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The Lithuanian Pavilion of the 58th Venice Biennale: *Sun & Sea (Marina)*

**A Cacophonous Beach Humming with the Artistic
Rhetoric of Performative Reflection**

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Performative Reflection**

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vorgelegt von

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The Lithuanian Pavilion of the 58th Venice Biennale: *Sun & Sea (Marina)*

A Cacophonous Beach Humming with the Artistic Rhetoric of Performative Reflection

I) A Cacophonous Beach of Artistic Speech

I can feel the burning sand underneath my feet as a breeze of cooling air is swirling around my head, bringing temporary relief from the pressing heat of that particularly hot summer day. Children playing ball. Adults chatting lightly. A tiny dog occasionally strolling past. I stow the tube of sunscreen in my bag and lie back. Relax. I'm on the beach. Summertime has just begun. The sound of the sea seems near. A vibe of carelessness is wafting through the air. Seagulls grunting, squawking, laughing. A notion of insouciance suggesting aestival enjoyment. A sensation of idleness taking hold. It's holiday season.

And yet, as I close my eyes – in search of serenity and inner peace – on the spur of a moment, an underlying, hammering tune of lingering danger turns into a strident, shrill sound, a subtle premonition of an imminent, looming catastrophe that calls for immediate action. A cascade of cacophonous voices surrounding me keeps swelling, causing an inner stir and emotional upheaval. Terrified, I am jolted out of my otiose dream, waking with a start from my very lethargy. I sit up in a state of desperate expectation of oblivion as looking around, I come face to face with an exhausted Earth that is mirrored by my own inaction. Still hovering in a state of startled apathy, the realisation dawns on me how an apocalyptic future scenario has confirmed itself, eventuating in a dim prospect of planetary life.

Awarded the Golden Lion for the best national contribution¹ the Lithuanian Pavilion *Sun & Sea (Marina)* of the 58th Venice Biennale represents a unique piece featuring a combination of art forms and aesthetic elements that by their multi-dimensional nature situate the artwork between performance and installation. A collaboration between the artist trio of filmmaker and theatre director Rugile Barzdziukaite, poet and playwright Vaiva Grainyte as well as composer, musician and artist Lina Lapelyte, the play captivates through a subtly – and yet forcefully – delivered message, fabricated by dint of a powerfully crafted narrative.² Many a time referred to as an “indoor beach opera”,³ *Sun & Sea (Marina)* addresses a range of pressing issues that have continued to shape a critical, alarming reality of the 21st century via sublimely vitriolic song texts targeted at rendering a depiction of the status quo of a globally exhausted world.⁴

“Art is to start practicing the future”,⁵ Tania Bruguera formulates poignantly. A statement which proves an apposite claim when applied to the Lithuanian Pavilion for sparking consideration with respect to the intrinsic quality and aim of the artistic aesthetics suggested by *Sun & Sea (Marina)*. Accordingly, the question of how the artistic is ‘produced’ comes to the fore, hereby invoking the underlying assumption of a practice of art interpreted and understood as a mode of envisioning, illustrating and conceiving the future. In concordance with the notion of art as a ‘utensil’, the thesis shall aim for a deeper insight into the reading of the Lithuanian Pavilion as a graphic, metaphorical figure of speech towards a construal of art as a tool to think and act with. In this respect, the concept of ‘pre-enactment’ as an envisioning realisation of the future shall be investigated, adjacent to ‘futuring’ as an aesthetic practice. Read against the backdrop of the political, an analysis of the visual rhetoric employed by *Sun & Sea (Marina)* is due as an engagement of the spectator is achieved by dint of stimulating an emotional response. By this, the Lithuanian Pavilion elicits an affective reaction, while thus encouraging a

¹ Halperin, 2019 (b).

² Povoledo, 2019.

³ Lesser, 2019.

⁴ Clarke, 2019, p.25f.

