

Holbæk Images 2016: *An Age of Our Own Making*

Roskilde, Reflection 2: Concept for performance program

Partners: Museum for Contemporary Art and the Roskilde Festival

Concept: Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung and Solvej Hewleg Ovesen

Reflection 2: the route that tempts the traveler to test gravity

Notes on the Paradigm of Immunization

One of the greatest paradoxes of the concept of globalization is undoubtedly the fact that it expects of itself to be semi-permeable in reality. This semi-permeability in essence refers to that ability for certain things, especially goods to flow freely, while peoples' movements and the flow of religious or philosophical concepts more often than not are expected to flow unidirectional or with massive hindrances in the other direction. It is the contradiction between 'social circulation' and 'immunisation' amongst human beings, which is eminent in our contemporary western and non-western societies today that takes centre stage in the series of performances in the Museet for Samtidskunst in Roskilde, in the framework of the yearlong exhibitions and research project *An Age of Our Own Making* for *Images 2016*.

In an age of globalisation with claims of a liberalised market, the extent of the liberalisation comes with an exponential increase in control. It is fair enough to say that although the concept of globalisation can be traced as far back as the middle ages – for good or for bad – it can be considered as one of the most striking features of our age, i.e. understood as 'an age of our own making'. It is interesting to observe that while Coltan, bananas, fish, textile or car parts can easily be shipped from a to b, it is rather unlikely for the miner, farmer, fisher, nor factory worker to move from a to b, even in cases of emergency, and even those persecuted for religious, political, race, gender or economic reasons. To depict it in a simplistic but not untruthful manner, while it is normal practice to fish empty the waters of the Atlantic coast of Senegal, dump chemical wastes on the shores of Ivory Coast, or pollute the Ogoni lands with the remnants of petrol tapped by multinational oil companies, it is rather impossible for the people who suffer these damages to seek for greener pastures in Europe for example, whose metaphorical fortress is becoming more real with every day.

In his seminal publication *Bios: biopolitics and philosophy*¹, Roberto Esposito in the *Paradigm of*

¹ Esposito, R. *Bios: biopolitics and philosophy*, Trans. Timothy Campbell, Minnesota University Press, 2008.

Immunization reflects on some of his key concepts that answer to the Foucault's underlying question: What is the nature and the meaning of biopolitics? With his concept of immunization Esposito clearly distinguishes himself from other philosophers of biopolitics like Giorgio Agamben, who according to Esposito in an interview with Timothy Campbell, "accentuates the negative even tragic tonality of the biopolitical phenomenon in a strongly dehistoricizing modality"² and Toni Negri who "on the contrary, insists on the productive, expansive, or more precisely vital element of the biopolitical dynamic (...) imagin[ing] that biopolitics can contribute to the reconstruction of a revolutionary horizon at the heart of empire, and so doing absolutely accentuates the moment of resistance to power."³ Esposito's position is one that doesn't take on extremes of productive or affirmative against destructive or disapproving. With his model of immunization, Esposito proposes a concept that encompasses the positives and the negatives of biopolitics and puts them into a causal relation. To follow where Esposito is heading to, one must understand that while "the term 'immunity' for the biomedical sphere refers to a condition of natural or induced refractoriness on the part of a living organism when faced with a given disease, immunity in political juridical language alludes to a temporary or definitive exemption on the part of subject with regard to concrete obligations or responsibilities that under normal circumstances would bind one to others."⁴ The issue at stake here is the fact that in the biomedical and political-juridical understandings, immunity/immunization exempts an entity from an entire community, which puts immunity and community at loggerheads, as etymologically observed in *communitas*, which is positively connotated and *immunitas* negatively. All these boil down to two important underlying theses Esposito so brilliantly makes: First and foremost that the tendency to exempt, safeguard and to self-protect that was typical to the juridical and medical fields has now spread its tentacles into other domains of existence like sports, economics, culture and especially politics such that our contemporary existence is dominated by this experience. And on the other hand, when protection of life through immunization surpasses a certain threshold, it topples and negates itself in what Esposito would term 'protection is the negation of life,' in the sense that such a protection, when pushed beyond a certain limit, forces life into a sort of cage or armoring in which what we lose is not only liberty, but also the real sense of individual and collective existence. In other words, we lose that social circulation, which is to say that appearing of existence outside of itself that we choose to describe with the word *communitas*: the constitutively exposed character of existence."⁵

