
Society of Molecules: WAIT

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To Be Done With The Boredom Of The Bus: A Radio Play

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He believed in an infinite series of times, in a growing, dizzying net of divergent, convergent and parallel times. This network of times which approached one another, forked, broke off, or were unaware of one another for centuries, embraces *all* possibilities of time. We do not exist in the majority of these times; in some you exist, and not I; in others, I and not you; in others, both of us.

Jorge Luis Borges

WAIT

This project has as its starting point one wait too many for a streetcar that never comes, and a fairytale about rats. In this story, mean scientists perform scientific studies on the rats. The rodents are randomly fed treats in an experiment to see how they would behave in the absence of a predictable pattern of controlled rewards. The rats quickly habituate themselves to the arbitrary stimulus by doing nothing but waiting; they become "body-bored." At the same time, close to 3 million TTC commuters daily intersect, subject to similar waits. The mechanical repetition and random alternation of increasingly demanding patterns and cadence of work and leisure (also a giving of treats) seems to have engendered our own body-boredom, along with various articulations of impatience and inattention. We are all caught in the alienating rat-race of Toronto's commute, wrapped in the common habituation of body-bored urban waits while packed tight with other unresponsive and adapted passengers. Hence, we felt a need to imagine different and multiple endings to our story.



HABIT

'I am bored,' suggests a specific composition of affective associations that pre-exist the (bored) individual but which are perceived as 'boredom' through consistent and familiar reactions. Habituated boredom could be described as an imaginary fusing together of all the times we wait for a streetcar and 'start feeling' bored or agitated (though we still understand each wait as separate). An interference in this fusion could possibly increase receptivity and facilitate a reconfiguration of relationships, transforming the experience or habit of boredom. This process would need to take place prior to the individual's habitual perception of being bored – that is, at this level of affective composition related specifically to the practice of waiting and thus linking the other two terms.



INTERFERE

A project of interference is one that strikes (*ferir* 'to strike') rather than interrupts. Interfere and boredom etymologically reference each other, sharing the cognate *borian* 'to bore,' meaning both to cut and to make a hole. A cut, a slicing, or the making of holes inevitably precede any interruption of already existing fluxes and e/motions. The rat-like wait of Toronto's commuters for never-coming (or always-coming) streetcars is a potent site for interference, for cutting into our habituated re/actions in

public spaces while we wait for the random treat. Against the experimenting scientists who seek to re-pattern habits, we can rather strike at the single desire for a treat and intensify, multiply it, or even better derail it (the desire, not the street car). Although it may seem unimaginable, there are more flows to cut into than broken streetcars at the Toronto Transit Commission's depot: flows of bodies in transit, flows of stories, information, memories, flows of monologues that can turn into conversations...



ETHICS

What will happen if we develop experiments that construct or facilitate (random) encounters among bodies and things in transit? Can we increase our own willingness and ability to displace habituated associations suggested to the body that waits? We hope to subvert the mechanisms (social, technological, emotional etc.) that 'convince' us to do nothing but wait and instead play with daily micro-(non)events to provoke an 'ethics of boredom' as "the intensification of life" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1991: 74). Here, intensification is understood as politicization. Ultimately, we are aware that, contra the standards of scientific progress, we will not be able to provide an incontestable answer to our research aims. Even less do we intend to provide the ultimate fair-traded, ethical recipe for body-boredom-interference (since for us ethics has little to do with correct habits). What we do hope to do is provide a sketch, a set of granny's secret tricks that can be assembled as our own treats from what is available, turning any time of wait and boredom into one of creative encounter...

STRIKE

A displacement of habits can take place through the creation of unforeseen connections. This is our take on micropolitics: a belief in the world that makes you want to precipitate events, be a however scaled-down and only-half powerful *deus ex machina* behind the encounters that engender new time-spaces, or different modalities of being. (Deleuze 1995: 176). Previous theoretical discussions on the problematic role of communication and information overload already established that the only possibility to operate any shifts, however small, take place through exemplary practice, i.e. the viral creation of situations that become contagious by virtue of their ability to produce pleasure and stimulate desire (Berardi and Renzi, 2008). Since viruses are important elements in any serious experiment with rodents, we decided to organize our bus shelter performance pieces virally. Ideas included leaving provisions at bus shelters that could be dropped off at other stops, inviting those who are interested to forget the tram, calling on a friend to come play with us; we thought about invoking situations where we can continue to interact while waiting or delaying waiting to other days. We hope to continue to invent other experiments (this is a call to other artists and agitators)!