⁵ Bruguera, 2012, p.194.

reclamation of individual agency towards active intervention against the dire global future scenario insinuated as the audience is challenged by the issues addressed.

The thesis is hence concerned with an examination of how the fabrication of the ‘artistic’ operates along a powerful imagery modelled upon a palimpsest of meanings. A diagnosis of the aesthetics at play shall therefore constitute a deliberative approach to unveiling the inherent dynamics of *Sun & Sea (Marina)* whose amalgamation of site, sound and image along various art forms has created a powerful artistic parable of an ailing world and dysfunctional global society which represented by the vacationers convene on the beach (Ill.1). On these grounds, it ought to be seen how the performative eloquence of the Lithuanian Pavilion conjures up visions of alternative futures as a comprehension of art as a social practice is corroborated. By this, *Sun & Sea (Marina)* is meant to serve as a visual parable towards reflecting a jointly inhabited reality.

II) Current State of Research and Methodology

Since its first emergence, the concept of performance⁶ art as a visual rhetoric and aesthetic tool has been discussed against the backdrop of epistemological approaches to an operative field of artistic production, thereby concerned with unravelling, questioning and reconsidering the discursive mechanisms at play.⁷ On these grounds, new formulae of artistic speech were devised in order to address current issues of global concern. An extensive body of literature prevails that circumscribes the discussion of the political potential of the artistic,⁸ whereby performance art experienced critical attention. Accordingly, the thesis moves within these boundaries invoking various theoretical

⁶ The concept and theoretical understanding of ‘performance’ employed in the thesis shall be modelled upon Roselee Goldberg’s definition as “live art by artists”, thereby underscoring a permissive, indeterminate notion of the artform that operates along a panoply of variables. (Goldberg, 1988, p.9). Emphasis is then put on a theatrical dimension that equally involves “bodily presence and movement activities”. (Andree Hayum, 1975, p.339).

⁷ Reißer, 2003, p.174ff.

⁸ Marchart, 2019, p.15ff.

concepts and thus drawing on various deliberative strands that discuss a range of aspects such as aesthetic practices, visual rhetoric and performative imaginaries. By this, the writings of diverse scholars and artists – among these Martin Patrick and Tania Bruguera – shall be invoked whose comprehensive work provides the background for an examination of the visual aesthetics employed.

The current state of research hereby illustrates and reflects a vast discrepancy between the on-going theoretical discussion of performance art and the specific case of the Lithuanian Pavilion. One year into the inauguration of the Biennale still a relatively recent performance,⁹ *Sun & Sea (Marina)* represents an artwork whose manifold aspects will have to be further examined towards an extensive elucidation of the multi-layered dimensions condensed into the complex piece. On these grounds, newspaper articles constitute the main source of information since no primary research has yet been done. The lack of a more profound previous analysis accordingly obstructs any premature conclusion for no theoretical embeddedness has taken hold so far. An exclusive reading of the Lithuanian Pavilion therefore proves highly problematic, as a contextualisation of the performance relies on an interpretative approach open to a plurality of construals that refrain from squeezing *Sun & Sea (Marina)* into the straightjacket of a unilateral, reductionist interpretation.

Aiming for a deeper understanding of the underlying dynamics that influenced, shaped and determined the final version of the Lithuanian Pavilion, video conversations with the artists as well as performers provided thorough insight into the artwork while in this manner constituting the empirical backdrop of the thesis. Highly critical of the creative process, the circumstances and the general reception, the artists and performers both illustrated their own approaches to as well as individual readings of the performance – largely self-referential interpretations that added further nuances to the staging of the artwork. With reference to any absolute construal of *Sun & Sea (Marina)* both artists and performers admonished not to opt for a singular, exclusive interpretation of the Lithuanian

⁹ *Sun & Sea (Marina)* was first performed in 2017; however, it only gained momentum after it debuted at the 58th Venice Biennale. (Halperin, 2019 (a)).

