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Towards a Virtual 'Aesthetic Community'

Embodiment and Agency in Blast Theory's work

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Towards a Virtual 'Aesthetic Community'

Embodiment and Agency in Blast Theory's work

Premshay Hermon

OUTLINE

Blast Theory
Conclusion

TEXT

1 Unlike other media, Virtual Reality (VR) has a very brief history. Therefore, it is difficult to write on virtual art from a referential point of view. Although some writing on virtual reality art exists, previous research and critique has had to allude to comparisons made from metonyms and metaphors, for no other medium has ever included its complexity and affects as a whole. Virtual reality, as a full mechanism of delivery, perception, and impact on the entire realm of senses, is only now starting to materialize.

2 An important part of the medium is the promise of community. The elevated levels of presence, embodiment and agency in virtual spaces are fundamental in immersive experiences that challenge all previous concepts. Communities in VR differ from traditional communities and are closer to the principles of Jacque Rancière 'Aesthetic Community'[1].

3 They are formed by a reconfiguration of the sensorium, always holding a duality – each community member exists both in the real reality, as well as in the virtual world, sensing both realities and reacting to both at the same time.

4 The place of encounter for the community is an arena in which play and presence meet. The avatars inhibiting these worlds range from the symbolic to the mimetic, and different degrees of control of the avatar are used, many utilize the advanced graphics processing power in today's consumer computers to allow highly complex 3-dimensional representations of full bodied avatars, with the ability to

control its physicality by replicating the user's body movements in real-time. Yet, even with simple mechanics and graphics can users embody their avatars and use it as a medium to convey a 'performance of the body'[2] that establishes their existence in the virtual world.

5 Avatars bring life to a virtual constructed space, as they are embodied by users bringing real-world interaction forms (social cues and gestures, for example) into the virtual world. The user can form an individual identity and build a social life when inhibiting an avatar[3].

6 Although virtual, the interactions can induce real pain. Such was the case in 1993, when an avatar in the text-based virtual world LambdaMOO exploited a feature in the system to cause other avatars to perform violent and sexual acts against their wills, causing the victims whose avatars were exploited to suffer from post-traumatic symptoms[4].

7 More recently, an incident in the VR game QuiVr shed light on the realness of sexual harassment in VR. In this bow-and-arrow game avatars maintain a similar, bodiless form. While playing, a player's avatar began groping another player's character, chasing her around the play area and rubbing his virtual hand across where her chest and crotch should be. The woman, having previously experienced two real-world sexual assaults[5], perceived it just as real, with the groping character preying solely on her as the only female around (determined by the sound of her voice)[6]. The virtual environment employs visual, aural, and haptic feedback stimulations to create an immersive experience. Embodying an avatar in such an environment causes a sense of presence and agency that brought the woman to attest 'it felt real, violating'[7]. In order to deal with these possible actions VR worlds have been developing safety mechanisms, such as a personal space bubble, a feature on the social platform AltSpaceVR, Which turns on an invisible radius around the avatar as a personal safety space. An avatar that crosses the barrier is faded from the user's perspective into invisibility. Such tools slowly create new aesthetics of social norms, potentially changing the way we communicate.

8 An opposite example occurred on January 2018, on the social platform VRChat. The platform is known for the mischief that goes on in its rooms, and especially for the Ugandan Knuckles pranksters

disturbing users, but on one occasion, when an avatar fell to the floor, accompanied by moaning voices, the community came to aid. The users understood that something was wrong, stopped their casual interactions, surrounded the struggling avatar, and helping through voice chat. The ones who were still misbehaving were pushed away. The participants were making 'room' for the avatar to breath, and by that, trying to assist the person experiencing the seizure, to make it through. The community came together for a person, as if their communal presence was physically real, despite the different norms and behaviours the space provides, and even though their help could only be transmitted through a virtual avatar.

9 The Sociologist T.L. Taylor notes that the presence of an avatar in a (virtual) space signals to other users their 'continued participation in the space' [8]. This echoes Erica Fischer-Lichte's notion of co-presence of actors and spectators as a condition of performance [9]. Fischer-Lichte emphasizes the presence of the actual bodies, however it is hereby suggested that due to the influences of embodiment this notion should be extended to the virtual realm [10].

