

The comfort of questioning. Zenita Komad's oracle and its context.

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In one of his famous but today practically unknown essays, Georg Lukacs writes: "A game is a drama; a game about people and destiny; a game in which God is a spectator. He is only a spectator and never interferes by words or gestures in the words or gestures of the players." Obviously, Lukacs is speaking of tragedy as an art form, but also of tragedy in general, with the inherent recognition of the absence of God, the *deus absconditus*.

It torments believers and accompanies agnostics. It is the most healthy because the least enthusiastic and most questioning form of belief and non-belief. And note: God does not interfere in the game of people, but the game itself is a mirror of human existence. Is the game therefore inherently godless? Is God a kibitzer? We might think so, but Zenita Komad says no. She doesn't say it impetuously or without prior thought. One of her most wonderful large inscriptions says "God is nothing"—except that she has inserted the word "not" in another color between being—in the form of the verb "is"—and nothing. In other words, "God is not nothing." This might at first glance appear banal, but it is not for nothing that banality is the heroic act of the over-hasty glance. Because the nature of this intervention gradually becomes clear. Someone is interfering. But who? The artist? At that level, it is indeed too obvious and banal, after all it was she who painted it in. But at a semiotic level the question still remains to be answered. The intervention seems to have come from someone else, maybe God wrote himself into it, albeit in the stuttering alliteration of a "nicht Nichts." But this stuttering fulfills a function: it interrupts the flow, it challenges the rules of grammar, and can thus be seen as an irregularity, as a miracle—if only one of syntax. Deleuze, I think, described stuttering. And Lukacs writes: "Before God only miracles are real." So even if the intervention doesn't appear to come from God himself, from a linguistic point of view it still shows that something is real before God. The miracle, the miracle of stuttering: but a miracle nevertheless. And an intervention. And that's not nothing.

Be that as it may, the intervention means that someone else has entered into the drama, and that someone must inevitably come from the outside. An outsider. Life, in other words the "game of people," always involves having to do with someone else. And this is how the opponent appears, whom we generously refer to as "partner," because euphemisms are the most appropriate way of reminding us of the game-like character. In truth, games are battles, and board games battlefields. Whether the little Archduke Franz Joseph pushes around tin soldiers or two attorneys in Café Central rack their brains over a chessboard as to how they can trap their opponent's queen, the only difference is that one game ends in the defeat at Solferino and the other in covert drinking. But these considerations are almost a digression. Almost, because over the years Komad's works have repeatedly been devoted to games, interpreting and modifying them in installations or theater. Like the *Schachoper*, for which Bernhard Lang wrote the music, performed with Ignaz Kirchner (and others) in the Museumsquartier. And what better game than chess as an image of society and human life? The pawn can become a knight, but all too often his knightly moves are those of a pawn. *Operation Capablanca* is the name given by Komad to her chess opera in homage to the Cuban chess master and diplomat (why is this combination not surprising?) José Raúl Capablanca.

The labyrinth that Komad created in Mumbai in 2010 is also a reflection of life and, unlike a maze, which as the name suggests is amazing, i.e. bewildering, always has an end point. The route to it is serpentine, also like life itself. The opposite of a maze and yet connected to it as opposites usually are. They form a pair: desperation and hope, freedom and destiny, losing and finding oneself. Paradoxes, like “salvation through destruction,” as Simone Weil noted in her diaries.

The fact remains, however, that Zenita Komad’s outsize installations proceed from an open game, as it were from chance through skill (but not in Heidegger’s sense of *Geschick*) towards a destiny. Moreover a red thread permeated Komad’s labyrinth, in fact co-existed with it. Every wall was topped red. Inescapability in model form. As if everything was already written in a Book of Life. In a book that repeatedly calls for the deciphering of mankind’s hubris. This hubris logically ends at the oracle, a symbol of inevitability, mocking the vain efforts to escape one’s fate. The oracle, however, belongs to the era of the epic, about which Lukacs famously wrote: “Blissful are the times in which the starry sky is the map of passable ways and routes to take and whose paths are lit by the light of the stars.” This equation of heaven and earth, which was effected in a different form in *Tabula Smaragdina*, is used artistically by Zenita Komad in her halma oracle. On the way there are inscriptions by Komad saying “Guilt is shit” or “Free yourself of desires.” It would almost seem as if a search had found its end here. But only almost. Because a search of this type tends to generate further searching. And it is good that it does so.

But what are we seeking? Happiness? Love? God? Zenita Komad’s own progress is remarkable in this regard. From “Religion is dangerous” (2005) and “God is (not) nothing” mentioned earlier, too “In the beginning was (not) simplicity”(2010), she sketches out a region that extends from a denial of all religions to the *tohu wa-bohu* of the Bible and the book of *Bereshith*. The fact that the beginning was not marked by simplicity but by “erring and confusion,” as Rosenzweig/Buber translate “*tohu wa-bohu*,” is also disguised in the last-mentioned work as a game in a sandpit. In truth the sandpit is a “box of relationships” with names of famous lovers scored in the sides: Romeo and Juliet, Tristan and Isolde, or Pyramus and Thisbe. Long live love. Or, in the words of another inscription by Komad: “Knowledge is a highly complicated affair. Love too!” (2005). Yes, the game is a tragedy. And tragedy is also just a game. That sounds very much like inescapability. But only in appearance.

The doubt, the question and the searching, remain. The inscription “Daddy, I Miss You” (2010) has not lost its validity, since the search for a father, the absence, can be just as real and painful as it is emotional and spiritual. (I didn’t actually want to write that, because it sounds a bit trite, but it fits here.) Fathers have always been the absent ones. If the person is there, he can hardly play the role of a father. Father is the *deus absconditus*, the hidden one. He is the person to be searched for. But can a person live on whom God has looked, writes Lukacs. The answer is clear. All that remains is the quest.

Komad’s progression is nevertheless evident. From a chess game and a labyrinth to an oracle in the form of a game of halma, a game that is defined by triangles and circles. The fact that the halma board forms a Star of David, which again references the link between man and God, is not really a coincidence in view of Komad’s marathon (to give a Greek connotation). Circles—symbols of completeness—and triangles. This combination is a feature of the cultural history of mankind: the circle within a triangle, or vice versa. And they are always symbols of the human and the divine, heaven and earth. And appear to bring order into the all-too-human erring and confusion. Security.

All too human? Nietzsche wrote something as Prince Vogelfrei that Komad as his princess

recognizes:

Since I have become tired of searching I have learnt to find.
Since the wind has been resisting me I sail with the wind.

The quest is also deeply embedded in the act of finding. And it is this that generates the creativity that make what seems an obvious path in Zenita Komad's works into a game of questions. With God looking on.