

From there to Rehearsing Sex: A space of freedom among theory and the dead meandering to assist with resistance

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SUMMARY: On a rectangular table, four heads recollect their personal experiences of existence. In the absence of physical body no gender or sex differentiations exist. However, in depicting images of their existence the four heads recall relationships and emotions characterized by all the stereotypes of engendered relations. Submissal, obedience, resistance, are evident. The limits and power play of family and sex bondages are revealed. Through a constant state of sleep and/or death the heads speak with their eyes closed the truths of their selves. Pursuance of pleasure (achieved through sex) and desire of fulfillment motivates their every action and thought and allows to endure the pain that emerges from the lack of completeness. Language is the medium that gives meaning to an existential life, sets the space of one's freedom, constructs or deconstructs reason. "Rehearsing Sex" can be seen/heard as a paradigm of queer theory, where sexual identities and relations are being revised and reconstructed.

"Once upon a time there were mass graves - of gladiators, of the victims of epidemics, civil wars, doubt, juntas, military invasions. In there lived bones; all together, without discrimination. But there were no bodies as a whole. Totality was dismembered, unimportant. Some of the bones kept their memory and some did not. They created alliances and disputes to pass the time. The partial lack of memory brought confusion and memory was released from the Sisyphean burden of order. Among the bones were also skulls. These rounded and hollow spaces occupied a slightly higher position because once they had been heads. Their recollections originated from the murdering acts. It lived inside their scars or their lack of. Because much time has gone by, original thinking was replaced by sleep. A queer thing for bones. From the moment sleep was recollected, so was the hair, the eyes, the mouth. They remembered hunger and kissing. And decided to form an alliance to stage a performance about themselves. As long as rehearsals went on the skulls lived. Not one noticed the constituencies of pleasure editing modes of representation. One of the skulls suggested to unsettle the existing conditions and proposed unearthing. If they surfaced, they could stage the performance within the norms of theatre and through theatre rediscover the same or better yet different positions of domination and submission. Isn't that the definition of life? Otherwise they were doomed to endure rehearsing

conditions forever. Not one took into account the possibility of displacement as a different set of riddles that were to determine the camp of transformation. Yet who and what could then guarantee they would stay together forever? Surfacing was different from descending. Acting could be a solution. But then how would the archaeologists of knowledge understand theatre existed? That was a very difficult question." (Lambrinidis, from Rehearsing Sex program)

A rectangular table, fit for eating, presenting points of views, negotiating, writing collectively is the starting point of interpretation. But what is interpretation? Perhaps a process of production that defends itself against communication. The table, also the stage for this particular production, is occupied by four heads in a row - an instance of order/disorder - that slowly, very slowly emerge from darkness and silence. Upon utterance, the spectators/voyeurs - scattered inside the bar-turned-theatre around many small tables, functional skulls or family locations for Sunday lunches - see/hear the four heads revealing a system of discipline, instances of family violence around sleep. As in the mass graves, there is no totality of body. Only personal memory deconstructs the semiotics of narrative and turns the re-collected home into a geocultural space of sadomasochism where the canon is the calculated pleasure of savagery.

A wide, elastic, black ribbon holds together each head; bandage, bondage, a sign of mourning. Two male and two female heads. What constitutes gender if the body is not apparent or visible? Is the head the only body we are in need of? Could the head be an audiovisual projector of the body as an agency of multiply rehearsed desire? If there is no body-visibility, can there be sex? Could sex be a kinship of rules existing to cover the bloodshed of family formation?

Is family a geo-cultural space?

In July 2006, during the Athens Festival, *Le Dernier Caravansérail*, a six hour long theatre work by Ariane Mnouchkine's Theatre du Soleil, was staged in Athens. Testimonies of displacement from the East to the West. From the ravaged to the barbed wire. Entire families were violently trans-ported, dug-out, torn apart. Are we speaking of members or of dis-members within the transnational political situation we all find our selves in? Is family, as a system of thought and politics, exonerated if displaced? Is a performance of bones and dis-remembered narrativities political since it aims to understand the ways into which construction and deconstruction manifest themselves? Can bones speak of theory? Can theory speak of bones?

There are certain assumptions one needs to take into account in

regards to Rehearsing Sex, a theatre performance staged in Athens by the Group for Conflict Resolution:

It originated in Greece - a socioeconomic reality where family is the mode of apparatus.

It aims to unravel the perversion of that apparatus through the looking-glass of sex.

It stages psychoanalytic processes as a circus where imprisonment is invisible, wild beasts are family members, and perversion is both the whip and the tamer.

It claims that spectacle is a starting point of resistance and theatre a geo-cultural space where activists turn into theorists and theorists into activists through the temporary construct of death.

Mara: "Say goodnight and go to your room. NOT YET. You have school tomorrow. You will not wake up in time. MAMA, LET ME STAY A LITTLE BIT LONGER. Go to your room. I WANT TO STAY."

Nothing visibly wrong in this dialogue. Nothing visibly violent. The mother safeguards the daughter against a late night fatigue. School is the proper mission, the required time-occupation for the young

child. After all, children are not there to mix with the parents and their friends who are in dire need for a time of their own. The daughter goes to sleep as told and escapes obedience through dreaming.

Mara: "I dreamed my mother raping me. With a wide wooden rectangle between her legs. She made my back bent and pushed it inside of me."

Does the daughter take revenge of the mother's disobedience in sending her to bed? Could the daughter desire to be raped by the mother as the only means to practice civil disobedience towards her gender? Is escaping punishable with rape or is rape the only condition in which a mother becomes the totem of the father who lets the daughter free by raping her in her sleep? Are we that perverse to sustain such conditions of punishment when desiring to escape dominant institutions?

