

Fallout shelters and dictionaries

Linguistic public space as a kind of heterotopia. The performative function of language: symbolic linguistic violence and symbolic methods of defense.

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"Linguistic survival' implies that a certain kind of surviving takes place in language."

"To be injured by speech is to suffer the loss of context, that is, not to know where you are. Indeed, it may be that what is unanticipated about the injurious speech act is what constitutes its injury, the sense of putting its addressee out of control."

Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech. A Politics of the Performative*.

The subject of my doctoral dissertation stems from my long standing interest in space and the attempts to figure out what it is and how it works. First of all I was curious how language as a tool (understood as a system of signs) can be employed to describe space. For many years prior to the work on the present thesis I was making attempts to tackle this problem with means traditionally ascribed to the artist. However, the available artistic tools, rooted in their history turned out to be insufficient, too limiting, or even powerless. Nevertheless, space and language are still one of the two pillars of my interests, in their more abstract and conceptual aspect. The second, more significant pillar of my work, is, generally speaking, space and time in which we live, history, events, circumstances, traces of the past, namely, everything which creates concrete contexts that affect us at present. They shape our so-called reality, i.e. our concepts – language, our space and our bodies emerged in it. The concept of heterotopia, elaborated by Michel Foucault, became key for my further work. I came to a conclusion that in order to be able to fully discuss the topics of my concern three elements need to be combined: space, language and body. However, this combination needs one more catalytic factor in order to become operational and performative, that is, for the fusion to really take place. I believe – and attempt to proof my belief in the present thesis – that the effect of violence is the catalyst I have been looking for.

Therefore the subject-matter of war, conflict or, more generally, state of alarm, enters the area of my research. War is a total phenomenon, probably unlike any other, encompassing the whole life with all its aspects. It covers the entire reality, and, consequently, the whole language (*war language* is, after all, performative, such as for example the act of *declaring war*), it affects the body and annexes space: air, water, ground, the invisible space of information. In the linguistic research I am not interested in a direct description, e.g. a report on events, but in a different type of messages. What is more, during my research I realised what kind of tool was in fact language and the narration it created. How close were facts and fiction. Often there are no tools to decide what is the former and what is the latter, when both *work* in the same way. This is when the problem gets more complicated, but at the same time becoming more intriguing and complex. As a consequence, my work required the use of many different tools. They include essays, which I write to analyse specific cases, test theories, combine phenomena, sometimes quite distant, and to look for meanings through the combinations. The essays provide the bottom line for the second type of my activities – site-specific actions, and they legitimise them.

The idea that only the experience of some kind of violence, or an intense experience of ecstasy (as described by Butler in *Prekarious Life. The Powers of Mourning and Violence*.) is a hidden thesis of the present work. Only the experience of being put "out of control" – the disintegration of the world and the previously stable structure – make it possible for us to get in touch with reality. In an ordinary state this contact seems to be obscured with the abundance of different texts, by narrations which separate us from reality or by the everyday routine. To continue in the same vein, any knowledge drawn from heterotopia can provide us with the "truth about reality." Through contestation, reversal, reflection, reinforcement or

accumulation, heterotopia presents the features of space and world that are otherwise invisible. My direct argument is that when a combination of elements – language, space and body – becomes a heterotopia, our contact with reality, that is, experience, is absolute and active. Through mind – language, logos and through our biological body. The prerequisite for the combination to occur is the catalysing element of violence. All this takes place in particular spaces, on particular bodies and it also acts through language (e.g. hate speech, but not exclusively).

I also argue that there are spaces which preserve this state within themselves. One of such spaces with this type of extraordinary potential is the fallout shelter from the title of the present thesis. A fallout shelter, discussed not in its capacity of a building, but of space, is a time, information and history capsule. Moreover, it has a specific impact on the body inside it, providing shelter and being at the same time oppressive. A fallout shelter is therefore also a space of coexisting contradictions. In the course of my work I analyse such cases and I look for features of a fallout shelter in completely different spaces and phenomena.