Blast Theory

10 Although Virtual Reality is a nascent medium, some artists have already been generating works that challenge the rigid definitions of performance, spectatorships, and community. New performance practices create a dissolution of the distinction between spectator, participant, and creator. Such approaches allow for a more political artist and a more political spectator. The discussed works precede the current wave of VR and are treated in this context as precursors: they present an opportunity for reframing critical notions in order to make room for what will be a new age of human experience, and an extensive field of research.

11 Blast Theory (hereafter: BT) is the name of a group of artists and researches initiated in the 90's by Matt Adams, Ju Row Farr and Nick Tandavanitj. Working out of their center in Brighton, UK, the group has been layering performance, gaming, theatre, film, interaction, and installation, and involving technology to entwine and examine the disciplines in each work. The group uses ludological processes in the

development of their works, testifying to the affect the computer-game form has had on them [11].

12 Sociological theories are often called into play when discussing BT's performances. In his seminal book sociologist Irving Goffman observes mundane social interactions as a series of ongoing performances. The performers, which are actors and spectators at the same time, give themselves into a 'kind of information game – a potentially infinite cycle of concealment, discovery, false revelation, and rediscovery.' [12] Goffman suggests that the communication between participants of the so-called 'social game' is asymmetrical, as the spectator (which he calls a 'witness') may have an advantage over the actor due to an ability to recognize an individual's recalculation and manipulation of behavior. Reflecting on BT's performance A Machine to See With (2011) Marcos Dias connects Goffman's observation with Victor Turner's performative reflexivity, which could be achieved in liminal constellations such as play or rituals [13]. Both theories take into account a constant flow of information between individuals in everyday scenarios, which digital embodied performances use precisely at the point of spillage to create new opportunities for reflection:

> Embodied performativity questions the technolibertarian myth of digital media as an augmenting module to be attached to contemporary social practices or the main driver of social interaction in these practices. It enables emergent social interaction to materialize through its perceived imperfections, or breakages in information flows. [14]

13 In his definitive book on the role of play in culture Johan Huizinga differentiates the play and ritual from the everyday. The playground is a 'temporary world' with its own absolute order that creates 'a limited perfection' [15]. It is a magical world, contained within a 'magic circle'. The 'magic circle' metaphor was adopted by game design theorists as both a defining trait as well as a subject of critique, and, as Sofia Romualdo points out, it is a valuable frame of reference when examining Blast Theory's work, precisely because of the way they treat the magic circle as a 'fluid and permeable demarcation, perhaps best described as a layer, rather than a separate space within the real world.' [16]

14 In their works BT produce virtual spaces in which the spectator is an active participant that accepts upon her/himself the embodiment of an unseen representation which is made up in part of a fictional character and in part of him/herself.

15 A precursor to the potential of avatars as embodied vessels for the formation of a community can be found in BT's Day of the Figurines (2006)[17]. In this 24-days mixed media production a fictional decaying miniature town unravels. Each day in real-life represents one hour in game-time. The 'town' is represented both as a physical object (a miniature complete set residing in the venue) as well as an asynchronous communication between the 'town's' people via SMS messages. Although primarily interacting through mobile phones, participants must first register (in person, at the venue), select a figurine to represent them, register online and make sure the operator has the correct details. After receiving an index and commands card from the operator the figurine is placed on the board – a 1:100 scale model of the fictional town (Fig. 1). Sending an SMS message to the system with directions on where to go triggers a projection of an arrow on the board, instructing the operators (paid actors) to move the figurine to a certain location in town. The miniature model was built to complement the textual essence of the work, creating a kind of spectator interface[18], and serves as a material community center.

Blast Theory, Day of the Figurines, 2006
Detail from mixed media installation

(Photo: BT website).

