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On the Socio-Political Background of Performance Art in Estonia During the Transition Period (1986-94)

Since I started my PhD project in Estonian Academy of Arts, I have had plenty of time to ponder the two main focal points of my research entitled “On the Socio-Political Background of Performance Art in Estonia During the Transition Period (1986-94)”. The writing itself is, according to the general plan centred around two artistic vortexes of the local scene, two main groups of prolific artists, writers and intellectuals – *Group T* and the *Quiotists*. So far the public interest in general and also my own previous professional interest, has at least until 2012 almost exclusively been fixed on *Group T*. Already in my BA thesis I wrote extensively on *Group T*, positioning them as the main forbearers of a tendency I identified as Violent Artistic Subject in current Estonian Art. They were the stars indeed, much defining the cultural climate and public opinion on culture and to a certain extent even politics. I thus have lately focused on the phenomenon of the *Quiotists Group* (named after Don Quiote), not so clearly manifesting their ideas programmatically, but more like acting them out, thus as if becoming spontaneous symptoms of history. By doing this they “wrote” the somewhat underground and even clandestine parallel story of Eastern-European Body Art. But the fact is, that groups’ *oeuvre* has so far only been discussed in relation to one artist, Jaan Toomik. Investigating the group has taken a lot of patient archival work, repetitive interviewing and intuitive close reading of their works, of which mostly only fragments have survived. It also has made me to rely on often contradicting and over-mythologised personal memories. In history there are moments of decisive importance and paradoxically they have performative scenarios as do artistic performances – they often develop the curvy form of ballistic trajectories with clearly defined dramatic peaks. I guess mine is a typical position of an East European coming from a small country – which seldom has stood a chance at a status of historical nation in Hegel’s sense – that makes me particularly receptive to the idea of Historic Moment. I have now picked one of the symbolic moments of decisive importance, which challenge the monolithic carelessness of comprehensive histories. Searching for a temporary escape from the minute details of highly subjective accounts of artistic production, I will hereby choose to analyse a concrete political event for the proposal to the *Internationales*

Doktorandenforum 2019. The event I have chosen is generally accepted to be one of the key moments within local history of *Perestroika* and *Glasnost* – the so called Joint Plenary Session of the Association of the Creative Workers. This groundbreaking event finally triggered the mentality, which led to liberation from the Soviet Occupation. The event took place during two heated days in April 1988 and turned out to be the breaking point of political discourse, a moment of extraordinary honesty. In contrast to that carnevalesque moment I will bring in as illustrative intervention opening up the everyday, the surreal and unique designs for the Tallinn Department Store. These theatrical installations were also created in 1988 by Margus “Sorge” Tiitsmaa, a figure who has so far been peripheral to my research, but who holds a key position in the late 1990ies Estonian performance scene as an instigator, father figure and teacher for Non Grata School.

These two sides of transitional reality, the televised, festive, almost pathetic atmosphere of the congress and the grey everyday of deficit economy transgressed by the absurd shopping windows by Sorge, form a synchronized double-basis for relating to this particular historical/hysterical moment. I will hereby use comparative discourse analysis testing both Foucauldian and Althusserian models of dealing with Subjectivity, Power and Ideology.