Once again about language, space and body

The title of the present thesis – "Fallout shelters and dictionaries" – refers to the combination of three elements: space, language and body. They demarcate my research area which I analyse with different means. I attempt to examine their relationship and the problems which arise around them that I manage to notice. In my considerations I have been drawing on extremely interesting theoretical concepts which I came across in the recent years (in particular of M. Foucault, J. Butler, P. Virilio, H. Ardent and other). I found them very inspirational and they made me look at things in a completely new way. I have been influenced by works and reflections of other people – their intellectual output is impressive and fascinating. I make attempts at interpreting their works (I treat them as works regardless of whether they are sophisticated theoretical constructs or artistic actions), hoping that they do not become distorted in the process. This is how I try to define and articulate my own ideas.

Space comes first in the order. It is only through the studying of space and learning about its different varieties and properties that one can read the instances and impact of the remaining two elements: body and language. This is why first of all I base my work on Michel Foucault's theory of other spaces – heterotopias. Foucault's ideas contained in the notes to a lecture entitled "Des espaces autres" became fundamental for my work. It made me notice different modalities of space, in order to later on try to read traces they reflect.

My site-specific actions are not separate from the theoretical reflection. Quite the contrary: carried out in parallel, they constantly influenced each other. Site-specific works that I created could be called an attempt to blend with a site, its surroundings and context. My actions are merely interventions in space – as heterogeneous as was described by Foucault – which result in nothing more than a momentary meaning. They serve as a commentary, or rather, a less structured reflection. They operate with words – language –, however, the words employed do not utter direct messages. I leave them to be read/deciphered by incidental passers-by. I never come back to them.

I would like my work to be, at least to a certain degree, more than just a confirmation of previously discussed and fixed positions. I wrote my texts in the form of essays, and my work is an attempt at carrying out an experiment. By presenting my own associations I intended to suggest a certain perspective. Consequently, the ambition to present a cross-section or a

systematic review of the subject-matter was not the criterion I applied in the selection of elements. This sort of task would far exceed my competences. The selection is entirely subjective. The way the work has been *assembled* may bring about connotations with collage. Both threads of my work, that is, essays and action, are structured around a similar principle, involving the setting of various elements side by side, so that the newly obtained juxtapositions become autonomous entities. This is how I attempt to write a new layer of meaning on the basis of the output of others – i.e. of what we, as a community, gained thanks to them. Problems and subjects that I undertake to describe are by no means exhausted in my work. I barely scratch their surface, and their vastness, which I can only suspect, is overwhelming even in the very apprehension.

This fusion of three elements (space, body and language) discussed in the present thesis can only take place if it is provoked by a certain catalysts. Based on my previous observations and intuitions I assumed that body, language and space collide in defined, specific circumstances, i.e. in extreme and critical situations. The catalytic factor of the *extremity* is necessary to bring language, body and space together so that they become performative. Their juxtaposition becomes visible. It is activated. In his book entitled "Przeźniona rewolucja. Ćwiczenia z logiki historycznej"¹ Andrzej Leder quotes Walter Benjamin: "The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the 'state of emergency' in which we live is not the exception but the rule. We must attain to a conception of history that is in keeping with this insight. Then we shall clearly realize that it is our task to bring about a real state of emergency (...)." Andrzej Leder quotes this statement in his analysis of the experience of destitution and its role in the context of revolutionary change and the bringing down of the symbolic field of social order. I am referring to this text as his understanding of destitution is close to how I would like the term *extreme states* that I use to be understood. "(Destitution is an) experience of extreme states – starvation, cold, often physical suffering, and, most of all, fear. It lets one act and think only in the present, under pressure of the necessity, it only wants to know what to do in order not to perish. Therefore it excludes the experience of the past and the future, dimensions which exist outside of the present, and which enable one to define one's identity through reaching to the past and to plan future activities reasonably. By pushing the person out of the framework of common meanings, beyond the symbolic system, destitution precludes relationship with the Other."²

In order to analyse such states and situations I had to refer to a specific historical context and texts. Therefore I am trying to form a general response to the extreme event of WWII, and, to a lesser degree, the Cold War, the Balkan War and war in Iraq and Afghanistan, on the basis of a widely available historical and literary works. WW II was in particular a total event, an extreme experience for people from almost the entire European continent. While presenting an abundance of facts – numbers and data – Tony Judt depicts an apocalyptic, Boschian vision full of details, at the same time maintaining a wide perspective, as if things were seen from a birds' eye view. He describes the reality and experience of people in Europe under Nazi occupation and what happened after the war: "Indeed, in those countries occupied by Nazi Germany, from France to Ukraine, from Norway to Greece, World War Two was *primarily* a civilian experience. Formal military combat was confined to the beginning and end of the conflict. In between, this was a war of occupation, of repression, of exploitation and extermination, in which soldiers, storm-troopers and policemen disposed of the daily lives

¹ Andrzej Leder, *Przeźniona rewolucja. Ćwiczenia z logiki historycznej*, Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, Warsaw 2014, p. 163.