16 The figurines create a personal connection of the observer-participant to the artwork: The participant gives the figurine a name; his/her directives move the representation in space, becoming meaningful as the day progresses; the figurines themselves were meticulously built as desirable objects (Fig. 2), enhancing the engagement and sense of ownership[19]. It is a metaphorical embodiment, but one that nonetheless manages to create a bond between a person and a figurative object within the imagined world. The performative actions are relational to the other, machanising a communal creation. The lack of imposition of any authoritarian objectives on the participant and the temporal expansion of the magic circle create, as

Romualdo notes, 'a space for emergence in storytelling, player behaviours and social dynamic.'[20] The unique configuration produces a work that, through operating in several forms simultaneously, on several senses and with several modes of mutually-effective interactions, produces what Jacque Rancière calls an 'aesthetic community'[21]: a 'community entailed in separation itself'[22], a tentative production of a community entangled between 'being together' and 'being apart'.[23]

Blast Theory, Day of the Figurines, 2006
Detail from mixed media installation

(Photo: BT website).

17 The fusion of spectator and participant is especially relevant in light of Rancière's *The Emancipated Spectator*[24]. In his essay Rancière examines the place of the spectator in the relations between art and politics by looking at the common views on political implications of the theatrical spectacle.[25] He detects that the critique of theatre revolves around what he calls 'the paradox of the spectator': on the one hand, there is no theatre without a spectator; on the other, spectatorship is an unwanted position, for it sustains the dichotomy between viewing and acting, between passivity and action[26]. Rancière then suggests a new kind of theatre, 'a theatre without spectators': separating the concept of the spectator from the concept of theatre and shifting the relations between the spectator and the stage to center on drama as an action that stimulates action[27].

18 All formulaic attempts have failed, including Brecht's epic theatre and Artaud's theatre of cruelty[28], for they do not truly emancipate, as they do not equalise intelligence. Both Brecht's and Artaud's approaches try to change theatre from within, to bridge between the shortcomings of the spectacle to the advantages of the theatre. Rancière find this logic turns the theatre into a mediating tool that aspires to eliminate itself, in the same way a teacher is responsible for eliminating the gap between his/her knowledge and the ignorant student[29]. In the pedagogical relationship the student does not know what he doesn't know, and can never know the distance between the knowledge (which sits with the teacher, or authority), and his own ignorance. It is an unbridged inherent gap precisely

because it is a form of power relations that establishes the teacher as that which will always know more than the student, and the only one among them who knows what ignorance is (as it is defined by the authority). That is how the eternal distance is formed. The first thing taught to the pupil is his/her inability to reach knowledge. The inequality of intelligence triumphs.

19 In order to break this pedagogical circle there is a need for intellectual emancipation – an acknowledgement in the value of intelligence, as it manifests in different forms. This is the basic intelligence of the mere option of human learning by observation and comparison with a thing which is already known to the learner. Theatre makers, claims Rancière, work the same way. Whether intending to convey a message or simply asking to ignite a feeling or a call to action, performing artists assume that they already know the correct distance (between knowledge and ignorance) and the ways to remove it [30]. The entire construct is counterintuitive, as:

> The human animal learns everything in the same way as it initially learnt its mother tongue, as it learnt to venture into the forest of thing and signs surrounding it, so as to take its place among human beings. [31]

20 What Rancière suggests is a complete reconfiguration of the distribution of the sensible. He alludes to the Platonic notion of the 'impossibility of doing two things at once' [32], and of the stage as a disruption of the divide of identities. Current day immersive art and virtual reality experiences realise a once impossible option – to be in two places at once. The use of embodiment and agency to produce a self-initiated ethical inquiry is thus a possible strategy for an emancipated spectator. Such strategies can be can be seen in BT's Ulrike and Eamon Complaint (Commissioned by the De La Warr Pavilion for the 53rd Venice Biennale, 2009), which mixes pervasive and locative gaming with roleplaying. The work begins with a phone call that asks the participants to choose which of two characters they would like to be, before embarking on an interactive journey throughout the city, armed with a mobile phone, through which they receive instructions and answer questions. The characters are revealed to be real-life terrorists Ulrike Meinhof (Red Army Faction) and Eamon Collins (IRA),

turning the journey into an embodied experience in which participants are confronted with their own morality while slowly being conditioned to a state of compliance through the instructions received on the mobile phone (Fig. 3). The work relies on the consent and agency of the participants, yet as it advances it calls into question that very agency while tying it in with real political past events. The participants themselves become avatars for three separate entities: Ulrike or Eamon, BT, and their self-formulated character as a performer in the work, each demanding some form of submission.

