

A PERSONAL ALPHABET

HANNAH HURTZIG'S BLACKMARKET OF USEFUL KNOWLEDGE AND NON-KNOWLEDGE

Karin Harrasser

I am not a detached observer of the Blackmarket. Since 2008 I took part as an expert on several occasions and was also involved in developing some of the topics. To what extent can these events be said to be curated? Quite a number of people are assembled around a theme, but it's not an idea or an umbrella. It rather works as a leitmotif that holds together a rather fragile composition. I asked myself what drew me in. What is this slightly perverse joy of being stripped of one's sovereignty? At the Blackmarket I am not allowed to perform knowledge the way I am trained and used to: I don't give a talk, I don't give a seminar. I talk to somebody I don't know and others are listening, a rather strange public forum for an evening. Experts are forced into a tight timeframe and spatial arrangement that forces them out of their habitus. The speech act gets out of control because it is regulated, regulated otherwise.

Archive

This is where everything ends and starts: an abundant online archive, a storage of all dialogues, from all the events, organised alphabetically. Voices emanating from the background of murmur, a monstrous assembly of experts and their clients across time and space, an archive of urgencies, desires, hallucinations.

Blackmarket

Not a market organised according to the principle of rational choice, rather a roulette: clients queue up to book a conversation but 50 percent of them get something else. Is psychotherapy like this? You pay for a service, but get something else?

Check-In

An administrative act is performed: forms are filled in. Paper changes hands. Please check in now. Please go to your table now. The overfriendly disciplinary machine of an airport, but without an airfield. As if you got stuck at the gate and realised suddenly that it is kind of okay not to go anywhere.

Dialogue

In the best of all worlds (sometimes the Blackmarket gets close) a dialogue is like an experimental system in the sense outlined by Hans Jörg Rheinberger: a setup that makes both participants reach out for something that could not have been adumbrated otherwise. First you

stick to the topic, but then the status of expert and client collapses, euphoric babbling, I can not quite remember what we talked about, but it was something I had never thought of before. To surpass oneself.

Expert

We do know things, we have been practicing something for a long time: playing the violin, reading texts, doing make-up, accounting, telling stories, preparing cases for court. Because I sit side-by-side with this guy who has this vast collection of action figures and knows everything about them, I feel a bit displaced with my academic knowledge. It feels like an orphan, unattached but therefore also special. I realise, that only after the dialogue will I have known what I was the expert for.

Flight attendants

If the gorgeous women (the gorgons made other people turn into stone, here it's the other way round) were not circling us, I would feel lost. Also a little bit like watch dogs. But in the case of an accident a beautiful face will be near. This allows us to face the catastrophe, the failure.

Glühbirne

Impossible to use the English word here. The bulb misses the glowing and the nicest of all letters: ü. Modernity lasted as long as the Glühbirne: from Nikola Tesla to the white energy saving lamp that can not be dimmed. Modernity knew that she had an unlit side; postmodern luminaires act as if there existed neither darkness nor light. (1)

Half an hour

'Hello, my name is Karin Harrasser, I want to talk about Alfred North Whiteheads speculative philosophy with You. Have You ever heard of him? He was a mathematician, a philosopher and Gilles Deleuze was very much inspired by his "philosophy of the event".' 'No? Never mind. Whenever I read Whitehead I have two kinds of feelings: either I have the feeling that I understand intuitively what he says or that I don't understand anything. So we can just try to find out how it is with You.' [...] 'What is the role of time and timing in speculative thinking? Good question. Not so easy to say. It is probably a time of fast returns, of reaching out into a future that is already here as a shadow.' Gong.

Interview

Before being part of the Blackmarket-Ensemble an interview with the future expert takes place. It is not a job interview, the experts have been picked beforehand. It is rather a rehearsal. The interview lasts one hour. This is the timeframe of one round in the future event. The expert will spend one hour at the table, talking with two clients, with each one half an hour. He/she is asked to present his/her expertise but then questions redirect his/her thoughts. A provocation to scan

the personal archive for a topic that fits unfittingly to the theme of the Blackmarket to take place in the future. A speculative act as conversation.

Job interview

In times of neoliberalism every conversation tends to be a job interview. You pitch what You know and who You are, even Your emotional and communicational skills could be relevant. If the conversation does not flow, it is You who is guilty; probably You are not interesting enough. This is the ultimate sin in the 'Century of the Self', it's hidden moral agenda. Your neighbour at the next table is struggling as well, a nucleus of solidarity forms within the potlatch of self-marketing. Utopian suspension of the great drama of the young twenty-first century: all conversations synchronize into a chorus: I don't wanna talk about it (Rod Stewart).