² <http://www.henryagiroux.com/links/Interview%20Robert%20Esposito.pdf>

³ *ibid* 2

⁴ *ibid* 1

⁵ *ibid* 2

It is the contradiction between ‘social circulation’ and ‘immunisation’ amongst human beings, which is eminent in our contemporary western and non-western societies today that takes centre stage in the series of performances in the Museet for Samtidskunst in Roskilde, as we mention in the introduction above. The contradictions exist on an individual physical entity level, as well as a collective level of a political body, such that the very thing that protects that entity is the same thing that obstructs it and upon transcending a certain threshold could even annihilate the entity. *In other words these selected performances shed light on issues of protection and security and on the liminal moments when the threshold is crossed- psychologically, physically and legally.*

Bringing this back in context, and considering *An Age of Our Own Making* understood as an age that is characterised by an over-production, over-regulation and over-protection, over-surveillance and over-instigation of fear as a protective mechanism, it is worth reflecting on that threshold that could be surpassed and thus lead to an inevitable tipping of the assumed equilibrium of nationalities.

It is also important to situate this within a Europe, which as forerunner, proponent and advocate of globalisation and free economy has rather chosen to build even higher and more fortified walls to protect its economy, geography, culture and racial conceptions.

Thanks to the air, land and naval surveillance patrols by Frontex and the billions of Euros invested in man power, information technologies and satellite trackings e.g. the Sea Horse, along the coastline of the Atlantic ocean and the Mediterranean sea, Europe has been able to keep thousands of refugees aware from its shores, most of whom disappeared in the abyss of the aforementioned waters. It might not sound optimistic but our might be an age of limitations and immunization.

In 2011, when the Social Democratic Party won the elections, one of their promises was to remove the border controls that the former conservative government, which support party was the extreme right wing Danish People’s Party (DPP), had reinstated in the 00s (against the idea of the Shengen Agreement). While other EU countries cried foul regarding Denmark’s conservative move to challenge this free movement of goods and services, but primarily to curb the influx of refugees, countries like Italy and France at the outer posts of Europe took this too as an opportunity to make demands on closing their borders even tighter against the in flow of African and Middle Eastern refugees. These tendencies which are observable in many European countries stand in contradiction with the basic concept of globality, but also further reveal the liminality of the *bios* in the framework of global *polis*.

Text: Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung

If I Were Another

If I were another on the road, I would not have looked
back, I would have said what one traveler said
to another: Stranger! awaken
the guitar more! Delay our tomorrow so our road
may extend and space may widen for us, and we may get rescued
from our story together: you are so much yourself ... and I am
so much other than myself right here before you!

If I were another I would have belonged to the road,
neither you nor I would return. Awaken the guitar
and we might sense the unknown and the route that tempts
the traveler to test gravity. I am only
my steps, and you are both my compass and my chasm.

If I were another on the road, I would have
hidden my emotions in the suitcase, so my poem
would be of water, diaphanous, white,
abstract, and lightweight ... stronger than memory,
and weaker than dewdrops, and I would have said:
My identity is this expanse!

If I were another on the road, I would have said
to the guitar: Teach me an extra string!
Because the house is farther, and the road to it prettier—
that's what my new song would say. Whenever
the road lengthens the meaning renews, and I become two
on this road: I ... and another!

Mahmoud Darwish, "If I Were Another" from *The Butterfly's Burden*.(2008)⁶

⁶ Mahmud Darwish, "If I Were Another" from *The Butterfly's Burden*. Copyright © 2008 by Mahmud Darwish, English translation by Fady Joudah. Reprinted by permission of Copper Canyon Press.

Artists:

- Aman Mojadidi (Afghanistan)
 - Naeem Mohaiemen (Bangladesh)
 - Bernard Akoi-Jackson (Ghana)
 - Faustin Linyekula (DR Congo)
 - Jackie Karuti (Kenya)
 - Tresor Malaya (DR Congo)
 - Ato Malinda (Kenya)
 - Moe Satt (Burma)
 -
 - Serge Olivier Fokoua (Cameroon)
 - Athi Patra Ruga (South Africa)
 - Urnamo - Wathu Kalameri, Ali Alfatlawi, Abdallah Schmelawi (Iran)
-