Blast Theory, Ulrike and Eamon Complaint
Mixed media performance, 53rd Venice Biennale, 2009, still from online video, accessed March 26, 2007, http://www.blasttheory.co.uk/projects/ulrike-and-eamon-compliant/.

(Photo: BT website).

21 As Romualdo notes, the use of game structures as a layer on real world events and spaces allows highly tailored experiences for each spectator, dissolving the Magic Circle just enough to create a personal reflection space [33]. The spectator is also the creator of his/her own path, and while not being able to influence events that have already occurred, the spectator's active decision making while inhibiting a real-life character demands a type of engagement that produces ethical ramifications in the lines of Rancière's emancipated spectator. Moreover, the work evolves as an experience of multiple expressions of stories of a fringed nature, of people whose crimes have deemed them undesirable but were made of decisions which are in part political, part criminal, and part the consequences of circumstances. Following Rancière once more, it is argued that the work redistributes the sensible. It's a reconfiguration of the communitas, forming a new (ad hoc) community:

> Politics consists in reconfiguring the distribution of the sensible which defines the common of a community, to introduce into it new subjects and objects, to render visible what had not been, and to make heard as speakers those who had been perceived as mere noisy animals. [34]

22 Similarly, *I'd Hide You* (2012-2014) redistributes the sensible by refocusing the spectator's gaze through the eyes of another [35]. Designed

by BT as a mixed reality chase game, three performers (runners) play a special hide-and-seek game on the streets of a designated city, armed with special equipment that broadcasts it live on the web and allows viewers to participate by interacting online (Fig. 4). Choosing a runner from the reality-TV-like designed web interface transports the viewer to the runner's POV cam, giving them the ability to provide the runner with clues as to the whereabouts of the other runners. Online viewers can even accumulate points by clicking on the other runners if they are viewed on the cam-feed, a pun on the word 'shooting', which is both an extreme political action, cinematographic term, and a computer games genre ('FPS': First-Person-Shooter). Embedded in the game is a need to constantly be on the lookout, notice details, and make interactions with the environment and with other people, while being aware of the chase and the opportunities it holds. The avatar in this case is a live human, an actor devoted to the game, receiving orders and warnings from its operators, who could be anyone, anywhere. The embodiment is only partial, as the actor is not subjected to the spectator-participant, and the control over motor functions and decision making remains with the actor. The orders are merely suggestions which produce, in effect, a real-time communication between the actor and each of the spectators-participants, forming a community within a shared playground, reordering the geography, architectural topography and social conditions. The game is not just a chase, as the actors take the time to interview people they meet on their way, observe details of aesthetic objects they come across, and even infiltrate exhibition spaces and social events, letting the spectators be inside an otherwise unauthorized place. The participants form bonds, help each other, and compete with one another, developing tactics of interaction while occupying several places and functions at the same time.

Blast Theory, I'd Hide You
Mixed media, 2012-2014

(Photo: BT website).

23 *Operation Black Antler* (2016), which debuted at the Brighton Festival and co-produced with the immersive theatre company Hydrocracker, explores the techniques and morality of undercover police surveill-

ance and espionage [36]. In this work BT further develops the use of game mechanics and roleplaying in real-world scenarios and continues to blend between reality and fiction while blurring the magic circle even more. The individual spectator is now a part of a team, the mobile phone makes way in favor of in-person interactions with 'agents' (portrayed by actors). After receiving a message on their mobile phones, participants make their way to a given location, where they are briefed and asked to form secret identities (Fig. 5). They are given a mission to gather information on potentially violent right-wing extremists assembling in a community event in a local pub, for which they will have to make their way to the pub and interact with its residents for the best of two hours. They wear several layers of identity: the first is their basic one as participants in a performance; the second is their given identity as undercover police officers; the third is their undercover identity, which is comprised of their moral attitude toward the extremists (as sympathizing or antagonizing triggers different scenarios). The interactions are open-ended; the participants do not know if they are talking to an actor, a bystander (bartenders and pub patrons) or a fellow participant. If working in the lines of the given assignment, they must perform a role that acknowledges and echoes the suspect characters, including voicing opinions against immigrants and using common racial slurs [37]. What they may say and do does not necessarily reflect their own views. It is exactly this kind of juxtaposition that calls for a real-time analysis and reflection on a situation covered with ambiguity: in the absence of a script, on a real-life location, under the guise of a character of their own making, and with a (semi-dissolved) magic circle, whatever the participants choose – is their own. Through their participation they create an ad-hoc community, which is both real and a poetic reflection of society. This strategy gives room to what Rancière refers to as the logic of emancipation in performance:

