

Jeremy Deller's *Battle of Orgreave*

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Abstract: This short essay on Jeremy Deller's *Battle of Orgreave* investigates the the political-politics alongside agency-act as presentation-representation as they are manifested in the work of art as part of a broader spatial practice. Considered are the positions of Jacques Ranciere's *Disagreement*, Thomas Keenan and Judith Butler's performative utterance alongside Chantal Mouffe's claim that "Every Form of Art Has A Political Dimension," and her indebtedness to Carl Schmitt distinction between politics and the political. Jacques Derrida's "On Absolute Hostility," within the *Politics of Friendship*, will likewise be considered within the further development. *Battle of Orgreave* is considered a model for an ongoing inquiry, in which specific works of art and architecture, regional and territorial events -- things -- are invoked as points or nodes of investigation to open gaps. Each problematises and consider terms and ideas at issue within *Exhibitionism*, tied to a specific curatorial and spatial practice and which is meant, like Daston's objects, to be probed from the macroscopic viewpoint (traditionally that of the curator) as well probed and dissected under the lense of the microscope.

When the *Battle of Orgreave* aired on the BBC in 2001 it radically altered the context into which it was inserted, thus offering the potential of making those who had otherwise been silenced heard. The documentary -- a painstakingly accurate re-creation of the 1984 uprising of National Union Mineworkers outside the British Steel coking plant in Orgreave, South Yorkshire -- was conceived by Turner-Prize winning artist Jeremy Deller. Made in collaboration with Hollywood film director Mike Figgis and Britain's leading battle re-enactors Howard Giles, the film captures what Deller considers to be one of the two most pivotal moments of the 1980s.

On June 18, 1984 four- to five-thousand picketers of the National Union Mineworkers clashed against the Thatcher-ite government, in protest of massive pit closures. Organised by then NUM leader Arthur Skargill the strike resulted in a violent confrontation between picketing miners and police. The numbers were staggering: four- to five thousand unprepared picketers found themselves pitted against eight-thousand trained and co-ordinated police, in which specially trained

'snatch squads' were deployed alongside mounted and other police. In tactical terms, the battle was one of mis-matched forces, according to Giles: A heavy infantry of police equipped with cavalry and no missile capacity was set in opposition to a light infantry of miners unable to stand in close contact but able to fight through missiles. "The result," as Giles tells it, "was pressure on a shield wall, followed by a series of police charges, which captured ground but failed to stave off hard line protestors until a decisive cavalry charge was launched. The battle was violent, messy and somehow un-British." Miners were driven from the coke plant, over a railway line, and into the village. Heavy-handed tactics resulted in beatings, riots and arrests.

While at the time secondary picketing was considered legal it was nevertheless considered undesirable by the government. At issue was the closure of the mines, deemed an economic necessity by the Thatcher's Tory government and opposed by the NUM who were fighting to preserve their livelihood. Orgreave was symbolic -- it was one part of what was considered a carefully planned campaign to break trade union power and introduce market forces into Britain's state-owned industries. Yet Deller's work is exceptional not because of its historical re-enactment of such a conflict. But rather precisely because, in absorbing this battle into the realm of art, Deller -- a self-fashioned artist cum curator-writer-film-maker-documentarian -- gives the *low man* the opportunity to speak. If as Jacques Ranciere writes in *Disagreement* that "politics is primarily conflict over the existence of a common stage and over the existence and status of those present on it,"¹ then Deller's work provides the creation of just such a stage.