Pavilion as an inherent multifariousness of the ‘beach opera’ bespeaks its intrinsic complexity along a range of mechanisms at stake. At the same time, the interlocutors encouraged a subjective examination in view of the nature of the performance.

As the body of sources available in Germany proved rather limited with respect to the number of volumes published on the Biennale, part of the research was conducted in Venice where the library of the Biennale ASAC¹⁰ provided further material. Besides, a day spent on the artificial beach in August 2019 allowed for a view into the artistic dynamics of the performance by dint of a personal participatory experience.

III) The Lithuanian Pavilion

„It costs a whopping \$3 per minute to run the Venice Biennale’s universally acclaimed Lithuanian Pavilion“.¹¹ Ensuing from this assertion, an analysis of the general setting of *Sun & Sea (Marina)* shall first and foremost be due in order to provide further insight into the nature of the multi-layered, complex artwork.

The performance-installation of the opera on an artificial beach was first performed in Vilnius’ National Gallery of Arts in 2017,¹² prior to being chosen as Lithuania’s national contribution to the 58th Venice Biennale in 2019, when Lucia Pietroiusti, person in charge of the ongoing General Ecology project at the Serpentine Galleries in London, curated the pavilion of the Baltic state.¹³ As a participating country without a permanent pavilion neither in the Giardini nor the Arsenale area,¹⁴ the Lithuania was ceded an interior space in a historic quayside building within the Marina Militare complex in the Castello district

¹⁰ The Historical Archives of Contemporary Arts/L’Archivio Storico delle Arti Contemporanee.

¹¹ Dafoe, 2019.

¹² Halperin, 2019 (a).

¹³ Brown, 2019.

¹⁴ Inaugurated in 1895, the Venice Biennale has succinctly grown in scope as further countries joined in. Whereas the first participating states hold their (respective) national pavilion in the Giardini or Arsenale area, new contributors have to rent spaces outside the designated zone. (Di Martino, 2005, p.12).

of Venice.¹⁵ The faux set of an indoor beach hereby constituted the backdrop for the performance that featured roughly two dozen opera singers who enacting their songs “reflecte[d] on the decaying Earth, through the guise of a lazy, frolicsome beach day”.¹⁶

Of approximately 60-minute duration, the opera was performed twice per week,¹⁷ thereby playing in a loop for eight hours. In order to uphold the illusion of perpetuity, the performance was struck up shortly before the opening time of the pavilion, while running in the evening until the last visitor had left. Owing to the repetitive, loop-like and perpetual structure of the performance, spectators could join *Sun & Sea (Marina)* at any given time for in contrast to conventions of theatre productions that dwell on a rigid concept of time while thus primordially featuring a climactic narrative, the Lithuanian Pavilion would fabricate its own affective temporality¹⁸ along the continual enactment. Whereas some visitors left after a couple of minutes, most stayed for an entire loop.

As only a set number of spectators were allowed to assist the performance at one time the limitation of the audience in the pavilion determined the mode of entrance for once reaching the maximum capacity, visitors were only let inside when others left. The restriction of spectators adjacent to the duration of the performance jointly resulted in up to three hours of waiting time as an admission to the Lithuanian Pavilion had become particularly desirable after the award presentation.¹⁹ An artwork on the pathological dynamics of our times, the wait simultaneously came to be part of the experience as a counterpoint to instant gratification within a driven, worn-out society.²⁰

Throughout the rest of the week, the pavilion was open to the public as a performer-less sound installation²¹ where a deserted beach complemented as much as reflected the apocalyptic vision sung of in the performance. At the same time, the uninhabited, empty

¹⁵ Khong, 2019.

¹⁶ Lesser, 2019.

¹⁷ Whereas initially the opera should only be performed once per week, the pavilion received generous funding by the Republic of Lithuania, Basel’s Laurenz Foundation and a number of individuals through crowd funding. By this, another weekly performance was rendered possible. (Barone, 2019).