> It is not the transmission of the artist's knowledge or inspiration to the spectator. It is the third thing that is owned by no one, whose meaning is owned by no one, but which subsists between them, excluding any uniform transmission, any identity of cause and effect. [38]

Blast Theory, Operation Black Antler
Mixed media, 2016

(Photo: BT website).

24 There is no clear end-game (win/lose scenario) to the piece. It ends with a regrouping of the participants and a discussion with the artists about the experience and the ethical consequences of the individual's and the group's decisions throughout the playtime[39]. *Operation Black Antler* is designed to use embodiment, presence, and agency to create a performance of citizenship. 'Being active' is not enforced, but suggested and encouraged, yet the implications of being active are to be confronted with one's own moral grounds and political views. This seems to fill a basic principle for creating a space where an emancipated spectator can exist, as Rancière puts it:

> Emancipation begins when we challenge the opposition between viewing and acting; when we understand that the self-evident facts that structure the relations between saying, seeing and doing themselves belong to the structure of domination and subjection. It begins when we understand that viewing is also an action that confirms or transform this distribution of position.[40]

25 In their works, BT create virtual spaces within real spaces, often replacing the separation between the two with a liminal space that accentuates tensions and enhances sensible experience.

26 *Ulrike and Eamon Complaint*, and *Operation Black Antler* (as well as an earlier work, *Desert Rain*, 1999) are fact-based performative works, dealing with highly volatile political issues through narratives that mix real life with fiction. Participants travel in physical spaces and take part in a work that evolves as they get more involved. I'd Hide You exists on two planes simultaneously – a virtual (online) space and a physical (city-wide) space. Spectators can step outside and encounter the work, but only for a fleeting moment (as the performers move around quickly due to the game element). To experience the work in its full duration and scope the spectators must sit in front of their computer, log in to the project's website and participate in the real-life chase by changing camera feeds, following the actors, and/or writing comments on the live chat feed.

27 *I'd Hide You* was performed as part of a city-wide festival[41]. Festivals create a vibe, a temporary rhythm and flow within an environment. The piece allowed people from around the world to tap into that rhythm, but by directing it as a chase-game, and connecting people in both synchronous and a-synchronous communication methods, BT also created its own temporality, its own time-outside-of-time[42], in which unpredictable things could happen.

Conclusion

28 Art historian Oliver Grau announced virtual reality as 'the complete divorce of the human sensorium from nature and matter'[43]. Caroline Jones defines Sensorium as 'the subject's way of coordinating all of the body's perceptual and proprioceptive signals as well as the changing sensory envelope of the self'[44]. She surmises that the human sensorium was misappropriated by the art world of the 20th century[45]. In addition to visuality, contemporary art should start treating 'the auditory, the olfactory, and the tactile as similarly crucial sites of embodied knowledge'[46], which could create a new sensus communis.

29 This last concept was also explored by Rancière, who offered to read the underlining Kantian notion of free-play as an aesthetic freedom which points toward a possible community that reunites the senses and cancels separations between politics, art, economics, religion, and the commonplace, counteracting the aesthetic revolution for which 'the root of domination is separation'[47].

