

<https://artouch.com/artouch2/content.aspx?aid=2018042315600&catid=05>

[Fan Xiangjun column] Navigating between reflection and perception: a talk about Rimini Protocol "Top Secret International: Staat 1"

If you participated in the "Remote X" in Taipei of Rimini Protokoll, during the Taipei Art Festival in September last year, it should be easy to imagine the virtual reality (re-imagining space) that is triggered by the earphone experience of Rimini Theatre. What is the matter? In the city, as the earphones instruct people to walk away, perceive space, reflect on history, and pull the questioner's existence through artificial intelligence and human subjectivity.

Debuted at the "Glyptothek München" exhibition in October 2016 and once again in March at the Neues Museum in Berlin, "Top Secret International: Staat 1" (Note 1), also using headphones as a medium to deepen the sense of intimacy, intrusion, and reflection of hearing simultaneously, asks questions about ethics between people and government, individuals and groups, privacy, and the public through a mission to become a spy. The questions are supplemented by several paragraphs of speeches spelt out from various insiders, lawyers, and journalists, pointing to the "constitution of democracy."

Using headphones as a medium, hearing, as a primary sense-induced creation, is not rare in Germany or Taiwan. However, what is special about "Top Secret International" is that it emphasizes the two levels of contemporary sensory culture to which hearing can point.

First of all, compared to visual experience, the sense of distance between the receiver and the object, as far as hearing is concerned, the sound invades the ear through the earphone - in your personal privacy. However, pedestrians in the museum are also mixed with ordinary people. Thus, at the same time, the listener can be aware that there are "insiders" (participants of Rimini's performance) and non-insiders (generally visiting museums) in the space. But even the people of your own "side", due to the fact that each participant entered the performance (that is, the sound system set by the Rimini Theatre) at different times, caused their respective timelines to be different since individuals made the different decisions within the

experience. Different choices were made and different voices were developed. Each of the various space-time axes then proceeded. In other words, in the same space, the spatial and temporal perceptions of individuals and groups are intertwined with each other. There is no absolute privacy and no absolute public. The boundary seems to float freely.

In the headset world, the artificial intelligence system that guides the participants to move around in the new museum acts as a logistics unit for intelligent agents. When the headphones are instructed, the listener like 007 moves in the monitored space. In your headphone, there is also another male voice that seems to act as an experienced agent, sometimes sharing experience, sometimes ridiculing, and more often asking a series of questions about the ethical issues of individuals/groups, public/privacy, people/government. The problem is not always entangled with big issues, sometimes as large as:

"Do you think people should be protected by the monitoring system?"

Sometimes it's only a small thing in life. It's like:

"When you come home and your husband's/wife's laptop with their Email is open, will you explore his/her privacy and peek at their emails?"

"Have you ever helped to lie because of someone's request?"

At the same time, the headphone performance is intertwined with messages from the former German intelligence agency, the former Israeli ambassador to Germany, the former White House security adviser, and even museums such as Plato and Socrates' views on democracy.

Riminis protocol "Top Secret International: Staat 1" interlaces various historical events, records, questions, suggestions, and actions. What they do is to juxtapose the world (thinking) in the ear with the outside world (action), transforming the ideology of democracy into action, contextualized and personalized, rather than leaving a single position, the only "truth" presented to the listener.

The supremacy "truth" was something Plato followed, as we learned from the voice in our headphones when encountering Plato's avatar in the museum. "Top Secret International: Staat 1" left the composition of democracy to each participant's choice and action through the privacy of headphones, the identity of context, the timing of participation, and the diversity of individual choices. Even to the extreme such as - are you willing to face the actions that come with each of your choices? For Example, when the voice asks you: "If you know that there will be an end of the world tomorrow, will you disclose this news to everyone or just tell a few selected people?" How would you choose?

When I walk here in "Neues Museum", I can't help but starting to think about Ancient philosophy and the differences in above mentioned Plato and Socrates. In the book *The Origin of Philosophy* written by Karatani Kojin, the Daemon instructed Socrates to "participate in city and politics as a non-political, non-public person." Socrates was reminded to not give himself to an "absolute truth". That is to say, reflections on democracy have returned to a series of "ethical actions" in which "individuals" are judged on bases of being a world citizen rather than being part of a limited national state.

Let's have a closer look to the medium earphone and hearing experience: Headphones, language (in English, and involving a series of political events and ethical concepts), questions and historical events that are so interwoven and intervened, and the need to immediately making decisions, to be unable to listen to questions for the second time, to be unwilling to make mistakes, or to make any choices. All the situation above stimulates the listener, caused my adrenaline surging, sweating palms. One miss could lead me out of the route set by system. There is even a comment after the premiere of "Top Secret International: Staat 1" in Munich mentioned that "it is a pity that the performance did not give him the opportunity to listen properly." Though I am also bothered by the same problems, hurry and struggling in every choice, stirring between perception and reflection; however, was this deliberately chosen by Rimini? After all, at the end of the mission, the male voice in the headset also told us that we could relax a little while here. Anyway, there is really no need to worry too much, because as soon as you leave the route, you will see the performance staff coming from afar and guiding you re-

entering the system route. Ah so after all, it turned out that we have been monitored by the network system set up by the show in the first place!

The notebook, that was given to a person when he/she first entered, acts as a monitor that traces the listener's movement in space - a mobile phone. Thus another layer of "Top Secret International" was woven into this place: the monitoring of the self through one's phone. Through mobile internet, we are constantly being positioned by a huge borderless space. In this borderless space, the restaurant you have just visited will call for an evaluation and your route will be calculated. The other side is that your "assets" may be arbitrarily stolen by some criminals or governments.

When reflecting about this, the decision just a few minutes ago without thinking seems to have been rushed. The headset asks, "Do you think people should be protected through censorship?" The fact that the people are being monitored by the Internet at any time has actually hinted that the above issue is not a double-blind issue. Perhaps it should be asked in the opposite direction, who is protected by this censorship system? The people? The government? Or vested interests? Capital Owners?

A few days ago, it has been just on the news that Facebook sold about 50 million U.S. users to Cambridge Analytica. The British political advisor data company thus affected the results of the UK's Brexit referendum and the U.S. presidential election. An actual case has been provided to the danger that our data produces.

Maybe let us return to the most fundamental issue. The phenomenon of monitoring or that the Internet continuously collect people's big data, what does this mean to contemporary life, and how does this refer to a person's relationship with others then? Individuals seem to have lost their connection towards their "real" environment, while being their online-self they constantly expose a lot of personal information, and are happy to share with their "friends" their deepest thoughts. This makes our relationships with others gradually evolve into a sense of reliance on the Internet, your information is laid out like a google map that cannot be deleted anymore. Every individual can be digitized, analyzed and consolidated into a model, and then be stolen, manipulated by it seems whoever has enough assets. At this moment, we have to face not only the monitoring of individuals that served the country's authority

during cold war, but we should also question ourselves on how our information is exposed and might be manipulated.

Wherever this development of our society will bring us, let's come back to Karatani Kojin's point when he looked at the ancient philosophers we just met on our way through the museum: He demonstrates the practice of Socrates as an example to discuss democracy nowadays. In this discussion about democracy, one need to act as individual based on the proposition of world's citizen rather than just in national interest:

Returning once again to the starting point, listening to the world, walking into the world, and acting, and always observing the technology that is heading for the future - will it give us more freedom and infinity, or more sturdy surveillance?