

Loss witnessing

In the rise of the symbolic economy, cities start to reinvent their multiple industrial spaces, believing that such a strategy will help them to create a competitive self-image – attractive enough to appeal to various forms of capital: financial, human and cultural [Zukin 1995; Scott 2000; Klingmann 2007]. One of the most popular strategies of culture-based revitalization is the conversion of former production sites into art-consumption venues. The transformation of the former BVG warehouse into Ufer_studios, documented in Nina Kurtela's work, serves as a perfect example.

Changing the function and perceived features of the industrial layer of a city fabric occurs in time. However the passage of time needed to reshape the space is much shorter than *durée* of its previous occupation. Such a disproportion makes the process of transformation almost invisible. While *before* and *after* win a new, different life – transformed by urban imagineers into marketable images of progress and nostalgia – *the in-between* “melts into air” [Berman 2005]. Kurtela's *Transformance*, situated and unfolded inside the fragile *in-between*, saves it from such a destruction by representing its duration on video tape and recognizing it – both as a *space for* and *metonymy of* performance. The metonymic gesture of such a saving is important for cities not only in terms of aesthetics but also in terms of politics.

City space transformation is not merely a physical action. Informed by a neo-Marxist approach [Lefebvre 1974; 2008] we already know that space does not function as a container for bodies and items. It is rather a product of social relations, a hybrid consisting of material and mental – of bricks and of memories. Thus transformation of physical and functional qualities of place leads also to reconfiguration of the feeling structure attached to it.

Kurtela's medially expanded presence at the former BVG warehouse constructs a liminal, fluid space serving as a stage not only for the performer but also for loss – to perform its drama. Inhabiting the *in-between* can be thus interpreted in terms of mourning. The stability of the artist's body in space recalls the figure of a witness, whose silent, attentive presence gives visibility to the process of transition from an industrial to a postindustrial state of mind. As we know, such a transit has its winners as well as its victims, its bright and its dark side. Dark here serves as the metaphor of time-based loss.

The political flavour of Kurtela's work stems also from an aesthetized routine used as a structure for performance. The concept of performing in 8 hour cycles makes “going to perform” very similar to “going to work”. In this gesture Kurtela addresses the precarious

condition of contemporary artists depending on elastic forms of employment, yet she surmounts it by establishing a work routine of her own. In addition, the artist's repetitive appearances at a construction site not only validate the former uses of the BVG warehouse but also reconstruct the connection between artist and physical worker that inspired the early work of Walter Benjamin [Morawski 1995].

Don Mitchell in his informative book exploring the concepts of contemporary cultural geography [Mitchell 2000] draws a connection between the capitalist process of landscape production and the Marxist concept of fetishization. This means that landscapes for purposes such as art consumption venues hide the labour needed for their construction. In the light of Mitchell's thought, *Transformance* can be read as bodily and media-supported criticism of the underlying logic of the processes in which urban space is reinvented in late capitalism.

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