30 As demonstrated, BT's discussed works tap into a new sensorium, 'in which the hierarchies are abolished that structured sensory experience'[48]. By incorporating embodiment, presence, and agency within the reinstated sensorium, it is possible to pave a path from aesthetics to politics. Rancière's formulation of aesthetic configurations yields metapolitics, ' ... proposing to politics rearrangements of its space, re-configuring art as a political issue or asserting itself as true politics'[49]. Refuting Lyotard, Rancière exclaims that:

> The experience of disharmony between Reason and Imagination tends towards the discovery of a higher harmony – the subject's self-

> perception as belonging to the supersensible world of Reason and Freedom. [50]

31 Each of BT's discussed works creates a liminal space which superimposes real life with its virtual counterpart. It is in these spaces that the barriers between spectator, participant, artist, and the art work start to collapse, and self-perceptions can evolve or, at least, be reflected. Through practices of embodiment, presence and agency within virtual worlds, BT creates a reconfiguration of a common sensorium, and consequently, new orders of community. The possibilities offered by BT's practices may be explored further within the framework of VR, where imagination, participation and the self are becoming truly limitless.

NOTES

1 Jacques Rancière, "Aesthetic Separation, Aesthetic Community," in *The Emancipated Spectator*, London: Verso, 2009, 51–82.

2 For further reading on this matter, see T.L. Taylor, "Living Digitally: Embodiment in Virtual Worlds," in The Social Life of Avatars: Presence and Interaction in Shared Virtual Environments, ed. Ralph Schroeder, London: Springer-Verlag, 2002, 44.

3 Ibid., 40.

4 Julian Dibbel, "A Rape in Cyberspace," Village Voice, December 21, 1993.

5 Sara Ashley O'Brien, "She's Been Sexually Assaulted 3 Times–Once in Virtual Reality," CNN, October 26, 2016.

6 Jordan Belamire, "My First Virtual Reality Groping," Medium, 2016, https://medium.com/athena-talks/my-first-virtual-reality-sexual-assault-2330410b62ee#.y18jwkd1l.

7 Ibid.

8 Taylor, "Living Digitally: Embodiment in Virtual Worlds," 42.

9 Erika Fischer-Lichte, The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics, New York: Routledge, 2008.

10 Andy Lavender, "Viewing and Acting [and Points in Between]: The Trouble with Spectating after Rancière," Contemporary Theatre Review 22,

no. 3, 2012: 307+; Juarez Nunes and Stephan Baumgartel, "The Construction of Presence and the Multimediatic Stage: Hegemony of an Immanent Presence" 5, no. 3, 2015: 640–61; Maria Fernandez, "Illuminating Embodiment: Rafael Lozano Hemmer's Relational Architectures," Architectural Design, 2007.

11 An analysis of the group's methodology can be found in Sofia Romualdo, "Going Undercover: A Multidisciplinary Analysis of Blast Theory's Theory's Operation Black Antler," in Proceedings of the 20th International Academic Mindtrek Conference, New York: ACM Press, 2016, 312–21.

12 Irving Goffman, The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life,New York: Anchor Books, 1959.

13 Marcos Pereira Dias, "A Machine to See With [and Reflect Upon]: Interview with Blast Theory Artists Matt Adams and Nick Tandavanitj," Liminalities: A Journal of Performance Studies 8, no. 1, 2012: 1–13.

14 Ibid.

15 Johan Huizinga, Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture, London, Boston and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1949, 10.

16 Romualdo, "Going Undercover: A Multidisciplinary Analysis of Blast Theory's Theory's Operation Black Antler," 313.

17 See YouTube video outlining the project, see "Day of the Figurines", YouTube video, 04:41, posted by "Steve Benford", November 8, 2008, https://youtu.be/l6Gq1v7QgGU.

18 Steve Benford et al., "Creating the Spectacle," ACM Transactions on Computer-Human Interaction 18, no. 3, July 1, 2011: 1–28.

19 Ibid., 10.

20 Romualdo, "Going Undercover: A Multidisciplinary Analysis of Blast Theory's Theory's Operation Black Antler," 313.

21 Rancière, "Aesthetic Separation, Aesthetic Community."

22 Ibid., 78.

23 Ibid.

24 Rancière, The Emancipated Spectator.

25 Under the term "Theatrical spectacle" he includes all forms of performance that position bodies in action in front of an assembled audience. Ibid., 2.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid., 3.

28 In his comparison of theatre to a plague and its use in stirring of a virtual uprising it seems that Artaud thinks like a modern-day hacker. Therefore, it appears that Artaud is offering a formula for theatre-hacking. See Antonin Artaud, The Theater and Its Double, New York: Grove Press, 1958, 15–32.