PROLIFERATE

Viruses mutate and cause mutations once hosted in an organism. Mayday's rich labour and migrant rights history offer anyone genuinely interested in politics a rich ground to thrive. All the more so because much of our body-bored habits deriving from contemporary economic conditions have to do with the sense of isolation and increasing displacement of stable patterns of work/unemployment and leisure. This creates a conflict between our desires and the conditions of our lives, a condition some European workers call "precarity." In the hope to turn this oppressive state into the basis for new modes of more ethical, generous and joyous interaction, many Europeans and other friendly/allied creatures invade the streets on May 1st, resisting boredom by celebrating the potential and the need for social change. In connection with [World Mayday 2009](#) our project formed a contingent synchronous link with other artist groups and organizations focusing on precarious life conditions in the city, allowing us to configure anomalous friendships that traversed the specificity of our interests. With the intention of spreading virally, affectively resonating with bored-bodies in transit, the question of what shapes such interventions could take followed us in the scouting of locations, along with the odd looks that people gave us.

RESONATE

Resonate: to evoke images, ideas, emotions, but also mechanical reverberations. Radio theorist Testuo Kogawa reminds us of how

resonance does not exchange information but synchronizes bodies. Bodies can communicate through resonance, creating a different relational space: "Airwaves relate to casting and resonating. As a casting medium, airwaves spread information upon the audience. As a resonating medium, however, airwaves create various enclaves of emotions in the audience" (Kogawa, 1999). Affective resonance. Radio resonance. Affective radio. Interference radio? Interference is noise, it's radio jamming, sound modification, receptivity alteration. We made a spoof, a fake, a play of sounds spinning off the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, something people listen to in their kitchens, drinking coffee, making dinner. Interference is disrupted bandwidth signals from an external source. Were we mimicking interference, becoming interference ourselves, even getting interfered with in the process... [\[link to part of Mp3\]](#)

RADIO

If, as Deleuze says, we think with conceptual personae (Deleuze and Guattari, 1991), we also *create* with compositional personas. Sitting around the kitchen table were Bob Swaggard, CBC radio host famous for his silky, baritone voice, Rufus Dean, quick-witted and suave, professor of economics at York University and Ornella Dosi, professor of sociology from a university somewhere in Italy. Her posture was professional and slick, but there was a glint in her eye that made you think twice, made your eyes linger just a little longer over her tailored suit and manicured nails. Surely there must be a glitch somewhere in her immaculate image... The small kitchen quickly became cluttered with script notes and half-filled teacups, competing with tangled wires, recording tapes and laptops, as we negotiated space for elbow room. Alexa Wright was on-site somewhere, getting interviews ready for live feed, but we would hear her bubbly voice over the radio when it was time for her part. All in all we were better than we thought. Ornella and Alexa were beginning to enjoy themselves, and starting to get good at what they were there to do. It was an easy transformation, but we didn't know what would happen next. An experiment turned into reality. A joke on boredom, a fake radio show, a correspondent and a sociologist. Questions circulated in our heads, questions about the split between reality and experiment, between fact and fiction, about who was in control. Do those distinctions even matter when the characters playing out the parts are too good at their roles? When the characters are really us? Aren't these questions made void once we comply with the intention of experimentation? And wasn't this also our way of upsetting the scientific experiments involving rats and controlled environments, relying on a calculated distance between the observer and the observed?

Alexa: What do you mean by experimentation?

Laura: The standards of scientific experiment have long been criticized for the ideal of the controlled environment and the relation it sets up between the scientist-expert and what is being observed... There is another kind of experimentation that has to do with breaking the rigidity of the closed lab, complicating the relationship between the observer and the observed, revealing its fictive status.