² *Ibid.*, p. 162.

and very existence of tens of millions of imprisoned peoples. In some countries the occupation lasted most of the war; everywhere it brought fear and deprivation."³

Those events are particularly important, if not crucial, for modern European culture and consciousness. The post-war period shaped philosophy, literature and art. The events of WWII introduced new codes, which irreversibly changed the meaning of objects and words. For example, locks of cut human hair are heavy with meaning that is difficult to ignore. It is difficult for artists to work with such material without referring to the code that was ascribed to it by the Holocaust. Similarly, juxtaposing words as *human body fat*, *production* and *soap* brings about an immediate connotation, just like a cut lock of hair, with the extermination of Jews, even though it turned out to be a myth (historical research proved that the Nazi made small-scale attempts to produce soap from human bodies. However, it was commonly believed there was a mass-production of human soap).

Participation in the seminar of Professor Andrzej Leder "The Post-war Period in Europe. The Path of Trauma to the Surface" in the Institute for Advanced Study in Warsaw was of capital importance to my work, as it made me realise what are the processes of the reworking of such traumatic events in our common consciousness, and how they function. Especially that they are still unfinished.

There is a reason why, in the 21st century, almost seventy years after WWII, books like "Vielleicht Esther" – a story of a Jewish family from Kiev in the war and post-war period – are still being published. There is a reason why a Ukrainian writer, Katja Petrowskaja, writes in a foreign, German language, and the book is published nowhere else but in Berlin. "Vielleicht Esther" is also a code, and its chapter, first published under a working title *Fikus* is a test and a key to my work.⁴

W.G. Sebald, born in 1944, did not experience the war directly⁵, however, his writings are devoted to war and the post-war period, being the work of memory of the next generation. This is how he describes the German society in the introduction to "Air War and Literature": "...the sense of unparalleled national humiliation felt by millions in the last years of the war had never really found verbal expression, and (...) those directly affected by the experience neither shared it with each other nor passed it on to the next generation." He continues: "And when we turn to take a retrospective view, particularly of the years 1930 to 1950, we are always looking and looking away at the same time."⁶ In order to proof how far-reaching and long-lasting was the repression from the social consciousness of those events Sebald

³ Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945*, London: Penguin Press 2005.

People's tragedy did not, however, end with the war. As Judt continues: "Surviving the war was one thing, surviving the peace another. (...) For much of 1945 the population of Vienna subsisted on a ration of 800 calories per day; in Budapest in December 1945 the officially provided ration was just 556 calories per day. (...) During the Dutch 'hunger winter' of 1944-45 (...) the weekly calories ration in some regions fell below the daily allocation recommended by the Allied Expeditionary Force for its soldiers; 16,000 Dutch citizens died (...)." The retreating German troops burnt and obliterated entire cities (such was the case of Warsaw, levelled to the ground), the advancing Soviet Army brought about not only liberation, but also mass rapes on local women. Aerial attacks by the Allies ruined German towns and cities, and those Jews who managed to survive continued to be persecuted or fell victim to pogroms. Millions were resettled or deported. It was a completely new reality, and with the ceasing of fighting it did not revert to the old, pre-1939 order. On the contrary, it brought about destitution and chaos.

⁴ Katja Petrowskaja, *Vielleicht Esther*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Berlin 2014. The *Fikus* chapter was eventually published under the title given to the entire collection of stories, that is *Vielleicht Esther*.

⁵ "I spent my childhood and youth on the northern outskirts of the Bavarian Alps, in a region that was largely spared the direct effects of the so-called hostilities. At the end of the war, I was just a year old, so I can hardly have any impressions of that period of destruction based on personal experience. Yet, to this day, when I see photographs or documentary films dating from the war I feel as if I were its child, so to speak, as if those horrors I did not experience cast a shadow over me, one from which I shall never entirely emerge." W.G. Sebald, *Air War and Literature*, in: "On the Natural History of Destruction", translated by Anthea Bell, Modern Library, New York 2004.

