



'I MISS YOU, JEW!'

Rafał Betlejewski

Abstract

Focusing on Poland, the Gdańsk-born artist Rafał Betlejewski takes a performative approach in his text, which offers a brief meditation alongside the artist's provocative photographic works on Poland's 'absent' Jewish presence.

Keywords: Poland, Polish identity, Jews, Holocaust, absence, absent presence, contemporary art, performance

DOI: dx.doi.org/10.5456/issn.2050-3679/2014s31rb

Biographical note

Rafał Betlejewski is a Polish artist and performer, born in Gdańsk, 1969. He is best known for his numerous public space projects concerning identity, social labels, the collective mind and memory. He is the author of art-social projects including, 'I Miss You, Jew!', 'And Would I Go? Warsaw Uprising'.

See: http://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rafał_Betlejewski

An earlier version of this material was presented on the occasion of the project conference 'Disturbing Pasts: Memories, Controversies and Creativity' (20 -22 November 2012, Museum of Ethnology/Weltmuseum Wien, Vienna). To view the film footage on the Open Arts Archive, www.openartsarchive.org, follow this link: <http://www.openartsarchive.org/oaa/content/disturbing-pasts-memories-controversies-and-creativity-conference-2>

'Disturbing Pasts: Memories, Controversies and Creativity' is financially supported by the HERA Joint Research Programme 'Humanities as a Source of Creativity and Innovation', co-funded by AHRC, AKA, DASTI, ETF, FNR, FWF, HAZU, IRCHSS, MHEST, NWO, RANNIS, RCN, VR and the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme for research, technological development and demonstration under grant agreement no 235366/291827.



Co-funded by
the European Union

'I MISS YOU, JEW!'

Rafał Betlejewski

Reality is a state of mind.

To be more accurate – reality is a process of the mind.

Whether or not there are any physical objects out there outside my head it is hard to decide.

The mind has no access to it other than by creating representations.

Reflections.

Ideas.

Definitions.

Opinions.

Words.

My mind cannot hold the chair but it can hold the idea of a chair. Also one with six or ten legs.

The more playful the mind the richer the reality.

We can suspect there are many objects out there which do not yet have their representations and therefore they do not exist.

And there are many things, which exist only as ideas created in the mind with no resemblance to anything physical.

If you can't name it you can't see it and vice versa.

Reflected objects are the tools of the mind. The building blocks.

The mental objects are assembled together to create a structure.

A sentence.

A narrative.

An image.

A comprehensive picture of the world.

It consists of the probable and improbable.

The common and the myth.

The probable and the improbable are equally important and equally untrue but they are both accepted.

They are believed to exist and therefore they are considered as true.

Out of a million different possibilities certain ones are chosen.

And there is someone to believe in them.

The picture of reality is based on acts of faith.

They fit the picture, fulfill the structure.

Faith is the nature of the moral imperative constituting true and false.







We believe something is true. Sometimes we believe it so deeply it seems to be knowledge.

It's a well-confirmed belief.

Faith has a particular quality: it's weak.

It can be lost in the face of experience. If faith was strong it would be obstructing imagination and reality would not be transformed.

Faith is weak so it must be confirmed.

We all have this feeling sometimes: when we close our eyes it all disappears.

It's not true, we are dreaming. When we wake up it will all be gone.

We get scared of this feeling. We don't want it. Some of us get scared more and feel obliged to defend reality from doubt.

These people make it their goal to make us certain.

We're not just a bunch of funny looking people speaking some strange language. No! That's the way it is supposed to be.

The best and easiest way to confirm beliefs is to believe what everybody else believes.

It's best to adopt the image of reality that is already there waiting for us.

And let's not fool ourselves – that's what we do.

We are presented with a detailed description of reality when we grow up and by the time we've grown there is little we can do about it.

We become members of certain groups – however vaguely they may be defined.

There's little choice – the group demands faith and it uses all kinds of immediate threats to impose it.

You are expected to respect – and that is to share the values of – your family, your kin, your school, your football team, your sex, your church, your country, your nation and so on, all the way to God, to your God.

It is your God because He was created to reconfirm your reality.

God is the ultimate argument for reality.

In recent years the role of God as the confirmation of reality is diminished, because we have developed a new idea: evidence and influence. We gain influence over the world, we can change it, and this change becomes the new fetish – proof of a higher force.



Everything we believe in, starting from the direction of gravity, our values, people we find important – this constitutes the status quo. The unchanged. The psychotic.

This is our line of defense. The status quo describes who we are and if it is lost we are lost. Keep it or die.

I am a man, my family name is Betlejewski, I am a vegetarian, I am a Christian, I am Polish, and my God is sweet Jesus the king of Poland, or I believe in science.

For some reason my football club is Barcelona in Spain, but I guess if I told them that they wouldn't treat me seriously.

It's not only about defense. It's also about attack.

These days we have countless ways to preach what we believe in. We have films, music, books, TV, internet, fashion, pop culture, advertising, politics, social issues, global schools, new churches, door to door etc.

One way or another everyone can be heard. Every story can be told.

But the competition is fierce. Suddenly everyone is talking.

The game is to block your ears and turn up your voice. Strengthen your defenses and be loud.

Be radical. And if that doesn't help, come up with some clever strategy to make others believe in your reality.

Simplify your message, narrow it down to a slogan and sell it.

And if this doesn't work, try to trick them. Pretend to be something else, disguise your ideas, use role models, play their game, whatever.

The goal is to get as many people to believe your story as you can.

Remember, the others want the same. They want their story to prevail and they want it to rule. That's the only way to make it real.

Justified by the amount of likes on Facebook.

By the amount of quotes in literature

By the amount of hits on google.

By popularity.

By price.

There are countless examples of abandoned 'identity scripts'. Who wants to be a samurai, a cowboy, a real man, a strong father, a polite woman, a housewife, a Catholic, a capitalist, etc.



They lay around waiting as waste to be recycled. Well described, not very fashionable.

They are what Duchamp called ready-mades.

The countless variety of identity scripts is being replaced by the unified script of the consumer.

Everything goes fine as long as you pay your taxes and keep the music down after 10pm.

Why does it all happen, why does it have to be like that?

Well, the most basic principle is movement.

Everything moves. We move. Energy waves move.

We are moving, we have to be moving, we will be moving, we can't stop.

And so there's another way to look at the struggle of narratives and identities: it's entertainment.

It's not about whose story is the most probable or morally justified, it's whose story is better told.

Aren't we all sick of these morally justified stories poorly told?

For God's sake, let's at least have fun!

It's probably high time to realize that life as a conscious effort makes no sense.

Lying on a beach through your whole life is probably time better spent than working in a bank. Or a museum, for that matter.

This is my reality, which I want you to share.

There are two interesting rules to fun and entertainment, which should be highly considered and valued:

1. Entertainment must be entertaining - and it takes a lot of skill to achieve that
2. It takes place on a stage in a defined space and has a time limit, after which we can all go home safely.

This is what I am trying to do in my country, taking performance art to a different level.

I am trying to play around with the religion of true and false.

The less religious we are – I believe – the less willing we are to reject, punish, kill, wage wars, close ourselves.

I believe we have a lot to do in redefining our status quo.

At the moment in Poland we are very protective of our story. We are terrified it may be false. We are very aggressively defending it and we are easily tricked by people who portray themselves as the guardians of the national myth.