29 Rancière, The Emancipated Spectator, 8.

30 Ibid., 14.

31 Ibid., 10.

32 Jacques Rancière, The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible, trans. Gabriel Rockhill, London: Continuum, 2004, 13.

33 Romualdo, "Going Undercover: A Multidisciplinary Analysis of Blast Theory's Theory's Operation Black Antler," 314.

34 Jacques Rancière, Aesthetics and Its Discontents, trans. Steven Corcoran, Cambridge and Malden: Polity Press, 2009, 25.

35 Blast Theory. "I'd Hide You". Vimeo Video, 05:09. Posted January 31, 2013. https://vimeo.com/58616453.

36 Blast Theory. "Operation Black Antler - Extended Trailer". Vimeo video, 02:09. Posted April 14, 2016. https://vimeo.com/162821629.

37 Romualdo, "Going Undercover: A Multidisciplinary Analysis of Blast Theory's Theory's Operation Black Antler," 316. Romualdo depicts her experience of the performance as being extremely current affairs, as the date of the show she attended was the day of the EU referendum, and the conversations in the pub included references to it, tapping in to her "real-life anxiety" of the situation from her own point of view as an immigrant.

38 Rancière, The Emancipated Spectator, 15.

39 Romualdo, "Going Undercover: A Multidisciplinary Analysis of Blast Theory's Theory's Operation Black Antler," 3.

40 Rancière, The Emancipated Spectator, 13.

41 Blast Theory. "I'd Hide You at Sheffield Doc/Fest 2013". Vimeo video, 0:34. Posted October 3, 2013. https://vimeo.com/75951736.

42 Stuart Reeves et al., "I'd Hide You: Performing Live Broadcasting in Public," CHI '15 Proceedings of the 33rd Annual ACM Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems, 2015.

43 Oliver Grau, "Spaces of Knowledge," in Virtual Art: From Illusion to Immersion, trans. Gloria Custance, Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 2003, 231.

44 Caroline A. Jones, "The Mediated Sensorium," in Sensorium: Embodied Experience, Technology, and Contemporary Art, Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006, 8.

45 Jones, "The Mediated Sensorium.

46 Ibid., 8

47 Jacques Rancière, DISSENSUS: On Politics and Aesthetics, ed. and trans. Steven Corcoran, London and New York: Continuum, 2010, 81.

48 Ibid., 176.

49 Ibid., 119.

50 Ibid., 131.

ABSTRACT

Français
La réalité virtuelle offre des niveaux élevés de présence et d'incarnation, fondamentaux pour toute expérience immersive. Dans une reconfiguration du *sensorium* — chacun existe à la fois dans le monde réel et dans le monde virtuel, les communautés virtuelles et traditionnelles entrent en conflit.
Chaque œuvre de *Blast Theory* crée un espace liminaire qui superpose la vie réelle avec sa contrepartie virtuelle. C'est dans cet espace que les barrières entre spectateur, participant, artiste et œuvre d'art s'abattent. L'imagination, la participation et le Soi y deviennent véritablement illimités. À travers la pratique de l'incarnation et de la capacité d'agir au cœur des mondes virtuels, *Blast Theory* amène à une reconfiguration d'un *sensorium* commun, et donc, à de nouvelles manières de faire communauté.

INDEX

Mots-clés
communauté éphémère, cyber-bulle, identité, politique, réel, virtuel

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Premshay Hermon est investi dans la vie culturelle israélienne depuis dix ans, notamment dans les milieux de la musique, de la danse, du théâtre, des arts visuels et de l’éducation. Il est le fondateur de Cannons & Muses, une association internationale d’artistes travaillant sur le rôle de l’art pendant les temps de crise, le directeur artistique de Activism Festival, un rassemblement annuel dévoué au changement social et environnemental en Israël, et le producteur exécutif de TheaterCan, une compagnie jeune et dynamique à l’origine de pièces participatives innovantes. Il est également photographe et compositeur d’œuvres produites à l’international, à Tel Aviv, Dublin, Tokyo, New York et Boston.
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