

The meaning of Everything, Part 2

/ Ayreen Anastas and René Gabri at Tanya Leighton

Some weeks ago while out for dinner, one of our friends told us about an uncanny dream. He dreamt he was an outcast. His fellow citizens had thrown him into a well. Somehow the well was connected to the sea, and so he fell into the depths of the ocean, where he led a life of great underwater hardship for years and years. He fought for food and shelter with sea creatures small and big, and he feared the sharks, which were swarming around him constantly. And he fought the sharks. Over and over again he fended off their attacks. Until he himself became a shark. Or shark-like. He remembers having shark-thick skin. Then he swam back ashore and into human society. He climbed out of the same well where he had once been thrown. People gazed in awe. He was now too strong for them to tamper with. Nobody dared come close. Had they dared come close he wouldn't have been able to communicate his experience anyhow. Yet people would respect him now, or maybe fear him. Still, for all his woes he was still not one of them. There was no relief to be found in coming back. One of our friends at the dinner table mentioned that he was like homo sacer from Agamben's latest book. Someone else asked if he was now seen as specially gifted, like mystically strong and wise. The shark man replied that strong and wise have no meaning: Society is a communication code. Success and failure can only be measured against that very code.

Dreams too, are a communication code. Like the symptoms of psychological disorders they vary accordingly to the cultural context of the dreamer. Since all communication strategies share a hidden entente with their listeners, the shark-man is somehow a collective dream. The dream of our generation, in specific, for that matter who got caught in the 'paradox of liberal democracy': not at all equipped with a discourse that would enable us to constitute ourselves as a political entity, because we are at odds with the notion of homogeneity, and

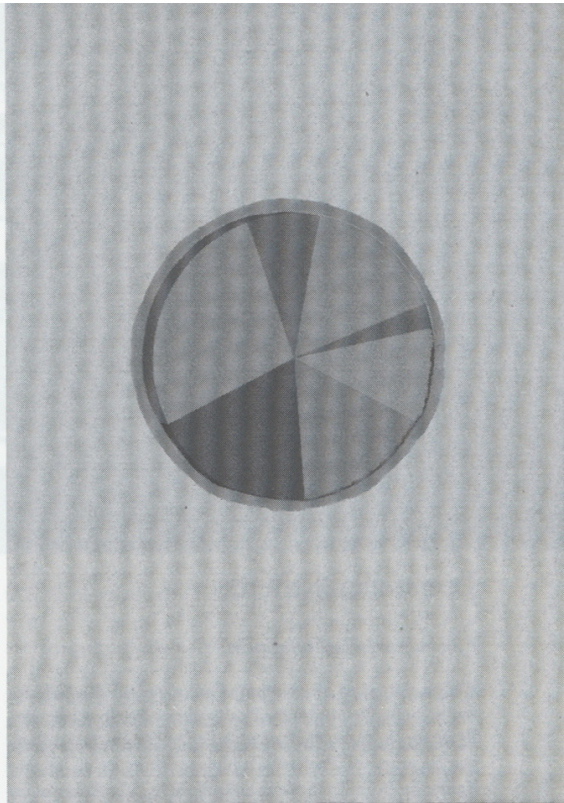
with the consequent erasure of heterogeneity, which the constitution of political entities necessarily entails. So we wish for the development of a political community of "citizen pilgrims whose loyalties would belong to an invisible political community, one which consisted of their hopes and dreams" as Richard Falk put it. Yet we are aware of the slippery slope one enters when refusing to constitute oneself as a political entity. We are aware that the ideal of an individualistic humanism coalesces with the logic of neo-liberalism, and how the avoidance of political exclusion leads to economical exclusion: how the true Other of democracy is not some fantasized Islamic threat but our very own home-grown neo-liberalism with its erasure of political discourse underneath its veneer of absolute 'equality'.

"The Meaning Of Everything. One Step Forwards Two Steps Back" is an attempt to constitute a discourse, which though political does not efface the dimension of the personal. Or better put, a discourse, which is able to re-articulate this dialectical pair. The exhibition takes on the form of a book, Volume 2 of the series "The Meaning of Everything", where long-term partners, René Gabri and Ayreen Anastas, have been developing a continuous presentation of their notes, journals, thoughts, drawings and diagrams. The first book, Volume 1 of "The Meaning of Everything" was produced during the summer of 2008, in the aftermath of the financial crisis, and resulted in an entirely hand-written compilation of lived experiences intertwined with political and economical reflection, which was presented at Castillo/Corrales in Paris and Tanya Leighton in Berlin. Mostly made with color crayons, their unresolved sketches and scribbles are somehow both candid and cunning. The drawings expose a possible mapping of the contemporary logic of subjecthood and of the mechanisms, which underline political identity, or rather,



to make use of Foucault's concept of governmentality, they expose how 'the conduct of conduct' creates an experience of subjectivity which is also the principle of one's own subjectification. Yet, they also capture the conundrum of being fully articulated while fully aware that such articulation voices the 'ideological other' within. As Ayreen Anastas herself writes "somehow in my memory Roland Barthes must have written fascism is not preventing from speaking, it is rather 'to force to speak'". If the outside of language is always already defined by language maybe a possible strategy is to turn it inside out, by staging a mise-en-abyme of a text about a text about a text, like for instance the way "The Meaning Of Everything. One Step Forwards Two Steps Back" is staged. A matrioska of footnotes and cross-references composed of a newspaper 'Pasting nothing in a little book is the way to use the paper and nothing is then lost and that is such a collection', which functions as an archive for the 'topic' crisis, addressed through a compilation of lectures and assorted texts comprising a research period from 1989 to 2009. Presented together with 'The autobiography of any one being including every one before' (2009). ТАОАОВЕОВ, a 'publication within a publication', which gathers "advertisements, media images, charts of slipping values, and an ahistorical impersonal history of anyone being"; and in juxtaposition to 'one step forward, two steps back' (2009–2010) a poster displaying the compressed translation of the film 'Pravda' shot by the Dziga Vertov Group (Jean-Luc Godard and Jean-Pierre Gorin) in the aftermath of the Soviet repression of Prague's Spring. The crisis of communism here being presented as an historical correlate of the present crisis of capitalism. And last but not least the artist's endeavor will be further stretched with the film performance – "testing nothing in a little room is the way to use the room and nothing is then lost and that is such a correction", to be held after the opening, at Kino Arsenal.

Ana Teixeira Pinto



Ayreen Anastas and Rene Gabri

„The Meaning Of Everything. One Step Forwards Two Steps Back“, Tanya Leighton Gallery, Kurfürstenstraße 156, 10785 Berlin, 13.02.–13.03.2010

Preview: Freitag, 12.03.2010, 18–21 Uhr

„testing nothing in a little room is the way to use the room and nothing is then lost and that is such a correction“, 12.02. (nach der Eröffnung) 21.30 Uhr im Kino Arsenal, Potsdamer Straße 2, 10785 Berlin