¹⁸ Mu, 2018, p.6.

¹⁹ Messina, 2019.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Sutton, 2019.

military complex moreover became a remainder of a precariousness of funding in the art world that continues to bespeak mechanisms of visibility.²²

1) Unveiling the Manifold Strata

In order to gain a deeper insight into the manifold dimensions of the Lithuanian Pavilion, a detailed analysis of the performance shall be due as various aspects demand further consideration towards an extensive understanding of the artistic mechanisms as well as aesthetic operations at play. Accordingly, location, setting, scenography, libretto and participation move to the centre of a detailed analysis.

a) Location

Whereas most national pavilions of the 58th Venice Biennale outside the Giardini or Arsenale area were easily accessible to the public, the Lithuanian Pavilion was characterised by its peculiar geographical location as well as particular spatial arrangement. In search of the off-site pavilion, many spectators were led astray due to a “glitch in the Google Maps location spot”²³ with the result that findability became subjected to the labyrinthine structure of the Venetian urban plan.

Owing to the architectural structure of the premises of the Venice Arsenale zone, a wall around the erstwhile military complex obstructed access to the actual venue of *Sun & Sea (Marina)*. A building complex recessed into the bricks that way assumed the notion of a gate observed by the staff who counted the visitors and hence limited the number of those entering.

²² Gronlund, 2019.

²³ Messina, 2019.

Having moved into the zone, the remote location elicited a notion of forlornness, which was mirrored by the vastness of the area of the former military complex. An overgrown, unkempt gravelled walk would then lead to the main building thereby becoming a prelude to the ensuing spectacle, admonishing and preparing the curious visitor not to stray and get lost along the narrow, seemingly improvised path. At its end, the actual venue greeted the audience with the first humming tunes that issued from the abandoned-looking edifice where the Lithuanian Pavilion was mounted.

Once inside the main structure, a wooden staircase that had to be climbed upstairs assumed the function of a gateway to the performance as the interior space of the building had been transformed into an artificially lit beach with sandy dunes that extended beneath a mezzanine structure from where the spectacle could be observed.²⁴

b) Setting²⁵

Glaring under the artificial sun, a panoply of colourful towels render the impression of a seaside mosaic whereby the paraphernalia of a day on the beach are meant to create the illusion of a carefree, blithesome holiday scene (Ill.2). At that point, the physical separation of performance and audience space brought about by the mezzanine-setting proves fundamental to an experience of the spectacle for inducing a notion of disjointedness between the opera performers and the spectators, an impression of detachment and state of aloofness which allows for a disinterested - and yet deeply enmeshed, involved - gaze. Accordingly, the audience is present in a state of absence, absent in a physical presence, while poised in their own agency to counteract as the space

²⁴ Halperin, 2019 (a).

²⁵ A shift in tenses is meant to reflect the peculiar nature of the Lithuanian Pavilion versus *Sun & Sea (Marina)*. Whereas the latter – understood as the performance per se – has been performed in various places with future renditions planned, the former, i.e. the physical-geographical location, was intrinsically bound by its Venetian setting and thus determined by a temporal frame. On these grounds, the following analysis shall revert to the present tense in view of future enactments to come.

in-between assumes the notion of an unsurmountable obstacle preventing any vigorous, confident intervention (Ill.3).

The gaze – “condition of reception”²⁶ – then becomes the adjoining force, transcending the spatial separation and thus uniting spectator and performer along the continuum of the performance. At the same time, the one-directionality of the look constitutes a vital element of how this co-presence is established for building on the uni-lateral vectoriality of the beholder and the beheld, a dichotomous immediacy of spectator and performer is introduced to the unfolding of *Sun & Sea (Marina)*. Subjecting the looked-at to the appropriating gaze of receptive apprehension on the part of the audience, a distance is created that reinforces the afore-stated simultaneity of absence in presence and presence in absence. As an effect, no congruence between spectator and performer neither could nor should be achieved. On the contrary, the physical-spatial separation is further corroborated and thereby transposed to an emotional detachment that bears on a decisive division into two seemingly unrelated spheres. The specific design of the pavilion accordingly creates a three-dimensional performative realm where a hierarchy among those present is introduced along the intrusive moment of the look that evinces its object.²⁷

