

Dario Azzellini on Mobile Vulgus by Christian

The modern horns of Jericho. How to bring down the walls of the Empire.

You are on a legal demonstration, which is supposed to be your right in the wannabee democracies of the western hemisphere, but suddenly the police force surrounds you and just keeps you there immobilized for hours. They don't do you any harm as such (apart from filling up their x-files with even more information, pictures, fingerprints and perhaps also genetic prints of alleged subversives), except to prevent you from doing anything, - mainly from your right to demonstrate. Being trapped by police is no fun, it's also illegal, but who cares, police and authorities sure don't, nor do the courts. This tactic, widespread throughout Germany (West not East) for the past twenty years, has crossed many borders and seas. Christian Nold, the author of *Mobile Vulgus*, has had his personal experience with this particular type of internment on Mayday 2000 and 2001 in London. Held for eight hours along with four hundred other demonstrators in Oxford Street, London, assaulted with teargas as a 'preventive action,' Christian Nold is not a neutral observer anymore - even if it were ever possible for such a notion to exist and even if he wanted to be one. He writes: *"I had been thrown into the middle of a controlled battle which revolved around rules that I did not understand...feeling a huge solidarity with the people I met and witnessing the unreported police violence against them my position became polarised."*

This is an exciting, frightening and sometimes astonishing book. It's a laurel crown for the mob, shifting away from the hysteric and mindless picture drawn of masses by the ruling classes, repositioning them instead as a concrete and collective 'experience' empowering the individual, building a force for change. Having described this context, it's superfluous for Nold to describe the central question that every professional politician, sociologist or journalist would raise; *"what does the crowd want?"*

Sticks and stones have for centuries been the arms of the unarmed, used to oppose landlords and governments, armies and injustice. Even today, in some countries the way to break up demonstrations and discourage protesters is still to shoot at them, but in most of our so-called democracies methods of dispersal are much more sophisticated. However Janet Morris, a pioneer developer of non-lethal weapons suggests that, *"when a boy with a rock faces a high tech army, that boy will win ...unless you can be less lethal than that rock."* So, to address with issue, police and military experts, investigators and psychologists have spent time and money during the last few decades to design non-lethal weapons and techniques of crowd control. Military and police functions have got confused, armies are confronted with civilians (war is always more focused on civilians than the army would like us to believe), but with current massive media presence, this coverage of civilians has become more visible in turn creating 'crowd control' and 'non-lethal weapons' into a specific strategic military mask. It's important to keep in mind that according to the Human Effects Advisory Panel, who produce guidelines for the non-lethal weapons industry, *"a weapon is non-lethal if it incapacitates 98% of the population, has no effect on 1%, whilst causing permanent damage to the remaining 1% - half of whom will die"*. All this means that the 'non-lethal' police action during the G8 summit demonstration in Geneva, 2001 could have caused up to one thousand and five hundred deaths if all of the three hundred thousand participants had been targeted. *"This is what democracy looks like"*, to use the words of Austrian video artist Oliver Ressler.

Sharp Talk 1



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In *Mobile Vulgus*, Nold investigates current research and interviews weapon developers to present us with a terrifying range of non-lethal weapons that already exist, are planned or in development. We read not only of the more commonly known weapons like tear-gas and rubber bullets but also of dozens of bio-technical, electrical, electromagnetic, holographic, marker, obscurant, optical, projectile, reactant and riot control agent weapons, as well as different operational, physiological and theoretical concepts. Compared to these monstrous products created by the wicked minds of some modern Doctor Death, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* looks like a fun fair and Terry Gilliam's *Brazil* is 'third world' again... Today, demonstrators are being blinded or paralysed temporarily by gases and electric shocks, low frequency waves in the form of beams cause nausea, vomiting and disorientation, thick and disorienting smoke restricts eye to hand coordination. Anyone who manages to get away from all these weapons could be stained with foam or smoke dyes for identification purposes at a later date.

Fortunately the author doesn't abandon the readers to overwhelming desperation. Nold outlines different ways and means to face modern police tactics employed by such groups as the 'Tute Bianche' in Italy, to create his own non-lethal weapon - a kind of modern horn of Jericho designed to empower the multitude to bring down the walls of the Empire. Informed by the recent closing down of London's Millennium Bridge after some small cracks appeared and reminded of the collapse of the Broughton Suspension Bridge near Manchester in 1831 under the rhythm of marching troops, Christian Nold conceives his own ingenious protester-tool aimed at causing superficial surface damage in official buildings using sound waves.

The idea is simple. *Mobile Vulgus* has an accompanying CD containing sixteen audio tracks (in a frequency range between 2,25 Hz and 2,85 Hz) edited from street recordings of the London Mayday 2001 demonstrations. With the help of a portable CD player, whistles, an FM transmitter, a megaphone, a helium balloon and multiple radios, it should be possible to unite a crowd and direct its energy against selected buildings and bridges. "The audio CD acts a calibration tool ... it consists of five sets of loops pitched at ever increasing speeds/frequencies covering the full range of human movement. By continually jumping at the speed set by the audio loops and observing the structure, the amount of vibration should increase as the speed approaches the particular resonant frequency. When the natural frequency has been pinpointed, and if sufficient force is applied, the material will react in a very distinctive way that can be heard and/or felt."

And even if the first test event that the author staged in Bristol didn't quite bring down a building - only a highly coordinated group of people will be able to manage it - it still remains a fascinating idea to jump and dance, bringing down the palaces of power...

Dario N. Azzellini is an author, journalist and translator, working in print, radio and film media. He was born in Germany in 1967 and currently lives in Brazil. He works with the Research and Documentation Centre (FDCL) and the Migration Research Centre (FFM) for Chile and Latin America and is a member of the leftist group FelS contributing to the political cultural magazine *Arranca*.

***Mobile Vulgus* by Christian Nold**

How do people group together? And what are the methods of containment used in order to regulate the 'vulgar mob'? These are just two of the questions elicited by Christian Nold in *Mobile Vulgus*. Looking at the tactics used by state forces, in particular, non-lethal weapons and associated training regimes, he traces the move toward total policing. As such methods have developed, so on the other side protest tactics have evolved in order to counteract them. Positioning itself within the counter-tendencies the book then develops its own methodologies of action. Once aligned under a common desire this project reveals the potential force a crowd of people hold when they act as a cohesive whole. At once a textual treatise, a visual manual and an audio tool, *Mobile Vulgus* has developed out of in-depth research, alongside test situations in Bristol and London.

Mobile Vulgus is available for purchase from [Book Works](#).

It is published in an edition of 1,000 copies, 128 pages, printed offset, with an audio CD, 170x155mm, ISBN 1 870699 56 4, Price £7.50

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