

Shit Yes Academy (Goh Ballet Academy)

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Intending to *visit* this exhibition (in contrast with spectating it)¹, my first visit, therefore, would be of the its title: *Goh Ballet Academy (Shit Yes Academy* in Persian).

At the first glance or hearing, the title would imply a specific location. This is perhaps due to the presence of the word “academy” in the phrase “shit yes academy” (academy of shit yes).

Facing the word, I cannot help but think of the fact that *it* originally comes from the name of a garden in the suburb of the ancient Athens, planted with olive and plane trees and surrounded by a wall constructed by Hipparchus; a wall that was ornamented with temples and statues of Athenian elites. The term “academy” itself comes from the name of the mythical Greek hero, Academus, who was in possession of the garden and later on left it to the citizens as a public space.

From here on, the term “academy” is tied to Plato who used the place for informal gatherings to discuss and teach philosophy. However, later on the academy was officiated as Plato’s school of philosophy. Aristotle also taught there for a while.

In fact, today’s both discursive and everyday usages of the term “academy” are heirs to this very philosophical-Greek-Platonic background – “Academy”: *the Platonic philosophical system based on skepticism*; in usages nearer to our days, “academy”: *a place for learning high knowledge*; and ultimately, “academy”: *an institution for advanced learning*.

Now, once I return to the “shit yes academy” after this train of thought, I immediately find myself in a paradoxical situation. This paradox is certainly caused by the coming-together of the following signifiers: “shit”, “yes”, and “academy”. Let me dwell a little longer here on the question of “paradox”.

To have a profound grasp of the functionality of a *paradox*, there seems to be no better way than going back the etymology of the term. *Paradox*, from the Greek roots of *para* + *doxa* (*endoxa*); *Doxa* (*endoxa*) meaning an established public opinion or a common belief. *Para*, is a modifying Greek prefix, meaning besides, side by side, and beyond. Therefore, a “paradox” is that which controverts the common belief or the public opinion within a situation, in so far as it counters, and goes beyond, the situation’s “doxa”.

In the signifying syntax of “shit yes academy”, the juxtaposition of “shit”, “yes”, and “academy” confronts my habitual anticipation of the signifiers that could customarily sit beside one another in a chain of significations. In other words, a paradox is to be regarded a *break* in the chain of significations.

See the postscripts.

What would, nonetheless, “shit yes academy” mean? Does it have any meaning at all, and if so, to what semantic sphere does its signifying system navigate the hearer, reader, or “the visitor”? If I am to construct a meaning *for* the exhibition’s title, while considering the different levels of the signification of “academy”, the results would perhaps be as follows:

- 1- A historical garden adorned with plane and olive trees, surrounded by the wall ornamented with temples and statues of the elites, and in which the “Shit-yes” lives/exists/grows, *or*, a historical garden (with the preceding descriptions) in which the “shit” says “yes”.
- 2- (*If we take philosophy as dialectical conceptualization of contradictions*): The platonic philosophical system, based on skepticism, focusing on dialectical conceptualization of the contradictions of the “Shit-yes”, *or*, the platonic philosophical system focusing on dialectical conceptualization of the contradictions of the “shit” that says “yes”.
- 3- The place for studying the high knowledge of the “Shit-yes” (*shit-yes-ology*), *or*, the place for studying the high knowledge of the “shit” that says “yes” (*shit-that-says-yes-ology*).
- 4- An institution for advanced learning of the “Shit-yes”, *or*, an institution for advanced learning of the “shit” that says “yes”.

It is difficult not to note that none of the above definitions are referring to any meaning that is previously introduced to language by structure and discourse. Accordingly, it will not be an erroneous deduction if one regards all the foregoing definitions as a body of *nonsenses*, or at best, a form of paralogism. – i.e., an illogical use of logic that one may be able to see, for instance, in the function of *jokes* within a situation.

In a close examination of joke and its functions, Paolo Virno, the contemporary Italian philosopher, mediates through Freud and Aristotle’s usage of the notions of joke and witticism, so as to construct a “nature”, “structure”, and “logic” of jokes.

For Virno, jokes in their “nature”, are innovative actions that take place in the public sphere in presence of a *neutral third person*. It is this very “third person” whose existence makes the joke possible – a figure without whom joke would not exist. The significance of this “third person” is, on the one hand, due to the role he plays to the success of the joke, i.e., indicating whether the joke was effective. On the other hand, it is the figure who ‘authorizes the interchangeability of the joke and public action’.

In their “structures”, jokes apply a rule to a particular or contingent situation, for which it demands to go beyond the established norms of that very situation.

And ultimately, in their “logics”, jokes are modes of reasoning and argumentation involving use of paralogisms.

Paralogisms can be categorized within the set of verbal and conceptual paralogisms. The former

deals with the relations between the signifiers, whereas the latter centers on the relations among the signified. There also exists another type of paralogism, which one would call “the witty paralogism”. They engage a form of fallacious deduction touching upon the relationships between homophonic signifiers and humorous phrases. For Aristotle, even this play on words is an authentic form of argumentation capable of altering the direction of thought.²

Perhaps the importance of joke-making is owing to this very characteristic of applying a transformative paradox onto a situation; an action toward the structure, aiming for its transformation.

Postscripts

To speak of, or looking at art, the best entry would be to begin, not by its ‘there and then’, rather, by its ‘here and now’. To attain an approach of this sort, however, necessitates a radical abandonment of the art’s familiar ontological and vertical triptych, i.e. *artist-artwork-spectator* (subjective experience of an object); a triptych that is essentially a product of cultural bourgeoisie and the romanticism it exerts. Subsequent to such an abandonment, it is crucial to reconstruct an altogether reconfiguration of the above equation. One that is, instead, formed around a horizontal axis, and in which both the artist and the viewer have the chance to engage the artwork from an encountering point of view (inter-subjective). The equation, as such, would read as: *visitor-artwork-visitor*.

The transformation of the spectator to a “visitor” renders the art attendant liberated from the agony of connecting to the artist’s “level of intentionality”, who is constantly presumed by the spectator to exist behind the artwork. The “visitor”, on the contrary, is not occupied by the angst of whether he could achieve to *receive* the meaning of the artwork; The meaning that is supposed, by mediation of the artwork, is descending to the spectator’s inferiority from the transcendence of the artist.

Analogously, the artist may arrange to situate himself as the “visitor” of his own work/material. This would, however, entail his detachment from the conceptual determinations he’s aware of throughout the procedures of production. The artist becoming a “visitor”, may, rather, employ his own critical faculties to encounter the semantic, semiotic, and psychoanalytic signs, which are contingently ascended by his self-made objects.

With the *visitor-artwork-visitor*, signification may not anymore be considered as that which can veer off from one state (artist) to another (spectator). Rather, it is that which may happen to be constructed by the “visitor” within a particular or contingent situation.

It is, therefore, to say that in a situation that is intervened by the presence of the visitor, “signification” and “poiesis” are brought to their nearest proximity.

² Virno, Paolo, *Multitude Between Innovation and Negation*, Trans. Isabella Bertoletti, James Cascaito, Andrea Casson, Semiotext(e), 2008