The scenographic caesura is further rendered overt by dint of the carefully pondered lighting of the interior of the Lithuanian Pavilion (Ill.4). Whereas the mezzanine is clad in twilight the sombre atmosphere contrasts starkly with the artificially lit beach where a colourful tableau of towels and beach paraphernalia glisten in the light of a false sun. The gradients as a consequence mark a clear estrangement which allows for a disengaged participation as the aerial perspective insinuates an objectivised look onto mankind itself.

c) Performance and Scenography

No strict choreography orchestrates the (inter-)actions of the beachgoers as the performance rather abides by the idea of a naturally unfolding ordinary day on the beach,

²⁶ Crimp, 1993, p.16.

²⁷ Reißer, 2003, p.192.

thus allowing for an individual, flexible enactment of the scenery. Correspondingly, the pavilion is marked by an incessant rearrangement of contingent constellations as the participants smoothly assume new postures, pick up casual chats with their co-vacationers or leave the setting for a while. These subtle changes induce and contribute to a notion of an infinite, continuous flow of images that – reminiscent of a kaleidoscope – create new views, alternative ‘con-figurations’ together with dynamic set-ups and varying perspectives. At the same time, this stream of scenic pictures insinuates a degree of co-temporality, a synchronous study of co-existence confined to and by the jointly inhabited beach. The multitude of instants condensed into a humming and slowly evolving canvas of individual microcosmoses is further purported by the melodies of the different songs which produce a degree of internal coherence between the beachgoers.

The opera performance is primordially characterised by the interweaving of individual characters that alternate and whose stream of singular voices as well as auto-biographical accounts contrasts with casual intermissions of the vacationers’ chorus or the philosopher’s comment. Whereas the individuals are primarily concerned with their own affairs, the latter comment on and bewail a general state of the world. As both parts smoothly blend, a constant, seemingly infinite flow of vocal shifts creates a narrative coherence while introducing a subtle dynamic of turn-taking aimed at conveying an idea of a societal sphere that has convened on the beach.²⁸

As a result, private concerns are juxtaposed, whereas the impression of a collective moment is created in virtue of the joint passages. The trivialities of everyday concerns get infused with general reflections, hence blending into a medley of banal considerations whose mundane nature and futile essence is illuminated by the listless, torpid chant of the beach community that becomes reminiscent of a swan song, an apathetic farewell to mother Earth.

²⁸ Barone, 2019.

d) Libretto and Music

Originally written in Lithuanian by Vaiva Grainyte, the libretto was translated into English by Rimas Uzgiris to meet the needs and to accommodate the exigencies of an international audience to the Venice Biennale.²⁹

In accordance with opera tradition, the libretto of *Sun & Sea (Marina)* was rendered accessible to the public by dint of being distributed on the mezzanine floor. There, it was hung out from the balustrade to be consulted by those interested in following the text (Abb.5).

The libretto can be summarised as made up of 23 passages that comprise aforementioned solo parts, a choir sung by the beach community and a philosopher's comment that by virtue of its erudite formulations stands apart. The individual characters are introduced by means of self-referential statements, that implicitly situate them within certain stereotypical contexts, thus conjuring up strong images of specific personal entanglements. The recurrence of these types accordingly corroborates a set of assumptions formulated about them while adding further layers of personality traits as the opera proceeds. Whereas in classical opera the performance generally follows a rigid unilinear development,³⁰ *Sun & Sea (Marina)* contradicts such paradigms as the spectacle - running in a loop - knows neither beginning nor end. On these grounds, a factual hierarchy among the individuals on the beach is furthermore dissolved as neither of the characters moves into a more prominent position in direct comparison with the others.

