

# *METAPHORIC VACATIONS IN THE LAND OF PLENTY*

*by Sokol Ferizi*

Children make everything their own. They don't ask, they take. They relate to works of art so naturally, they want to destroy them. It doesn't make sense to them for an artwork to hang on the wall, to exist, after they have experienced it, after they have delved into it. Benny, five years old, was hanging around with Katrin and Magdalena at Petrit's work as if the place were their own. They were laughing with one another, touching and undoing the straw structure with their little hands. Benny was holding a metal tool when I found them, thirty minutes after the exhibition had opened. I tried to take the tool away from Benny not knowing how to tell him, in German, that it was sharp and that he might cut himself. He was doing nothing with it, just holding it, but wouldn't give it up without my telling him why he had to. I did my best to explain, in my fluent sign German, until he understood and handed it over. Katrin and Magdalena were playing near by, going in and out of the cabin, undoing pieces of straw.

The three of them began to ask me questions I barely understood. Then they burst into laughter with me, asking if I had a nose, whether I had hair and a mouth, until Benny asked where my father was. »Wo ist dein Vater?« »Ich habe kein Vater!«, I said, assuming he was asking whether my parents were around, like his parents, a short distance away on the lawn. I remarked unwittingly that I was twenty-three years old, and Benny started laughing, as if he knew how provocative was the question he was going to ask, and asked »Hast du eine Frau?«, unable to contain his laughter. Katrin and Magdalena stood silently. I chuckled a bit, as well, a laugh that quickly turned sour. I thought of answering, »Nein, ich habe ein Mann!«, a thought which committed suicide in front of my eyes, releasing into the air a subtle awareness of why it did so. I realized that to give Benny that answer would be the same as what he, Katrin and Magdalene were doing, which was dismantling the straw structure. If I were to let that answer reach them, I would as well dismantle something in the – perhaps caged – purity of their expectations; I would undo some straw structure in their heads. How many of us can imagine the miniscule world of micro-organisms co-existing with us, human beings? Isn't there a kind of implicit understanding that we are only concerned with bacteria, insects and other such lowlives when we get sick? When we feel the threat to our health, to our preservation, to the structures that themselves sustain the meaning of our lives?

Formal education has done enough to familiarize us with the basics of biology, physics and chemistry... Family, no matter how broken at its core, has done enough to instill in us all the difference between good and bad, health and sickness, to remind us all for the rest of our lives what supposedly constitutes success and what failure! The organized State has done everything possible within its means to structure our daily routines by producing conditions for work and free time. These three structures are exemplary, and have come to life with the purpose of emancipating the lowlives. All three live a constant death. Their purpose is eaten from within by various micro-organisms.

There must be a power, a certain poison in the air, which has to do neither with chemistry, nor values, nor labor, that keeps these micro-organisms alive and vital in their pursuit of ultimate destruction of structures. When an individual human being is convinced – through intuition – that he has been born into a structure which survives by keeping him in the margins of what it means to be an individual – for instance, being considered a trans- formed insect rather than a butterfly – he will plant that structure with mines and lie in wait until springtime, when micro-organisms grow wings and, before taking off, they step on the mines leaving behind a glorious aftermath. An individual at odds with a certain structure of life – or somehow only sporadically visible to it, if

at all – becomes like a well-equipped hunter with no real game to hunt. Thus, in his necessary solitary pursuits, he will plant a field with mines and lie there without occurring to him that he is gardening death. Some- thing like a little child in the forest picking flowers, alone and happy, though heavy with some weight so inexplicable it is hardly discernible in the face.

There is one way to think of this minefield as a fertile land, and that is in connection to artistic drive.

The landscape of the cluster of Wachau villages was breathless, but so was the structure and organic life of its inhabitants who mowed entire stretches of lawns, nailed pieces of wood and drove several kinds of maintenance or transport vehicles every day before lunchtime. To be inspired by the view, or just feel relaxed by looking at it, would instantly evoke the thought of the human discipline involved in maintaining the feeling of what it means to enjoy nature.

A minefield becomes a fertile land when the victims – those who are supposed or expected to travel the path of mines and step their way to death – have already died in some intimate ways. They have already grown wings and can summon clouds at will so that it rains exactly where and when they see fit. Every now and then, while taking their regular flights, those who fail to fall victim of the minefields, decide to flood an entire human structure so that mines become wet and when they surface on Earth, they are like dead moles, defunct.

