

Katya Ev

PERFORMANCE AUGENMUSIK (Paris, 2016)

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Augenmusik is a site and time specific performance by Katya Ev (Ekaterina Vasilyeva) that reflects on the condition of France after the terror attacks in Paris in November 2015. These attacks traumatised the city, turning it into a body of collective pain. Vasilyeva's work responded to the atmosphere of fear, and to the government's declared state of emergency, through an intervention into public space and an appropriation of symbols of state power.

On the day of the summer solstice, at the beginning of the *l'heure bleue* (twilight), twenty four performers departed simultaneously from each of the twenty four "entrances" to Paris. Holding flashing blue police sirens in front of them, the participants walked from the Parisian ring towards the geometrical center of the city at Les Halles, where they placed the sirens next to one other on the ground. The sounds of the sirens, each tuned in a particular way, when combined together played a short electronic rendition of Bach's *The Art of Fugue*.

A strong signifier of state power and a signal of danger, in Vasilyeva's performance the police siren is taken over by the performers, thereby shifting power metaphorically to the people. Entering through the strategic defence points of the city, the performers converged on the historical "Belly of Paris," referring to the ancient Greek understanding of the market square as a space for practicing direct democracy. The polyphonic texture of Bach's composition served as a metaphor for the political equality of voices, as opposed the

contemporary understanding of democracy which reduces this polyphony to the single voice of the majority.

The piece specifically responded to the French context, where the state of emergency was imposed in the wake of the 2015 terrorist attacks. At that time the sound of sirens and rapidly blinking blue emergency lights very much became a part of the urban space, increasing fear and anxiety. The hysteria that took over the city provoked police violence; for example, during the non-violent civil gatherings that originated in opposition to the labour law adjustments in March the following year.

The performance triggered a strong reaction that revealed the sense of panic embedded in society. It disclosed a mutual distrust and aggression between the police and people living in the city. During the performance two of the participants were suspected of terrorism and detained for questioning, while other performers were actually protected by the police who feared that, due to the sirens, they might be mistaken for police and attacked. At the end of the performance soldiers came to Les Halles to investigate. The assembly of sirens replaced the forbidden assembly of people.

By following the canons of the local legal system, in *Augenmusik* Vasilyeva tested the borders of state power, through an alternative kind of public assembly as well as the use of state instruments as the objects of empowerment for civil disobedience.