As the performance unfolds, it is the music adjacent to the texts which jointly create an inner coherence. Best described as a panoply of melodies and tunes that interweave, unfold and blend, *Sun & Sea (Marina)* operates with minimalistic music patterns³¹ whose catchy, recurrent themes achieve a sonorous recreation of the beach setting as certain refrains may not only be attributed to distinct vacationers' character types but moreover

²⁹ Lesser, 2019.

³⁰ Salzman & Desi, 2008, p.334.

³¹ Barone, 2019.

allow for a synesthetic depiction of the evolving scene on the beach. The repetitive, loop-like structure of the performance is reproduced and mirrored by the iterative individual appearances of the various character types, a rhythmic arrangement by dint of which a degree of inner cohesion comes to the fore.

e) Participation

The performative setting of the Lithuanian Pavilion is further complemented by a participatory element as the public is invited to spend a day on the beach.³² In order to assist, a form has to be forwarded, specifying the precise date and time frame as well as the number of persons interested as the participation has to be coordinated in accordance with the overall performance. Those who sign up are allotted a customised time frame with the option to not only adopt the purely passive role of a disinterested beachgoer, but to moreover engage as part of the choir, thus becoming part of the musical rendition.³³ In case of a respective interest, the very bit-part players are asked to learn the scores of the choir by heart in order to blend into the setting and to render them indistinguishable from the professional actors.

The participation accordingly allows for an alternative reception due to the interaction with the opera performance as the spectators are no longer confined to the audience space on the dimly lit mezzanine but switch into a mode of active presence. Concerned with rendering a most natural setting of professional actors and extras, the voluntary participants are instructed to ignore and block out the audience, pretending to be on a genuine beach while avoiding interaction with the spectators on the mezzanine. In this respect, the extras are asked to not lift their gaze as no eye contact with the audience should be established. By this, the integrity of the staged illusion of the beach setting can be preserved, modelled upon the portrayal of a beach microcosm spinning around itself,

³² Halperin, 2019 (a).

³³ Ibid.

disjoint from the world, removed from reality and thereby gravitating towards the banal, discomfoting state of everyday affairs.

The idea of a participatory involvement of the spectator is thus made productive as they become a pivotal element in the fabrication of the artwork. In this respect, the mode of production inherent in as well as characteristic of performance art reveals intrinsically correlated with an inclusion of the audience since the aesthetic experience is construed as a vital part of the artistic process.³⁴ The therefrom resulting aesthetic practice bears on a dynamic reading of the artistic which by virtue of comprehending the audience challenges their status as a no longer disengaged, uninvolved spectator. As a consequence, the enactment leaves the rigid context of the theatre spectacle play towards a more fluid interpretation of both production as well as reception along the paradigm of mutual interaction between performers and spectators.

The participatory element conclusively reveals a performative strategy that furthermore bears on the notion of embodiment. No longer mere spectators, but an integral element of the beach setting, the beachgoers become a live matter and animated element of the scenography, situated “between process and product”³⁵ as their physical presence purports a transformative instant of recreating and remembering the opera performance.³⁶

2) A Mosaic of Meaning – Disentangling the Manifold Layers

As the humming tunes of “dangerously gentle melodies”³⁷ unfold, a myriad of semantic layers as well as epistemic strata come to the fore that hover over the “panoramic cast of characters”³⁸ whose individual biographies meld into a mosaic of meaning. In this regard, prominent features of the Lithuanian Pavilion shall be examined in order to disentangle

³⁴ Fischer-Lichte Risi & Roselt, 2004, p.7.

³⁵ Nicholson, 2006, p.1.

³⁶ Shaughnessy, 2012, p.xiv.

³⁷ Barone, 2019.