The result is a process of making things visible and the coming to light of a human state that was untouched by emancipating forces of human structures. This winged state of being is an outcome of the strong intuitive power that produces the artistic drive. This drive lies dormant in those individuals who decide to build up a straw structure within so many structures of ideas and beliefs, just so that they demonstrate a fact of life which is actually the opposite of what we grow up with; that is, the fact that formal education, family and the organized State have done just as enough to convince us that we cannot grow wings and that we must fall victim before anything else. (Victims of supposedly harmonious chemistry, of a stable hierarchy of values, of dignified slavery in labor!) Well, some individuals, whose task is to make things visible and who must end up creating art, simply fall short of falling victim. From the innermost experiences of their lives, they sense that it is the minefields they have planted themselves which have become arenas of lost battles, that is to say precisely the structures and their organic mechanisms have been working hard in landscaping their own death. These individuals survive on what they knew all along, but the instant of articulation, of making visible, comes as a dramatic insight into how things have always been possible.

In this way, an artist is a micro-organism that blows things up from within and he is the first survivor of the glorious aftermath. What results from this aftermath, are fertile lands and vast gardens swelling with a readiness to host funerals of dead ideas and beliefs that had their origins in illusory understandings of chemistry and biology, hierarchies of values without any ladder and labor feeding on blind servitude. Funerals that transform into festivities full of life and during which children feel the pangs of growing wings but can't explain it, though such will be their task in life! Such was the natural task of Petrit Halilaj and his work in »Struktur und Organismus«, the whole event itself a splendid funeral of what is about to die soon, and a celebration of what is becoming visible at the same time.

After all, it's a human phenomenon for things to become visible in the wake of a funeral. What seems to be more than merely human is the occasion of artistic drive shaping into a new form – perhaps another structure and organ- ism – the occasion of organizing a funeral (after the artist's previous deaths) and an occasion of festivity at the same time. Without one tear shed and no apparent gesture of struggle, as if art had nothing to do with human suffering.

I said »später« to Benny, Katrin and Magdalena, and climbed up to the lawn where the rest of the works were standing only to find a heavy-looking man, making his opening speech. He was speaking in German about Struktur und Organismus, which I could understand only intuitively, including his explanation that the word »Struktur« is of Latin origin. Then he mentioned the word »System« (I shivered!) and related the meaning of »Organismus« with »Individualität«...

Before I dozed off, bored with the ceremonial rhetoric about something I already felt was dead, I heard him mention Aristotle, perhaps a quote delivered as absolute truth, which finally made it clear

to me that I had to turn my back on it all. I faced away from the stage, lit a cigarette, and kept my eyes on the children playing with fire at Tue Greenfort's work, a fire which didn't quite burn in the apricot orchard, though the work itself remained there like a beautiful instrument with which to play and dwell, pensively, on its concept that sought to remind us of the ugliness of reality. The tip of the straw structure was visible from the down side, and if you look through Greenfort's work, it becomes subtly apparent that something invisible must be burning.

On my left, Max Frey's work looking like a park bench in paradise, draped in carpets that people could take away, sit on them and take a flight of their own, and on my right Rita Vitorelli's sheets painted, or maybe stained, with colors that seemed to give shape to indiscernible declarations of individual freedom, waving their way to the booklet of actual shapes of flowers and formless objects, which the children were coloring with innocent confidence as if they knew each color in Nature.

I remained there facing the breathless landscape of the Wachau, with several castles sticking out of the greenery, which I was told were private properties and almost nobody lived in them. (A physical symbol of standing structures that have no life!)

I became friends with Benny, rolling playfully on the grass, up and down the straw structure, he kissed me on the cheek and told me »Du bist mein Freund« (which surprised me since some time before he was holding his mother's hand and on spotting me he shouted for his mother to hear and told me »Du bist ein Madchen«). Magdalena was picking flowers, Katrin had a big apple on a stick and was roasting it on the fire at Greenfort's work.

The day ended only after the children had left and I had gotten so drunk, that the next morning I woke up and took a cold bottle of beer and rested my head on it to alleviate my headache. The headache caused by the perfect harmony of Muhldorf and Otz, the watertight Struktur und Organismus of Wachau, and the rest of the world. With a fuzzy awareness that something had died and we celebrated it.