Knowledge

The Blackmarket is not a vision of plurality of knowledge, it is a setup of evocative relationality, an assembly/assemblage of exemplary cases, of narrative miniatures that do not amount to a mosaic of some sort. The Blackmarket has the shape of a grid, but this makes the unfitting character of the different knowledge practices even more evident: Nobody's knowledge fits this space-time grid. The big theory, the small practical tool, the monstrous attack on rationality, the well-kept secret, the urgent problem, the ultimate solution, the modest proposal, the historical gem – they all exist side-by-side, each one inapt.

Language/Lure

Language is the Blackmarket's lure. It does not form a Habermasian public that relies on communication as the ultimate tool for consensus; the Blackmarket is neither a Schmittian political arena of fair but hard dissent. Rather it's a tryout for magic spells: it experiments with the idea that a word or sentence might capture a mind in such a way that the one who hears it is forced to think in a different direction, is forced to act. Isabelle Stengers, thinking with Whitehead, has said a lot about words that are able to act upon us as spells. That's a bit more radical than speech-act theory or the idea of performativity of language: we are virtually possessed by language. And because this is so, we have to recuperate those language games that possess us most: capitalism, modernity, lineage, identity, truth... whatever Your demons are.

Murmur

As a visitor what I like most at Blackmarket is the possibility to dream away in the murmuring of the many voices.

Non-Knowledge

Is useful.

Off topic

The topic is always slightly off-topic.

Para

Everything is complicatedly contiguous. Like the building of the Institute for Parapsychology that was once situated on the campus of Duke University and is now in a building bordering it. It was moved out, when Parapsychology was no longer accepted as proper science. Or like the Paralympics neighbouring the festival of perfectly enhanced bodies. Like a parallel slalom that in theory allows for parallel observation but is simply too much for the perceptual apparatus even if it is supported technologically. Parameters out of joint, paragraphs that don't fit, paraphrases that distort phrases. Christopher Tracy's Parade: The show will proceed, unless it should rain strawberry lemonade. (Prince)

Questions

Questions are redirections. The game of asking questions does not work like an FAQ at the Blackmarket. Questions tend to be very concrete, but because of the generous displacement of everybody they also tend to be misplaced. That allows them to generate a result that is not only interesting for the one who asks but also for the one being asked.

Radio

How is it that each time I act as an expert I completely forget about the audience watching us and listening to the conversation? Of course I 'know' that somebody might be listening but I cannot actively imagine this procedure. It is the face under lightbulb that captures my attention. But it's the same whenever I give a radio interview: I talk only to the interviewing person. Listening to the result over the radio is not eerie because I hear my own voice, but because I cannot understand how it comes that others can join in. The conversation is for two, my mind is not able to conceive of it other than this.

Side-by-side

The side-by-side principle is developed by Siegfried Kracauer in his book *History: The Last Things Before the Last* (1969) and his *Theory of Film* (1960). Film is a good model for emancipatory ways of knowing for him, because in film the small and the big, the abstract and the concrete, the close-up and the panorama coexist side-by-side (at least they can be neighbours on the filmstrip). The particular and the general, past and present, experience and thought need to coexist in the same sphere. Abstraction is not allowed to rule over the concrete, to explain it away, to tell it what to mean. That's not the relativism of a lot of equally important parts, it's a monstrous assembly of all kinds of things.

Topic

The topic has to survive the curatorial treatment. It needs to be capable to assemble contradictory possibilities at a specific place. It is shredded, duplicated, torn apart. It is sent

through a wilderness of mirrors, is magnified, distorted, spiralized; some of its extremities shrink or are elongated. The result is the opposite of an adequate representation of something or somebody. Everybody who is familiar with the topic already should be at least a little scared to participate.

Unknown

It is nice to encounter a lot of not-yet-knowns. Oh, how surprising, I did not know that the Edison company filmed the electrocution of an elephant in 1903. Yes, this is also scary. But even more scary is the unknown unknown, something I did not know that could possibly be known. A very scarce guest at the table, but sometimes he/she/it shows up in the middle of a dialogue.

Voices

As a visitor what I like most at Blackmarket is the possibility to dream away in the murmuring of the many voices.

Words

Don't come easy. So it's good to know that You are expected to start the dialogue. You don't need to wait for the words to come, they are already with You and start to form in Your mouth. You try to find out which of them rings a bell in Your interlocutor. Which one will he/she take up first?

Xenophile

The Blackmarket is xenophile. Newsfriendly, curiosityfriendly, incomprehensionfriendly, alienandanimalfriendly, motleycrewfriendly, stutterfriendly, con-tingencyfriendly.

You

The client and the expert sometimes mutate into just two yous. Not quite a we. Two yous are good enough, a good enough story can grow between them.

Zap

The joy of zapping through the channels, listening to different voices, to tune in for a while, to sit at the table, trying to locate the conversation in space, to see a distant face smile at another distant face. Smile to Your neighbour. He might be listening to this as well or to something else. Being apart together.

Empty stages, crowded flats.

Performativity as curatorial strategy

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