³⁸ Ibid.

the underlying palimpsest of interrelations, cross references and links while investigation how they collude within *Sun & Sea (Marina)* towards a fabrication of creative speech and artistic deliberation.

a) The Beach

Created from roughly 30 tons of sand,³⁹ the artificial seashore brims with vacationers of all walks of life who populate the scenery with their colourful towels, thereby blending into a medley of voices as the opera is struck up.

The beach as a place of in-betweenness and historical tension has by its very spatial-topographic nature continued to represent a realm of discursive appropriation, a focal point of collective contention, an emblem of societal change in virtue of a rootedness in social, cultural and political practices that operate along a narrative constructedness on various levels of meaning.

Associated with an idle state of insouciance, the beach serves as an emblem of leisure and tourism, relaxation and holiday, for detached from the harsh reality of everyday life it emerges as an idyllic realm of escape into a purportedly natural, unspoilt habitat – a habitat that paradoxically has been engineered by mankind itself as an artificial phenomenon.⁴⁰ In the same line, the beach moreover represents a global habitus of international travel, a mode of moving irrespective of the dire effect on as well as consequences for a fragile ecosystem of planet Earth.

Equally defined as a “site of sociocultural debate”,⁴¹ the beach as a concrete physical place as well as a toponym of societal confluence has constituted a sphere of deliberative contestation, sparking an on-going controversy over socio-culturally determined techniques and historically established ethics of the denuded self. The existent field is turned into a space of display where the look renders its object, a voyeuristic gaze targeted

³⁹ Povoledo, 2019.

⁴⁰ Barone, 2019.

⁴¹ Breidenbach et al., 2020, p.4.

at unravelling the unseen. The instant of exposure correspondingly serves as a metonymic strategy in *Sun & Sea (Marina)* as the divested human physique exhibited points to an unveiling and de-coding of an ailing society on a moribund planet Earth.

It hereby is the body, field of contention, that moves to the centre of deliberation. Understood as a “site for creation”,⁴² the human figure emerges as a vessel within performance art since constituting a corporeal modality of a ‘raison d’être’.⁴³ Suspended between concealing and unveiling, the body is exposed nowhere in such a sustained manner as on the beach – a body that in *Sun & Sea (Marina)* speaking with Nick Kaye is “engaged in a mapping of the site”⁴⁴ for acted out as a place of contention. By this, an inherent moment of disciplinary, socio-political practice exercised upon the embodied individual comes to the fore that is at the same time reflected on an oppressive exploitation of planet Earth.⁴⁵ By these means, the body becomes a metonym for the planetary sphere of the Earth as it stands for a state of exhaustion, a fragile artefact deprived of its own capacity to speak.

As the beach, site of heightened corporality, is laid out, the scenery is crafted as an artistic field of embodied involvement, marked by the production of meaning through a both physical and cognitive involvement of the performers and participants alike, consequently fabricating a narrative inscribed into the physical presence of the interpreters.⁴⁶ The being-in-place hereby draws on both impersonated as well as incarnated semiotics of performativity that beyond the beach setting equally extend to the audience along a co-presence.⁴⁷ On these grounds, a here and now is emphasised that inextricably involves the performers and the audience alike, while promoting the emancipated spectator who according to Florian Malzacher becomes a “co-author[s] of their own experience”.⁴⁸

⁴² Gómez-Pena, 2003, p.23.

⁴³ Ibid., p.24.

⁴⁴ Kaye, 2000, p.157.

⁴⁵ Pylypa, 1998, p.21.

⁴⁶ Shaughnessy, 2012, p.xvii.

⁴⁷ Ficher-Lichte, 2004, p.15f.

⁴⁸ Malzacher, 2015, p.19 (b).