First there was a joke we made about Facebook and an experiment with rats. These scientists were giving rats treats at undetermined time intervals, and the rats habituated themselves to the random timing of the treats by doing nothing. There is an irony here that relates to the way social networking sites are presented as community-building, but yet we stay indoors, waiting for the next friend request or message to pop up in our inbox. When he was here in Toronto, Bifo talked about the paradox of hyper-connection and its resulting isolation, depression, psychopathologies, and above all, lack of empathy. This separation between individuals, the contact zones between bodies and sensibility have been the focus of our collective work for a while now. While the radio idea only came last minute, our experiments were always meant to be a way or reassembling the space of wait at the bus stop and anything that can come into relation with it.

Alessandra: It's a way of triggering changes, yes, but while also remaining yourself open to other kinds, new forms, of experience. If everything is made, if human life is to a certain extent a "production of falsity" then experimentalism is about seeing or experiencing other ways of connecting. Everything is constructed, we have to play responsibly with the materials we have and try to produce some other way of doing things, be more open. It's a way of engaging with both life in general and with the particular institutions and relations surrounding us. It requires openness without losing sight of what made you wanna do it in first place. Intent and practice. Whose intent and whose outcome? Something urges us, opens more questions, perhaps even problematizes both the way we think about things and the way things are done. What would make the project meaningful for us, we mean, important, while leaving its outcome open and relinquishing control, while at the same time building on our political beliefs. We didn't want the experiment to merely take on the shape of a lofty, outdated imperative "to desire". We did not want to stop at the sole intent of getting through the white noise surrounding us. In the midst of crisis madness, I had followed the preparation of Mayday events around the world. We didn't wanna pay for 'their' crisis either. And the only survival instructions that made sense to us were those about sticking together, creating community. Bob Swagger's survival guide to the

meltdown is not just a call to come together, it is the way in which we ended up together, and came out stronger.

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The recording of the show was seamless and the people and groups they had already visited had been very supportive. All they had to do now was a final interview on immigration rights, and then edit the show. Ornella hit the road and met up with Alexa at the auditorium where a panel on immigration in Toronto was happening. It was their first collaboration and they were ready for the role. They waited to interview two of the speakers after the panel was over—busy people with huge smiles who had volunteered to partake upon hearing of a radio show supporting the groups involved in the Mayday carnival. It was the first time for the organisers too, the first time that they had built their event around ethico-aesthetic practices. Decided to be more joyful in their militancy about the abolition of borders and the sensibilization of the public. Several hours later into the night (thank you Bob), the show is ready for download from several websites and circulated. One step closer to the streetcar interference...

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PLAY

Alexa: We started with interference because the project wasn't about confrontation or conflict, but was lined with a subtle act, not innocence but the indiscernible – interfering as a cut that precedes intervention, producing not an object but a 'jolt'. We were interested in waiting because there seemed to be no necessity to define your experience at a bus stop merely as waiting, and we saw an opportunity for playfulness... and in that sense we saw interference as a possible fabulation.

Ornella: The idea of fabulation is closely related to the virtual, where the disclosure of the possible is brought about via a shock, and it is the shock that admits the emergence of alternate kinds of social interaction.

Alexa: Deleuze's notion of fabulation is closely connected to literature, to art, where receptivity to interaction with others and with other worlds, is increased.

Ornella: We were concerned with the notion of receptivity, if it could be increased through affect, through our interference. This wasn't about make-believe but about real perception and the capacity of the imagination to fill in/see/experience events as meaningful. Before,

Alessandra was talking about the “powers of the false” – it’s this primitive sense of making-reality that is an “eventalizing” (Rajchman, 2000: 147n9), because it disrupts common sense, and fabricates new truths...

Alexa: We pretended that we didn’t know each other and sat in ear-range of each other on the streetcar. I played the radio show from a stereo hidden in a cloth bag on my lap. Ornella was interested and a conversation started, hoping to pull other people in, to begin other conversations.



