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At-tractions' Montage

A dream which is not interpreted is like a letter which is not read.

The Talmud

The only thing that the world will not have enough of is exaggeration.

Salvador Dali

Everything has its opposite side. Dream is the inverse of the performance. The opposite of imitation's reality is the reality of the individuality, expression of the inner; and even sometimes the desired effect becomes something inverse. *Vice versa*, a performance by Cobratheater.cobra, reminds me of Freud's term *symptom*, which in his meaning applies to written but unsent letters. It relates to our desire of keeping the message without handing it over to the addressee, or destroying it, "we say, that in fact, our thoughts are too precious to entrust them to the recipient, who may not appreciate them, so we 'send' them then to our *alter ego*, which exists only in our imagination, and we hope that it will understand us".¹ Therefore the only recipient there is - is the non-existent 'someone'.

In the first scene of the performance, the actor seems to initiate an irrational situation - it is not clear whether this is a dream or reality. He is hungry so he begins to eat - probably it is not a dream then. However, he begins to talk to a dwarf as well, which shows the opposite of reality.

The story of Eisenstein, who wanted to evoke strong reactions *vice versa* to the inspirational and improvisational actions in the arts, is the axis of composite attractions of the performance. He dreamt of artistic revolution as a holistic and integral part of the social revolution. He took part in the German-Soviet cultural fusion, which was crushed by reigning dictator - in the performance he is portrayed as an animal handler with a powerful whip, a spirit being communicated in a séance or as a land-scape architect (here denoting people). Also, in relation to Eisenstein, we see a traditional Japanese dance in the midst of liquid nitrogen; his art was heavily influenced and inspired by Japanese culture.

¹ Transl. from Polish transl. of Malcolm, J., *The Silent Woman*, (*Milcząca Kobieta*, Warszawa 1998, s. 154-155)

And what of it? One may say. Everything looks like a circus rehearsal, where all at one time, in order to improve performing in front of the audience they try to practice their presentations, prepare their numbers or nibble at prepared dishes while letting others to take the stage. There is a bearded woman, an animal handler, dancers, jugglers, a mime, a musician and a director. They all play their scenes. A circus. The entire performance lacks consistency. The story is disjointed hence we do not know what is of importance here. It seems as though several topics (theater, music, gymnastics) were mixed up together making it incoherent. In one of his works Lenin defined circus as the most 'appropriate' of arts for the working masses. At the same time, Eisenstein remaining under the influence of Constructivism and Futurism sought to create on their basis a truly proletarian art. As for the masses, each and every element should be functional, aesthetic, fulfilling its function; it should be [sic!] easy to use. The better the compilation of facts is arranged in a proven structure, the more it is saturated with meaning. There should be a code in the randomness on stage. What we had seen looked like random attempts at randomly chosen roles, as if the actors forgot what the roles had been and nobody could have reminded them because they also forgot who the director was.

Did the creators of the show, in the spirit of Eisenstein, provoke any strong reactions? Maybe they tried to invoke the spirit during the organized séance? Perhaps they invoked a strong feeling that all of it does not matter? Could the audience decipher the meaning and depth in the spirit of symbolism? Perhaps we are presented with some private symbols that can only be deciphered by examining individual world of each of the creators. Perhaps they are not available to us, like an unread letter, or like a letter that has never been sent to us.

It may well be the point, that the boundaries of the invisible side of symbols can never be set. The inexhaustibility of symbols is endless. Breton's definition of surrealism states "Surrealism - pure psychic automatism, by which it is intended to express, verbally, in writing, or by other means, the real process of thought. Thought's dictation, in the absence of all control exercised by the reason and outside all aesthetic or moral preoccupations. Surrealism rests in the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of association neglected heretofore; in the

omnipotence of the dream and in the disinterested play of thought".² It happens without a dictator nor censorship. Cobratheater.cobra's work shows no content behind words and actions of reality or non-reality they create. It is only a facade behind which there is no real function. In other words, we cannot see the functioning of the mind; but I will make yet another attempt to find it.

It is possible that the authors of the show, wishing to be regarded as a revolutionary theater - the avant-garde, in a critical way wanted to expose the usurpation of language or ideas which only appear to reflect the world faithfully, but in fact they want to replace it. Still, any artistic attempt, which aims to create doubts or to evoke reactions in the audience, must use a language. Any language works through messages and codes that can be deciphered by its users. The words of Veteranyi, a Romanian writer, elucidate all that happened on the stage of Kana Theatre, she says "My mother and I did not have a common language. Just words".³ Words alone, however, are only a phonic sequence, a homophonic one even if they make no sense, are incomprehensible or noncommunicating.

Is the topic or the attempt at these questions undertaken by *Vice versa's* makers a suitable choice? Perhaps they lost their grip on the performance just like 'the vase with its two thousand year history' was dropped and shattered during the show. The entire past can become a sphere of fantasy. History can be interesting as a realm of imagination and reanimation of corpses (the actors were trying to mend the vase and their stories). One should remember though, that there is no such thing as private language (Wittgenstein).

The purpose of a review is to show its readers any value discovered in the work of art, but this piece of theatre seems like a bad dream. Lacan then advises "The real has to be sought beyond the dream-in what the dream has enveloped, hidden from us, behind the lack of representation of which there is only one representative".⁴ Consequently, my aesthetic experience was happening instinctively, but in the final

² Breton, A., *What is Surrealism?*, accessed electronically January 18, 2014
<http://home.wlv.ac.uk/~fa1871/whatsurr.html>

³ Transl. from Polish transl. of Veteranyi, A., *The Shelf of Last Breaths (Rega Ostatnich TchnieŃ*, Wołowiec 2004, s. 67)

⁴ Lacan, J., *Tuche and Automaton*, accessed electronically January 18, 2014,
<http://personal.bgsu.edu/~dcallen/tuche.html>

version it did not materialize. *Vice versa's* performance, increasingly, thrusts upon the spectator different qualities. These qualities in a combinative manner should work with each other; subsequently they should lead to seeing some entirety - an aesthetic concretization.

In order to discern the subject matter of Cobratheater.cobra's attempts, I endeavored to use all the associative networks by engaging with already existing cultural images of fictional and historical symbolic figures and situations. And where did it take me? This architectural structure made no associations and it provoked no questions. It merely created an occasion to recall the theory of culturally accepted symbolism.

In one of the scenes of *Vice versa*, a paper plate letter arrives from another world posing a question "What would it be like, if it hadn't been the way it is"? If I were to answer it, I would reply that in order to avoid the way it is, you should know exactly what you are talking about in the performance and what is your dramaturgical concept. You should not let the performance lose its way or run away from you. Next, you will only go mad or lose your mind completely. Sadly, the fear of insanity is not enough to prevent our imagination from sparking.

Translated by Marcin Zabielski