

White Cube :: Black Box

14 Notes Adjacent to the Work of Sarv Iraj

Ido Radon



Destituere in Latin means: to place standing separate, raise up in isolation; to abandon; put aside, let drop, knock down; to let down, deceive. Whereas constituent logic crashes against the power apparatus it means to take control of, a destituent potential is concerned instead with escaping from it, with removing any hold on it which the apparatus might have, as it increases its hold on the world in the separate space that it forms. Its characteristic gesture exiting....¹

The Invisible Committee

Flee, but while fleeing, pick up a weapon. 2

Sadie Plant

ONE A strike is a radical gesture: a withholding, a blow, a redaction, an excision.

TWO The moment of insurrection tears the scar tissue of history which would overwrite/erase both wrongs and wounds and any possibility that anything could now or ever have been otherwise. It rends a hole in the fabric of reality, revealing all that is ostensibly neutral, all that is business-as-usual, all that is "just the way things are," for the construct that it is.

THREE In the moment of insurrection, the social mask is removed to reveal the black mask beneath. Bloc is a tactic, the black boxing of the predicate-laden subject in favour of a temporary operative collective composition.

FOUR Black box is to theatre as white cube is to gallery. The purportedly neutral space with the potential to produce any space in a space outside of the world. But of course, that which structures the world infuses every atom of white cube and black box. These spaces are anything but neutral.

FIVE A black box is also any system that can only be perceived in terms of inputs and outputs. What goes on within it is inaccessible, occluded, hidden from view. Machine, algorithm, government.

SIX The real itself may be said to be inaccessible, locked away in the black box of ideologically determined and socially reproduced reality.

SEVEN Now picture here in the white cube a black box, a void struck from the immediately perceivable. Picture the absence of Dr. Who's phone booth, the monolith in 2001 Space Odyssey, any black cuboid work of Minimalism, say a glossy John McCracken, an Anne Truitt.

Iraji refers to this monolithic box as a "kiosk," a word derived from the Persian kūshk. In common usage, a kiosk is a site of exchange, of vending, of distribution of information on a street corner, in a mall.

This dislocated kiosk, however, is at least externally rendered inoperative, a site of exclusion, its contents black-boxed.

EIGHT Marcel Broodthaers *Un Coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard* (*A throw of the dice will never abolish chance*) foregrounds the all-important structure of Mallarmé's poem of the same name by meticulously redacting or black-boxing each typographically exuberant line.

The scene framed by the intertitle, "A picture shot in the back," in Godard's *King Lear* is situated in a cinema to consider the conditions of collective reception of the

projected image. The reflected light of the screen offering the only illumination.

Iraji's microcinema, this kiosk/booth/monolith, demands a consideration of that which structures presentation, participation, and reception... a consideration, that is, of the conditions under which the event of the work takes place. These conditions themselves may be said to be black-boxed, taking place as they do "behind the backs of men."

NINE "Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living." 3

In Iraji's play, *Chronicles of an Escape*, the space of the stage is permeable. Players repeatedly move through a stage door to the outside world where insurrection stirs the streets. The audience invades the space of the stage. History and legend weigh upon the players, intrude upon and shape action and reception.

TEN A cinema for one, Iraji's black box negates the possibility of collective simultaneous reception. 4

It structures the approach, demands a stepping into, a stepping out of. It isolates, limits options for movement and alternative modes of perception. It makes evident the modulations that structure any reception.

ELEVEN It folds the subject into its sculptural form, transforms subject into an invisible object contained within.

TWELVE In the common use of the term, subject paradoxically is used to mean both "a free subjectivity, a centre of initiatives, author of and responsible for its actions" AND a subjected being, "who submits to a higher authority, and is therefore stripped of all freedom except that of freely accepting his submission." 5

THIRTEEN Stepping into the black box is to step into what Marcuse calls the aesthetic dimension. Though it may be conventionally designated as "unreal" in the ordinary sense of the word, it is "unreal" not because it is less, but because it is more as well as qualitatively "other" than the established reality. As fictitious world, as illusion, it contains more truth than does everyday reality. For the latter is mystified in its institutions and relationships, which make necessity into choice, and alienation into self-realization. Only in the "illusory world" do things appear as what they are and what they can be. 6

It offers, that is, an inversion of the world. He writes that it is a place in which one can call things by their name.

FOURTEEN "The destituent gesture does not oppose the institution. It doesn't even mount a frontal fight, it neutralizes it, empties it of its substance, then steps to the side and watches it expire." 7

1. The Invisible Committee, *Now*, tr. Robert Hurley (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e): 2017): 78-9.
2. Sadie Plant, *The Most Radical Gesture, The Situationist International in a Post-Modern Age*, (London: Routledge, 150). This is a version of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari quoting George Jackson saying, "I may take flight, but all the while I am fleeing, I will be looking for a weapon," in *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 277. The footnote for Deleuze and Guattari's quote of Jackson is blank.
3. Karl Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon (1851-52)," *Die Revolution* (New York), 1852. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/ch01.htm>
4. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility," *Grey Room* 39 (Spring 2010): 11-38.
5. Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (1971)," *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (TK: Monthly Review Press, 2001): 121-176.
6. Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension: Communications and Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), 54.
7. The Invisible Committee, *Now*, 81-82.