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The Chair Remains Empty / But The Place is Set

Jeremiah Day

ASAP/Journal, Volume 4, Number 3, September 2019, pp. 502-510 (Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/asa.2019.0050>



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Sebestik. Sebestik interviewed eight important twentieth-century composers in this documentary.

⁸ John Cage, "Experimental Music: Doctrine," in *Silence: Lectures and Writings* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), 17.

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HANS FIDOM is professor of Organ Studies at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, and leader of the Research Program at the Orgelpark in Amsterdam. He is one of the leading researchers worldwide in the field of the so-called hyper organs: pipe organs that combine historical sound concepts and twenty-first-century technology. The pinnacle of this development so far is the so-called Utopa Baroque Organ at the Orgelpark, an instrument that enthralls not only organists, but all kinds of other musicians, composers, and sound artists as well. Cross-disciplinary active in the fields of Sound Studies, Philosophy, History, and Musicology, Fidom contributes to new understandings of what sound is and how listening to them works, both as such and as the material music is made with, and to what extent sound may be considered heritage.

THE CHAIR REMAINS EMPTY / BUT THE PLACE IS SET

PERFORMANCE BY JEREMIAH DAY

So you go down the hill and there is a channel and the ferries pass through there, all day, over to the island. And where you wait to get on the ferry there is a local bar, but McDonald's wanted to buy it and take over there. The town is kind of a hippie town and the hippies they didn't want McDonald's and so they fought. It took ten years.

In Istanbul, there is a hill and a channel and ferries, but in Istanbul you go up the hill, up Istiklal Caddesi like the main artery

into the center, to Taksim Square where the government wanted to put in a shopping mall. The people gathered there, all of them threading through the small streets and big arteries like beating into this central place, and they took it over to stop the shopping mall. Until the cops came and kicked them all out and they were pushed back out through the streets into the city into the night, alone again or in small groups.



Figure 1.

Jeremiah Day, "The chair remains empty / But the place is set" (May 25, 2018).
Performance still, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam.



Figure 3.

Jeremiah Day, "The chair remains empty / But the place is set" (2013). Still from slideshow. Found archival photo of forum at Abbasağa Park.



Figure 4.

Jeremiah Day, "The chair remains empty / But the place is set" (2016). Still from slideshow. Abbasağa Park.



Figure 5.

Jeremiah Day, “The chair remains empty / But the place is set” (2016). Still from slideshow. Yoğurtçu Park.

—Yoğurtçu Park—this one is on the other side of the Bosphorus, and was known as the women’s forum. When it grew cold, they squatted a house on the park to keep meeting. They made it through the first winter.

round here

no, I mean this town here

what goes down round here

and what comes around here

the facts on the ground round here

the way shit goes down round here

who calls the shots around here?

who picks the boss around here?

and who picks who picks?

who picks who picks?

but I’m here but you’re here

we-aahr hee-aahr

...

(slideshow plays of Marinehouse in Berlin)

Kaliningrad, which used to be called Königsberg, is on the other side of Germany, where Kant lived and where Arendt lived.

Hannah Arendt writes about the way that Kant observed the French Revolution from far away and observing this struggle the way he did, even from far away, was a kind of participation she said.

I wonder if it has to do with her mother and Rosa Luxemburg.

Very far away on the other side of Poland, it's Russia now, Kaliningrad, very far, and every day in Kaliningrad, Hannah Arendt's mother would read the papers about Berlin.

About the councils and the assemblies and Rosa Luxemburg.

About the things that had happened in Berlin—so Arendt's mother supported Luxemburg and so Arendt, even before she even got to America and learned about New England town hall meetings, she knew about the council struggle in Berlin and she knew about the sailor's council.

(guitar plays so loud that words become unclear)

Jannowitzbrücke the hospital there the canals going through the canals going through the city canals that carried the bodies of the leaders after they'd been killed, Rosa Luxemburg, carried through the city.

.....

(slideshow plays images of New England town halls)

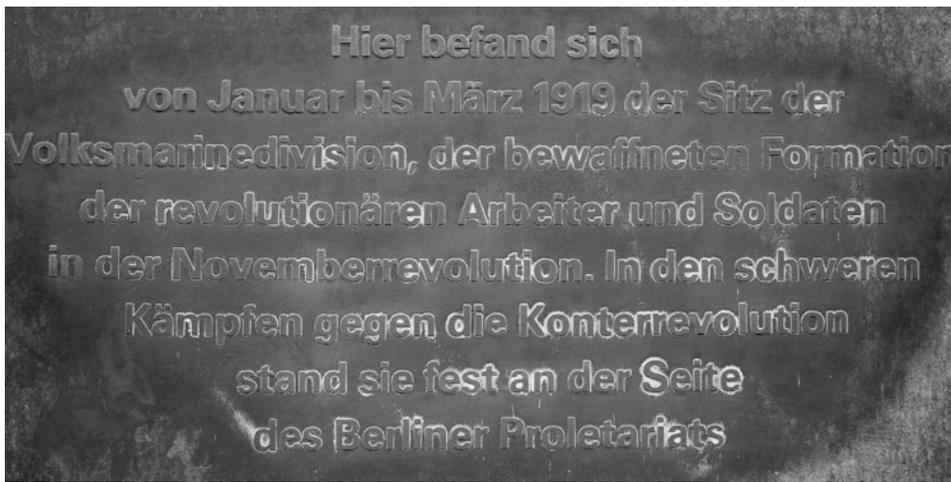


Figure 6.

Jeremiah Day, "The chair remains empty / But the place is set" (2016). Still from slideshow. Plaque from Marinehouse, Berlin.