⁶ W.G. Sebald, *Air War and Literature*, in: "On the Natural History of Destruction", translated by Anthea Bell, Modern Library, New York 2004.

mentions, among other example, the case of H. Böll, whose book "The Silent Angel", written in the 1940s, was only published in 1992. It is hard not to wonder why so much time had to pass for people to be ready to accept the past, or even to merely try to take a closer look at it. Finally, I believe it is necessary to *put it in words*, as only language has a causative force able to carry out transformations enabling the absorption of emotions, events and secrets. It transfers them to a sphere subject to cognition.

According to the media on April 22, 2015 a 93-year old former Auschwitz guard, an SSman Oskar Groening, was brought to justice.

Paradoxically, the further we move away from past events, the better we see them. The subject can never be exhausted and it is constantly being updated. Why do I write about it? Because of what today is like.

Metalepsis as a method of working with space and time

"The space in which we live, which draws us out of ourselves, in which the erosion of our lives, our time and our history occurs, the space that claws and gnaws at us, is also, in itself, a heterogeneous space. In other words, we do not live in a kind of void, inside of which we could place individuals and things. We do not live inside a void that could be coloured with diverse shades of light, we live inside a set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable on one another."

M. Foucault, *Of Other Spaces, Heterotopias* (1967)

In the present thesis I would like to discuss how I understand time and history. It is a working discussion, academically non-committal. I would also like to precise how I will further deal with the above concepts. In my method of work I employ a technique of *change* – of replacing one time with another, changing site and perspective, combining distant facts, therefore also a change in chronology.

Metalepsis, (or *metálēpsis*, meaning "change" in Greek) is "a rhetorical and stylistic figure which consists of altering the description of time, cause and effect or the narration of an event through:

- the replacement of the passage of time with the description of a phenomenon with the same duration;
- discussing the effect as if it were the cause and vice versa;
- replacing the description of a fact with the description of the circumstances where the fact occurred."⁷

By employing metalepsis as my method of work I intended to describe and understand past events that faded away (or perhaps have been repressed from consciousness), leaving only consequences for us to access. Only the consequences are visible, although it might be difficult to recognise them as such, and even then one cannot be sure that this identification is correct. (So we know/observe the effect of an event, but the event in itself remains unknown or for some reason is not accessible). I am particularly interested in the second of the functions of metalepsis mentioned above: "talking about the consequence as if it were the

cause and vice versa ". It allows me to interfere in the linear character of time. Perhaps only the present can provide us with tools to interpret and understand the past. I believe that when working on the interpretation of events in this perspective one can treat consequence as cause.

To put things differently: although it seems obvious and logical that past naturally influences the present and the future, that there is a sequence of time, the order of action and reaction, I would like to ask whether a reverse situation is possible. Can the present affect the past, and if yes, how does it happen? Bearing in mind that the working of memory is indispensable in the process – I believe that this is what actually happens.

For the sake of the present work I understand time as a chronology of events which do not have to be logically connected with each other, they do not have to allow for the interpretation of one narrative resulting from the other. The chronology which was attributed the logic of a narrative I would name history, whereas the process of bestowing events with meaning – the creation of history (Time with a sequence of events would thus be raw material, that is later on subject to processing. Only processed events can later on be presented, understood, interpreted). Creation takes place in the literal meaning of the word, as what is known from elsewhere, history is a construct. History is formed *a posteriori* by someone for the sake of someone. It is a narrative taking place in a space. There are two more keywords that are significant for my work: fiction and fictionalised. I assume that fiction is indispensable when narrating reality.

In relation to the above unstructured discussion about time, history, space, and with the help of metalepsis I sometimes dare to combine events that are distant in time and space in one chronological sequence.

Here I would like to define one more thing – *my role*. There is a phenomenon called *writing artists*, to which I would like to refer. Art, the so-called artistic actions have long ago ceased to exist as clearly defined genres (not to mention the ever changing role of art throughout centuries). Not only is art drawing from scientific discoveries, taking possession of them and directing them to its own territory, but it also *mixes* with other disciplines. It is a method of studying, describing, interpreting and understanding of the world and it uses its own array of tools. In the present text, written under the label of "theoretical paper" I do not hold pretences to any scientific discipline. Although I often fall back on philosophical theories, I am not an expert, nor do I work with the tools or within the system of this field. I mix ideas and elements of history with the interpretation of the output of other artists as well as theoreticians of art and cultural studies, hoping that in this way I will obtain a toolkit of a *writing artist*. The present text, although it draws from different fields of human sciences, does not represent any particular, structured scientific field, and it should be approached in the framework of art.