As the performance progresses, Mara places her entire head upon the table and interprets her dream herself with her eyes closed:

Mara: "Mother has a phallus. Mother teaches me obedience to the father, awe for his girth, submission to his law. The wooden rectangular shape in between her legs could have been my great-grandmother's washing basin for the dirty clothes, the cradle

of my non-existent baby, or my own coffin. Mother teaches how the backs should bend."

When the four heads stop speaking they keep their eyes shut. So the spectators/voyeurs are constantly reminded of the condition of sleep and of death. The four heads are decapitated and therefore dead. Or they are in between sleep and awakening. Or in between prophesizing and non-prophesizing positions. Are we prophets when we sleep and non-prophets when we are awake? Or is it vice-versa? Could in death as in sleep suffering be replaced by orgasm? Is orgasm sex and/or prophecy?

In preparing for the directing of this performance which is totally based on rehearsing conditions - that is a script that changes every night the performance takes place, as improvisation assists to maintain conditions of interpreting rather than answering or resolving - I studied many of Louise Bourgeois's art pieces. Especially one, "The Cell", where a naked and decapitated female body arches on top of an ironing board with the word *je t'aime* printed in red many times on it. A big industrial cutting wheel overshadows the arched body inside a confined space she calls "The Cell".

Could Bourgeois' installation highlight further the resisting dynamics of production against communication. Bourgeois says

"there is the big sleep which is death and the small sleep which is orgasm." (64). Orgasm is a code word for the desirability of sex and perhaps its masking as a tension release process. Orgasm makes sex sought after, lusted for. A long journey not into the night but into a rehearsed ideology of pleasure.

When one creates theatre, one is reminded of conventions of analysis, of entertainment, of political struggle, of philosophy. Queer theory becomes very valuable as a repertoire of epistemologies that flourish in deferrals. Epistemologies can sustain both the violence of discourse and the death of reason because they are constantly re-vised, re-examined, re-constructed themselves while keeping almost intact a shape that allows for the meandering of the mind - whatever that may be. If a bone can also be a performed instance of a mind then epistemologies can also be understood as mass graves. Or so I would suggest. And if queer theory is nothing but a convergence of theories in rehearsal, then *Rehearsing Sex* can also be seen/heard as a paradigm for queer theory.

What is an ideology of pleasure?

Tzannis: "I woke up with a headache. In the kitchen I found a bone shimmering inside a pot. This had been my food for years. I went to the doctor for the headache. He told me it was a matter of my diet."

Tzannis crosses over from sleep to arousing within the perimeters of the head. Instead of the ribbon to hold it together - a corpse head, an ornate recognition of a person, an easily claimed identity - pain signifies the head. In the kitchen, his own space of sustaining ritual and not of the family's, Tzannis turns into his own archaeologist of knowledge to discover an enormous bone seeking to become not only his remainings but also his sustenance. A cannibal of bare proportions, he eats his invisible flesh-self to bring his own to a history of the I. "In the rituals of pain, the sufferer (paschon) does not speak but accepts discourse (logos). He is not active but passive underneath the influence of writing, when he accepts the inscription of the sign. And his pain is nothing more than a pleasure for the eye that looks at him, the collective or divine eye, which does not act from any feeling of revenge, but which is singularly capable to conceive the fine line between the sign inscribed on the flesh and the voice that originates from the face." (Deleuze 220).

In science, a dramatized manifestation of epistemologies, the doctor, a favourite caricature of Moliere for example, takes on the face of double inscription, both because he surreptitiously confirms the pain as a problem of sustenance and because he is the voice that originates from the face - a secret father, a displaced origin that comes to reason about the sudden discovery of an animal bone inside the comfort of the house kitchen - like the house doctor, or the

house writer, or the house cook. The existence of the pain makes Tzannis, the sufferer, the acceptor of the sign.

Rehearsing Sex has almost come to an end. It has called itself a sign or it has used theatre to become one. After lullabies of sexed murders, disciplines of sleep, existential blowjobs, and bill negotiations, the four non-actors have turned into inscriptions on the flesh pointing not the road to redemption but to bodies without organs, without functions of their own, without any convention for a life spent to be understood or examined. At the end, the four-non acting heads stick out their tongues. Not organs but signifiers of spaces where freedom is as displaced as it is inscribed. As foreign as it is intimate. As ludicrous as it is needed. The lights go down on those tongues slowly very slowly while the eyes of spectators/voyeurs do not see/hear the crackling collapse of reason and of thought. If theatre does nothing more than occupy the tension of non-order then a performance is a dysfunctional claim for the revolutionary powers of desire.

If there is no language, there is no meaning. If there is no meaning there is no soil. If there is no soil there is no burial ground. If there is no burial ground there is no death. And if there is no death there is no fear or the fluxes of desire neither as theory or technologies of concepts exchanged and appropriated. If there is not fear there is no theatre.

Because theatre is a space where fear is bred and abandoned. And if there is no theatre then interpretation meets a very dangerous ground; it gets annihilated as not only it has been reversed but is has also finally met its rapture.

If you walk in Athens at night, late into the night you hear the moments of rupture as unintelligible noises. Like cement exploding because of the heat, or traffic lights jammed, or water running aimlessly because of a water pipe broken somewhere. And if you pay attention to these noises you begin to accept that cruelty is perhaps the only means through which we are allowed to non-revolt against interpretation. And bones have turned queer and so they can never return to or originate from heteronormative bodies. As Marx says, there are no monsters or unanswered riddles in reality, because whatever depth characterizes the way into which the bourgeoisie conceptualizes the money, the capital, the value, in reality it is equal to width. When there is no depth only the surface will determine the space of freedom between theory and the dead.

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