Figure 7.
Jeremiah Day, “The chair remains empty / But the place is set” (2016).
Still from slideshow. Old Pelham Town Hall.



Figure 8.
Jeremiah Day, “The chair remains empty / But the place is set” (2016).
Still from slideshow. Sandwich Town Hall.



Figure 9.

“The chair remains empty / But the place is set” (2016). Still from slideshow. Tammany Hall.

Fred Dewey’s axiom: “the town meetings were the elementary republics, and the enemy of empire.”

In Pelham, Massachusetts is the longest running town hall meeting in the U.S., two hundred years.

The New England town hall meeting was for Hannah Arendt the crucial organ of the revolution, and, in *On Revolution*, she argues the failure of the constitution in the U.S. was to not preserve the town meeting as a central political form. Town hall democracy was for Arendt basically the same as council democracy—as in the brief Räterepublik of Germany and the

Hungarian revolution of 1956. In 2001, when the governing order of Argentina collapsed there was another spontaneous outbreak of council democracy across the country.

They still meet in Pelham but now discuss only very local issues—I wonder if they get to decide about short-term rentals.

Pelham was also the site of Shay’s Rebellion—after the revolution but before the constitution, some farmers rejected being ruled by the city and had an uprising against the bureaucrats. Jefferson was in Paris, but he wrote about it: “god forbid we should ever go 20 years without such a rebellion. The tree of liberty must

be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants.”

Next to Pelham is a reservoir—in the 1920s they kicked everyone out of the towns next over and drowned them to make drinking water for Boston. The Boston politicians just did it.

What happened between Shay’s Rebellion, when the farmers rose up against those Boston politicians and 140 years later when they could just roll in and drown a town? What happened was that the town hall meeting was taken over by the political party as the organizing form of politics, this was written about by Arendt’s student H.R. Shapiro and his friend Fred Dewey, who then enacted it, developing neighborhood councils in Los Angeles.

In Tammany Hall, the backbone of the Democratic Party, jobs were given out to assure loyalty, elections were rigged, and those who tried to stop them were met with violence.

In the 2016 Democratic presidential primary, not far from Tammany Hall in nearby Brooklyn, 126,000 people went to vote—mostly supporters of the reform candidate who grew up in that neighborhood—and they discovered their names had been stripped from the rolls and they couldn’t vote.

.....

So I wanted to tell my friend in Turkey about Arendt and New England, and about the

hippies in Cape Cod who fought McDonald’s for ten years and won.

About the town my grandmother lived in, about the hippies that kept McDonald’s from taking over a local bar. It took ten years.

I asked the hippie, how do you fight for ten years? He said everyone gets to take a year off. The way you fight for nine or ten years is everyone gets to take a year or two off.

I wanted to have some event in Istanbul and say that Arendt had said council democracy could be a new kind of state, and that the problem was that the people—after such experiences—had trouble remembering them, that there was no frame of reference to organize and defend that memory. No frame of reference to offer people who experience it themselves, like in Hungary in 1956, or in Argentina in 2001 when they formed “Asambleas” block by block.

And he said you can’t just hold a lecture like that here now. Not now. Maybe you could write a letter.

So this is that. I’m not so good at writing, so this is it, my letter.

I wanted to tell him that to fight for ten years, you need to take a year off, maybe.

I wondered what he would say back—something has to come back. Something has to come back, right?

Letter to Turkey, return to sender.

Take a year off? What does he say?

I think he would say:

“Ok. Time’s up.”

Thank you that’s the end.

Guitar and dramaturgy by Bart de Kroon

This project was developed in dialogue with and inspired by Fred Dewey, in particular his work with/ on Arendt and council democracy. See his publication The School of Public Life, (Los Angeles / Berlin: Errant Bodies Press, 2014) for details on his writings and practice of council democracy, Hannah Arendt, and his establishment of the Neighborhood Council structure of self-government into the Los Angeles city charter. Special thanks to Dewey and, in Istanbul, Can Altay.

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The American-born Berlin-based artist **JEREMIAH DAY** has established a practice of elegiac descriptions of public life—from considering the farmers who formed the first Black Panther Party in Alabama to Hannah Arendt’s work on the French Resistance—and these affirmative reflections are staged in a novel form: small scale performance works that are often accompanied by free discussion and guest speakers, with live art as a basis to assemble a public. Day studied Fine Art at the University of California, Los Angeles, and subsequently the Rijksakademie in Amsterdam, then completed a PhD at VU University Amsterdam as part of a pilot project in establishing third-cycle education in the arts. Day is a Post-Doctoral Fellow at the University of the Arts Helsinki’s Center for Educational Research and Academic Development in the Arts, researching the teaching methods that emerged from the intersection of the visual arts and dance in the 1960s and ’70s.

SCORE FOR WAVELENGTH. AN HOMAGE TO MICHAEL SNOW.

ALEXANDRA KARL

PREAMBLE

The following score outlines the sequence of a performance of Michael Snow’s 1967 film *Wavelength*, available on YouTube.

The following are listed:

Stopwatch Minute denotes the real-time unfolding of the spoken word performance.

Wavelength + time stamp denotes the time of Michael Snow’s *Wavelength*.

Spoken Word to be read aloud in a deliberate and steady voice.

Stopwatch Minute 2–*Wavelength* 6m, 0s.

Spoken Word: *Wavelength* is a forty-two-minute continuous camera zoom from one end of a New York City loft to another. It was shot by Canadian artist Michael Snow in 1967. For years, the artist requested that the original film be screened in a darkened theater, but it is now available on YouTube.

In film, a zoom is created when the lens of a camera changes smoothly from a long