For more information on the mechanism of the prefix see: https://german.stackexchange.com/questions/2279/what-are-the-origin-possible-meanings-of-the-ver-prefix/2286#2286 (accessed 16th May, 2017)

ideology. Having said that, we can use ourselves as material for improvisation and through

Verfremdungseffekt and thinking-out-loud together we can explore the social dissonance that

emerges from our determination by capitalist social relations and our capacity for

self-determination: freedom beyond the self.

     In Postmodern Brecht: A Re-presentation, Elizabeth Wright argues that in

postmodernism *vefrremdungseffeckt* has been rendered obsolete because society already is using

these types of effects constantly.[169] In these post-fact times - with Trump and so on - her claims

may make even more sense. However, I would say that we need to reconsider the term and give

it a new spin. Today certain theories claim that forms of distancing through critique are obsolete

because they presume a form of objectivity that we no longer have, while other positions like

criticality claim to supersede critique because it undoes "dichotomies of 'insides' and 'outsides'

through numerous emergent categories such as rhizomatics, folds, singularities, etc.' that

collapse such binarities and replace them with a complex multi-inhabitation."[170] As a response to

these claims, I would say that we need an acceleration of the *Verfremdungseffekt* - to go beyond

its theatrical threshold as a critical exposition of the 'real' self as characters of the living theater

of society where increasingly we are performing a curated and increasingly conscious version of

ourselves. Fredric Jameson points out how Brecht was already dismantling the idea of selfhood :

> In fact, I think that Brecht's positions are better read not as a refusal of identification but,
> rather, as the consequences to be drawn from the fact that such a thing never existed in
> the first place. In that case, 'third-person acting', the quoting of a character's expressions
> of feeling and emotion, is the result of a radical absence of the self, or at least the coming

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[169] Elizabeth Wright, *Postmodern Brecht: a re-presentation*, London: Routledge, 1989, P. 96
[170] Irit Rogoff, 'From Criticism to Critique to Criticality', Available here:
http://eipcp.net/transversal/0806/rogoff1/en (accessed 17th May, 2017)

to terms with a realization that what we call our 'self' is itself an object for consciousness, not our consciousness itself: it is a foreign body within an impersonal consciousness, which we try to manipulate in such a way as to lend some warmth and personalization to the matter. The simplest models of identification are therefore rendered meaningless by this situation, in which at best, in a Lacanian complexity, two self-objects would entertain a complex and mediated relationship with each other across the gaps of isolated consciousness as such.[171]

The claim here is that *Verfremdungseffekt* is a way of exploring alienation, of generating forms of displacement where the projection of ourselves confronts glimpses of objectivity and by doing so helps us to reconfigure our own self conceptions. The glimpse of objectivity entertained in this process should therefore be contrasted with the didactic element of illumination. Instead *Verfremdungseffekt* draws from improvisation as a way for us to explore our own constitution. Capitalism - I remind you - needs self-empowerment and when it can it produces smooth social outlets for these identity models so as to let the work force go on with business as usual. It narrows the possibility for an overview, a global vision or perspective, it threatens the possibility of truth. Social dissonance - as a concept - explores the problematic conception of ourselves and truth by trying to gain an overview, however incomplete this overview may be.

Embodied critique is problematic because it takes for granted embodiment; as I have explained the politics of embodiment are illusory in their recourse to the belief in selfhood. These days experiments that are dealing with embodiment in the form of virtual reality have stunning results.[172] Having said that, we can explore forms of embodiment by placing experience in a constant *Verfremdungseffekt* so as to gain awareness of its possibilities and conditionings.

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[171] Jameson, *Brecht*, p.68

[172] See examples in the website of VERE (Virtual embodiment and Robotic Re-Embodiment research project, available here: http://www.vere.eventlab-ub.org/ (accessed 20th May, 2017)