My doctoral dissertation is composed of a series of site-specific works documented on photographs and in twenty short essays. Each site-specific work functions within contexts, i.e. photographs documenting actions are accompanied by information about the site, events that took place there and to which I refer to in my actions, keywords and particular findings, such as historical pictures etc. Some of the works are simply findings, and they become operational when they enter a cycle and context. They do not require any interference on my part, my only intended activity consists of placing them in a context.

The series begins with a piece entitled "Eos", i.e., the figure of the Greek goddess of the dawn. I *found* her in a graffiti covering the wall of a shelter sunk on the coast of the Baltic Sea

in Germany (in a small town of Ahrenshoop). "Lethe", the last in the series, is a dry river bed on a Greek island. Thus the dry *river of forgetfulness* closes the series. The following works are placed between "Eos" and "Lethe":

"Übungen zur Evakuierung" ("Evacuation drills"), created in Ahrenshoop (Germany). It is an inscription in dust on an empty wall. I find evacuation drills captivating with their ambiguity. On one hand, it is an exercise offered by the state to its citizens to promote safety. On the other hand, in a moment it is transformed into a forced evacuation, e.g. during wars or conflicts. However, the image of a collectively performed choreography is the same in both cases. What then is the role of the state with its procedures? The tools do not change, and nor do their users. The change involves merely one detail – the circumstances. Evacuation drill is a collective experience.

"Ikarisches Meer", or the "Icarus See" is an intervention into a found object – a wall painting representing an ancient map and into the context of the place: an abandoned military building, formerly housing a navy school. Location: Wustrow – a seaside town in Germany.

"*Ficus aurea*", where *ficus* is the key word. "*Ficus aurea*" shows the closeness between fact and fiction, and how identically they function. My work is composed of the juxtaposition between the story by Katia Petrowskaja "Fikus" (on the evacuation of the Ukrainian Jews from Kiev during WWII) and the picture of a plant – *ficus aurea* (eng. Giant strangler fig) – wrapped around a cart wheel. Although the photography was taken in different times and place, it complements the story of evacuation.

"Eltern haften für Ihre Kinder" ("Parents are responsible for their children") – a site-specific installation in Schlosspark – a park in north-east Berlin. The work refers to a real family history that took place at the end of the war in 1945, told by a citizen of Berlin. Apart from events in themselves, the work refers to several other problems, such as the nature of discipline and the roots of evil, the functioning of law, the lack of linguistic understanding. Its location – Schlosspark – is special due to the post-war political history of the place.

"Icarus" is a finding from the town of Ligota Dolna (in the Opole region, Poland), it was included in the series without any additional interference. It represents a bas-relief of Icarus on an old lime kin. The winged figure has been deprived of legs. In the past this is where the symbol of swastika was *attached*.

"FREI-BESETZT" ("FREE-OCCUPIED") is a work realised at the Berlin Tempelhof Airport. The airport, expanded and modernised soon before WWII by the national-socialist government is nowadays an open public space. Just like the communication that I am trying to read out from the light signal, no longer in use, this area is full of contradictions: it is both free and occupied. Empty and populated.

"Camouflage class" was photographed in 1943 at the New York University. Nowadays this picture is part of the digital collection of the Library of Congress in Washington DC, I include it in my series. A camouflage changes the reality in itself, it gives fiction the significance of a fact.

"LOT, or Landing On Tempelhof". The former airport in the centre of Berlin (and in the past also a parade field for the German army, a military restricted area, an airlift), currently a new, open public space, is yet again the site and context of my work. The phrase "Landing on

Tempelhof" is related to the series of hijacking LOT Polish Airlines airplanes and directing them to West Berlin that took place in Poland in the 1980s. My work interferes in the linear character of time, employing the method presented in the "Camouflage class".

"A House and a Bird. Es kam ein Wort, kam durch die nacht" – this work is an interference without interference. Its sens is brought out by photography (a photomontage), poetry by Paul Celan and astronomy. It presents a building in Katowice – a Theological Seminary at present, which in the years in 1940-45 functioned as the Wehrmacht House.

Translated from Polish into English by Aleksandra Żabicka

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