

URORURO

‘The Cabinet of the Signs of Weakness’

Dariusz Franek (Myśliwy)



The performance entitled ‘The Cabinet of the Signs of Weakness’ by Dariusz Franek, which was part of the ‘Uroruro’ artistic project, took place in the evening hours in an empty space at 7 Gwarna Street in Poznań. This multi-element performance was made in an exceptional pandemic situation. It included the artist's speech, film presentation, sound generation, interior design and posters. The location of the premises near a tram stop increased the number of viewers. In addition to the guests gathered in front of the site, the audience were people waiting at the tram stop, passengers of the passing trams and random passers-by who inadvertently participated in the event, responding spontaneously to the stimulants of the Uroruro Cabinet. One of the passers-by – a man of about forty years old who got off the tram a moment earlier – began to recite a fragment of the mass in Latin into a microphone attached to the window. The shape of the created reality was subtly influenced by elements directly related to the surroundings and cultural contexts. The artistic work melted into everyday life, perversely reinforcing the message and highlighting the dominant features, such as consumerism, populism and post-truth. The artistic activity penetrated into everyday life by duplicating and transferring elements of street advertising into the performative

space. The slogans such as: 'Poland as a Kingdom in the 21st century', 'Massage', 'Turkish kebab', 'Vodka', 'Żabka', 'Pharmacy', 'Sale of second-hand items' became an important part of the performance – a critical voice describing the contemporary image of Polish culture.

Due to its multi-media character, Dariusz Franek's performative action made it difficult to clearly define the boundaries of his work. It intensified perception and imposed a new way of participating in the urban space. The artist skilfully used the phenomena developed during the pandemic, such as empty estates in the urban space, reduced interpersonal contacts and isolated social groups, and at the same time revealed the characteristics of a capitalist, consumer and peripheral culture community in the context of a specific area.

The temporal context related to the pandemic, presented in a film shown during the artistic activity, revealed a state of uncertainty – a vision of the catastrophe disseminated by the media. The incoming information on pandemic-related deaths and behavioural changes exacerbated fear and deepened social anxiety. The scraps of information presented in the film along with the artist's speech revealed the values of democratisation and egalitarianism, which were complemented by drawing attention to aspects of life connected with suffering and death. Corporeality in the Uroruro's performative action, directly related to transience, generated a *creatural* image that served to reveal social equality. Erich Auerbach has made a similar analysis. When referring to Christian anthropology, he has shown that 'life's subjection to suffering and transitoriness— comes out in crass and unmitigated relief. The peculiar feature of this radically creatural picture of man, which is in particularly sharp contrast to the classico-humanistic picture, lies in the fact that it combines the highest respect for man's class insignia with no respect whatever for man himself as soon as he is divested of them. Beneath them there is nothing but the flesh, which age and illness will ravage until death and putrefaction destroy it. It is, if you like, a radical theory of the equality

of all men, not in an active and political sense but as a direct devaluation of life which affects every man individually'.¹ Auerbach's theory shows that equality is replaced by polarisation in the capitalist world.

The power of communication in multi-element artistic activities is based on the participation of recipients. There is no suggestive communication in them, which usually makes the utterance transparent² and reduces it to a relationship in which the sender is favoured. The participation of the recipient in the construction of a message does not only result from mechanical decision-making, but belongs to the sphere of work. The performative action in a subtle way emphasised the importance of the exposed and selected elements of the surrounding environment, which began to create a condensed image relating to currently important topics. The processual nature of the work stretched it in time, making it clear that the final image arises when the recipient begins to participate in its determination. Taking retardation into account, an artistic action is shaped similarly to the difference between the time of work and the production of commodities.³ In this case, the combination of created elements and those spontaneous, beyond the artist's control, found in everyday life, resulted in the de-objectification of the action, putting it in opposition to the process of reification and fetishisation.

The fragility of experience related to the momentary nature of sensations highlights the importance of the ephemeral value of art, which is often underestimated in consumer mass culture. Sounds, film frames and repeated advertising slogans in Dariusz Franek's

¹ Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2013, pp. 249-250.

² Communication plays a denotative role, objectifies the recipient and limits his or her activity only to listening and assimilating information.

³ Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. II, London: Penguin, 2006.

performative action liberated moral habits and absurdities from the urban space, making people aware of the propaganda nature of common social principles.

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