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Black space and trauma ruins. How do leftovers perform?

Black space is a term used by American artist Theaster Gates in reference to places abandoned by their inhabitants due to process of gentrification. In brief moment when black people left and white bulldozers are about to destroy their traces, the artist intervenes. In one of most well-known Gates' works, band called The Black Monks of Mississippi performs in the decommissioned St Laurence church in Chicago. They sing and play instruments, moving around in this haunted yet desacralized space making noises throwing garbage around. Music and singing doesn't stop for a moment. In this instance, *black space* becomes a model for affirmation of the black identity described by famous philosopher Fred Moten as nothingness – this kind of subjectivity that fills itself in the celebration of void, of non-individual, non-existing. The material traces, ruins, leftovers of capitalism become a space of something that in Moten work is called non-performance: specific ability to constitute the identity on the denial of agency. Blackness is always fragmented; it has a structure of leftovers that deny to become new building, new better reality.

On the other side of the world Polish artist Robert Kuśmirowski reconstructed ruins that never existed. His *Traumagutstrasse* was site-specific work produced for gallery belonging to Warsaw Academy of Fine Art. The space located in old baroque palace encapsulated detailed, real life scale fragment of ruined building. One could see detailed traces of fire and rain, smell the ashes, touch the bricks. It looked as if a bomb hit this part of the building minutes before. Destroyed tables, chairs and other furniture were still there, providing traumatic impression of what is already missing. In Polish context, the relation between body, ruin and leftovers is almost always, even if not directly, marked by the experience of II World War. In Kuśmirowski's body of work Marianne Hirsches postmemory reveals its performative potential: it is a field of "scriptive things" directing our bodies and motions to re-enact those missing in the ruins. Kuśmirowski's leftovers are a way to make history present and to make present time already historical.

I would like to compare those two works and two ways of playing with leftovers to ask how they perform in those two seemingly different contexts. I would like to present two models of thinking about the relationship between history and present day mediated by leftovers, remains and ruins. But in the end, I would like to use those examples to show how seemingly homogenous and supposedly white Polish identity is entangled in racial context; how almost inexistent blackness and lost during war and communist times Jewish identity play in Poland a role of the leftover – remain that strongly subvert the cohesion of national identity and launches some new performative and artistic strategies.

Reading:

Bernstein, Robin (2009) 'Dances with things. Material culture and the performance of race', *Social Text* 101 4(27), p. 67-94.

Brown, Bill (2001) 'Thing theory', *Critical Inquiry* 1(28), p. 1-22.

Schneider, Rebecca (2011) Performing Remains. Art and war in times of theatrical reenactment, London/New York, NY: Routledge.

Moten, Fred (2013) 'Blackness and nothingness (mysticism in the flesh)', The South Atlantic Quarterly 112(4), p.737-780.

Schneider, Rebecca (2016) 'Theater of bone', draft, www.academia.edu/15176788/Theatre_of_Bone_draft_, accessed 5 May 2017

How to make political theater? Polish socialist realism as historiographical question

My lecture will tell a story of the spectacle premiered in 1949, exactly when the totalitarian system was established in Poland, that till today is considered the only one socialist realist theatre piece that actually succeeded. It was *Brygada szlifierza Karhana* by a Czech author Vasko Kania depicting workers' struggle for better results in the tractors' factory. It was produced in New Theatre in Łódź by a group of young, leftist actors who believed in political efficacy of theatre and wanted it to become a tool of establishing new, better social order. Although at that moment it was quite clear that communism in Poland is introduced with the use of force, terror, prisons and deaths there was a group of artists and intellectuals who still wanted to be engaged in political and ideological battle with the old world. Later most of those working for system will be just writing socialist realist plays and staging them from fear or in hope for goodwill of the party or even some material and social success, but this one spectacle was made in true faith (if this is a good word) in social realism as a doctrine for new, politically engaged, antibourgeois art.

But to tell this story today one must face some historiographical problems that will be also an important part of my reflection.

Sources and mediations

Writing history of the spectacle from 1949 one meets classical problem of theatre historiography – problem of the sources. There are some photos, 5-minutes video fragment, some reviews and memoirs at the disposal. The legend says that the young actors were going to the factory to watch the workers while working on the spectacle. They learned to speak like them and to move like them. Important part of the set design was a real machine from the factory installed on the stage. Then the public had a chance to speak with them after first few shows and change little details conforming to "what's real". They even changed some part of the plot. The final version of the spectacle is not really based on the play's text and it is very hard to reconstruct. I would like then to ask what would be an actually interesting subject of the analysis? The spectacle itself is not really accessible. Meditating on the theories of performance and documentation like those for example gathered in the book *Perform, Repeat, Record* from 2012 by Amelia Jones and Adrian Heathfield I would like to argue that the truly interesting thing is a kind of life the spectacle lives in documentation, texts and social memory during whole communist era and till today. What would that mean that it was the only one successful socialist realist piece? What is hidden in this definition repeated over the years? To answer this questions, I would like also to bring another strictly historiographical question – if the spectacle lives in its documentation and further mediations like contemporary theory says what to do with spectacle from the time when censorship and propaganda ruled? How to read those documents (especially reviews) and what is their status? What kind of life the spectacle then

leads? I will anchor this reflection in Polish texts about documents and archives from communist times. This will allow me to reformulate the performance documentation theory and show how it changes in eastern European context.

What does sorealism remember?

I would like to present a hero of this story – the only one old person in the group, which was preparing *Brygada szlifierza Karhana*. It was Józef Pilarski – old, amateur actor who before the IIWW was running workers' theatres in factories of Łódź. This second figure in my opinion introduces on the stage of political theatre something those young people, and Dejmek among them, completely neglected – body as a site of memory and history. From this point I would like to ask about the relation between socialrealist theatre and memory. I would like to follow Boris Groys' analysis of soviet sorealism (*The Total Art of Stalinism*, 1992) as one being a final consequence of avant-garde understanding of history, politics and time and Susan Buck-Morss' reaction on his ideas (*Dreamworld and Catastrophe*, 2000). I would like also to introduce a notion of body-archive by Dorota Sajewska (*Nekroperformans*, 2016) to show that it was a subversive power of the workers' culture (embodied by Pilarski), which made socialist realism successful on stage and gave it real political power. I would like to end with a reflection on historiographical dimension of the sorealism in Poland as such (how it understood history and memory) and in consequence by showing how theatre materiality was constantly undermining it by making the status of present reality it was carefully coping deeply unsure. By making what's present abstract (or even comic) social realist theatre was depriving working bodies of their meaning and opening a stage for their "archival" dimension. History was not ending becoming a moment of constant, never-ending although always successful class fight as social realism wanted, but invading the stage through bodies with their individual stories, signs, movements and melodies rooted in the past. I would like to finish with reflection that the socialist realist problem with history is still valid and influences Polish theatre practice and historiography.

Reading

Groys, Boris (1992) 'The Stalinist Art of Living', trans. Charles Rougle, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Kenney, Padraic (1997) 'Rebuilding Poland. Workers and Communist 1945–1950', Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.

Chapter 3 in Schneider, Rebecca (2011) Performing Remains. Art and war in times of theatrical reenactment, London/New York, NY: Routledge.