Ornella: the change became evident while standing at the streetcar stop hiding the boom-box blasting Bob Swaggard’s smooth voice. The receptivity of the passengers to the noise of the radio resulted in raised eyebrows and dirty glances. It was as if we were making visible the line where private space is constructed, and our interference was a bother, rather than a jolt, to that space. We always left the streetcars, unsure of our success. Still, the idea of interference, although it wasn’t wholly planned, made the leap for us between habituated boredom and a scam radio project. Mayday moved us in the direction of content, and working with [No One Is Illegal](#) continually re-shaped the direction we were going in. We sort of forgot about the body-bored commuters. After reflecting on the outcome of the project, I would say that what affected all of us the most was our involuntary transformations and the connections they enabled.

SURPLUS

Alexa and Ornella were out on the streets again, the day after the bus stop performance. After doing their work for *The Meltdown to the Economic Crisis*, they found themselves again camera and mike in hand, swallowed by the Mayday march *No One is Illegal* had organized. They had been asked to interview people in the protest on immigrant rights and the economic crisis, to document, to give a hand. The smiles were even bigger upon seeing them again. The parade is big, significant for Toronto at least – close to 4000 people take up the streets and March towards Yonge street. There is an incontestable excitement building as the boom of drums resounds through the streets, striking stretched skin surfaces, and the cries of out of sync chants battle against each other while the hoarse-throated screams of the organizers' songs echoes out of microphones.

Bataille writes that “We can ignore or forget the fact that the ground we live on is little other than a field of multiple destructions” (Bataille, 1989: 23). The excess energies that comprise our life force, or living matter in general, can never be fully contained by the restrictive economy that is defined by the expansion of industrial growth. Under this system, the rationale of unlimited production is a drastic reduction of all surplus energy, while the ignorance of the necessary condition of dispersing the excess energies circulating on the globe pushes us further into a continual series of economic crises and war scenarios. By reversing the principles underlying the restrictive economy, Bataille writes that we adopt the perspective of a general economy and a concomitant reversal of the ethics that accompanies such transformation, where “the possibility of pursuing growth” is distinct to gratuitous giving (1989: 25).

The feverish pitch reached by the crowds assembling in front of the Eaton Centre is accelerated only more as one of three huge banner-drops gets stuck on a light that juts out of the buildings' facade. The crowd is mesmerized, necks craned, as the people on top of the building pull the banner up one, two, three times, before it falls in full view in front of a thousand or more people. The dj declares victory by pressing play on a bangra track, and there is dancing, yelling, spinning and jumping bodies grinning upwards at the oncoming rain. Relieving blockages is an aspect of societies that express themselves in festivals and carnivals, periods of non-productivity and squandering that diverts surplus production, energy that “cannot be accumulated in any case.” (Bataille 1989: 25) Accepting this perspective of a broader, global perspective turns giving (the absence of relations based on profit) into a logical argument, and instantiates an ethics of generosity and celebration.

While trapped in their *dei ex machina* roles of controlling experimenters expecting to see change where they were looking for it, the transformations, connections and satisfactions came from somewhere else. It was not the interference that did it, certainly not the deafening silence of the body-bored commuters, it was the encounters with the numerous generous people that made the show, it was the harnessing of our will to do politics through aesthetics rather than aesthetics as politics within an already composed concatenation, the satisfaction of a giving that was well received and culminated in collective expenditure, the transformation into a part of a community, and of course, the birth of Alexa and Ornella, a joke, a fake correspondent and sociologist. Fact *and* fiction.

THE UNFORESEEN

Alexa and Ornella had not forgotten the unpleasant feeling of infringing upon people's spaces and they were still bothered by the idea of rat-like waits gone to waste. There were questions still echoing in their heads, questions about affect, intervention, politics and aesthetics. They are still looking for ways to interfere in habituated behaviour but they now know that they also need to harness their interventions. At the same time, there were many unanticipated effects of the project, the most vivid one being the desire to keep the project going, to mend the artists call and invite people to keep playing with them and all the others. There have been other interventions documented on the website and more people have expressed interest in doing something. Some others feel a need to think through the questions posed. A Mexican artist group based in Toronto got in touch and talked about their knitting circle and their desire to make viruses out of wool, and setting up quarantined health clinics right inside bus shelters. Many of these interventions are subtle, but nevertheless trouble well-established assumptions about labour and migrant rights, gender and sexual orientation, cultural stereotypes and so on.

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