The documentary establishes of another order, another partition of the perceptible, such that the miners are constituted not as warriors equal to other warriors -- i.e., in this case the police -- but as speaking beings sharing the same properties as those who deny them those. As Ranciere writes: "At the heart of politics lies a double wrong, a fundamental conflict, never conducted as such, over the relationship between the capacity of the speaking being who is without qualification and political capacity. ...Politics does not exist," he continues, "because men, through the privilege of speech, place their interests in common. Politics exists because those who have no right to be counted as speaking beings make themselves of some account, setting up a community by the fact of placing in common, a wrong that is nothing more than this very confrontation, the contradiction of two worlds in a single world: the world where they are and the world where they are not, the world where there is something "between" them

and those who do not acknowledge them as speaking begins who count and the world where there is nothing."ⁱⁱ

The political enters here not in the act of revolt -- as Ranciere writes, "nothing is political in itself merely because power relationships are at work" -- but rather its re-creation now transposed to the field of art which creates a common stage. Broadcast over the BBC network, even outside the "elitist" confines of the art institution Deller's documentary "reconfigures the relationships that determine the workplace in its relation to the community." The documentary provides the performative utterance, "the act that in a strong sense the context was designed to prohibit." Here-in lies the importance of the re-enactment. Invoking what Judith Butler calls the politics of the performative, *Battle of Orgreave* asks: How do the rules, contexts and capacities change, or Tom Keenan phrases it, how can the political and legal conditions be transformed such that the speech and action are rendered intelligible?

In this instance the act of policing or prohibition has a strangely perverse effect. For rather than squelch the miner's speech it makes them heard, conferring on their utterance the force of law through its very prohibition.

Crucial to altering this context is the notion of repetition, iteration and recognition. That is, it is in the citation, according to Jacques Derrida, that something has the capacity to alter the given context. "Every sign, linguistic or non-linguistic, spoken or written ... can be cited, put between quotation marks; in so doing it can break with every given context, engender new contexts to infinity, in an absolutely illimitable [non-saturable] way," writes Derrida. Keenan, in his article entitled *Drift: Politics and the Simulation of Real Life* goes on to note: "The is not simply a meaningful utterance, either. Derrida's emphasis is on the "force" of the utterance, the "breaking force" or force of rupture that structures every utterance or every maker. It can, it must be able to, break out of any given context, be detached from its circumstances, and not become nonfunctional." In short it must have the capacity to radically alter that context. Within the thought of Ranciere, within the Deller's documentary mimesis or citation thus enters of two levels: first through the quoting of context (which has the potential to radically alter that context) and secondly through the mimesis of the speech of what Ranciere's calls the patricians (in this case the Tories) to whom one wants to speak, through the work of art.

<more to develop: Mouffe, Keenan ... >

ⁱ Ranciere, *Disagreement*, pp. 26-27.

ⁱⁱ Ranciere, *Disagreement*, p. 22, 27

Lexicon (or Nodes or Positions and Points of Investigation)

1989

Bilbao effect begin 1997 (opens)

Shift from party politics to ecological (environmental), end of Communism

Berlin Wall

Environmental Acts (ask Paolo)

Accidents, Aid, Catastrophe, Epidemic, Contagion

Animism

Bio Medical Gaze - Anatomical - Operating Theatre - Scrutiny - Dissection

Body

(Colonial - post-Colonial)

Collection - Collectivity

Display

Dispositif

Discipline, Surveillance, Security

(Disruption - Dissensus)

Exhibition Making

Exhibitionism (etymology)

Environment - Milieu - Circulation

Forensic Psychology - Science - Normative - Abnormal

Gaze

Individual - Multiplicity - Population

Laboratory

Nature (Animism)

Object - Objectivity - (Objection) - Thing

Daston, Lorraine, ed. *Things That Talk: Object Lesson from Art and Science*. New York: Zone Books, 2004.

Politics - Political

Presentation (Re-Presentation)

Profanation

Subject - Subjectivity

Text as Construct (Materiality)

Utterance

Working Framework

Experiments (working list);

1. Objectivity (to be further developed)
2. Dispositif (Exhibitionism as Metropolis via Agamben)
3. Jeremy Deller, Battle of Orgreave: Politics - Political
Ranciere
Keenan
Mouffe
Derrida
4. Gonzalo Escarpa: Utterance (Literal)
5. Archive (ongoing) as Collecting

Conferences:

1. Objectivity with Daston, et. al., Berlin, 2010
2. Bio-Medical with Alessandro Abbushi, Neuro-surgeon, Charite, Berlin and Palestine?, 2011

To be determined:

If specific geographical area ties in, whether Brasil or any other ...