Sun & Sea (Marina) hereby dwells on a site-specificity which may be condensed to “a set of critical terms and [...] a mode of work”.⁴⁹ At the same time, by virtue of dialectics, the site-specificity of the beach is overturned, finding its antithesis in the formulation of a non-place as conceived by Marc Augé.⁵⁰ Marked by an intrinsic notion of transience adjacent to a degree of anonymity, the so-called non-places reveal deprived of identity, thus subjugating the individual into a state of social detachment as no recognition takes place.⁵¹ In this context, the beach constitutes a realm of the disconnected, where singular existences are acted out whose common fate resides in a jointly inhabited planet Earth.

b) Topics Addressed

Whereas *Sun & Sea (Marina)* might – owing to the artificial beach setting – be prematurely labelled as environmental art,⁵² the range of topics addressed withstands and refutes a singular, exclusive and monothematic reading. On the contrary, a closer analysis of the libretto will readily reveal a palimpsest of meanings beyond a mere bewailing of ecological catastrophes. The various songs accordingly discuss a broad array of issues which reveal a general moment(um) of global upheaval as they bespeak a state of exhaustion symptomatic of both, the Earth as well as its respective inhabitants. The concerns sung of differ however with regards to a degree of urgency and socio-political scope, encompassing mundane trivialities and prosaic inanities through to broader reflections on a general state of global affairs indicative of a consumerist leisure society.⁵³ Ranging from rather banal worries about sunburns as in the “Sunscreen Bossa Nova”⁵⁴ song or the fear of missing one’s flight as addressed by the “Young Man From the Volcano Couple” to a frank reflection on a state of exhaustion as put forward by the “Workaholic’s

⁴⁹ Kaye, 2000, p.12.

⁵⁰ Augé, 1992, p.122.

⁵¹ Ibid., p.33.

⁵² Since its first emergence in the 1960s, environmental art has been concerned with reflecting on the relations between the natural environment and mankind’s world. (Pereira, 2016).

⁵³ Barone, 2019.

⁵⁴ Compare Libretto *Sun & Sea (Marina)*.

Song”, the palimpsest of voices furthermore features songs of complaint that are counteracted by the wry “Philosopher’s Commentary” which with great cynicism overturns some of the global mechanisms at stake.⁵⁵ Global streams of capital and commodities are recounted by reference to exotic produce found in local stores whereas the littering of the beach is insinuated through an allusion to the colourful sea.

Against this backdrop, a metonymic construal of the libretto shines through. Individual concerns require a twofold approach as the subjective ponderations reflect upon a meta-narrative of the Earth whose desperate state is personified by the individuals on the beach. Speaking with Barzdzikaite, the artists were intent on “draw[ing] a line between the fragility of the human body and the fragility of the Earth”,⁵⁶ by virtue of rendering an analogy of both through the interlacing of scenographic setting and song texts performed. In this respect, the songs interweave as deliberative fragments towards an extensive comment on the current status quo of planet Earth.

c) Stylistic Devices

Characterised by an ever-changing configuration of gradually evolving constellations, the beach setting becomes reminiscent of a tableau vivant,⁵⁷ as the view from the mezzanine turns the beach into a synesthetic canvas on which visual and auditive impressions collide. The lack of rigid stage directions correspondingly allows for a dynamic interaction among the beachgoers, thus endowing the opera performance with a degree of spontaneous arbitrariness by which an impression of natural beach life is introduced that undermines the inherent artificiality of the setting enacted. As a result, the illusion of a genuine beach atmosphere can be maintained, owing to the shared spirit of idle ‘vacationeering’. The “tableau vivant” hereby blends static images with animated scenes, thus reinforcing the notion of a polyvalent reality that under a veil of tranquil indifference and romantic

⁵⁵ Compare Libretto *Sun & Sea (Marina)*.

⁵⁶ Barzdzikaite in Halperin, 2019 (b).

⁵⁷ Guerisoli & Vincenti, 2019.

indulgency seethes with the imminent threat of an environmental, societal and social catastrophe, portraying a world reminiscent of a volcano about to erupt.

As the opera proceeds along an underlying tune of impervious monotony, humming a complacent song of lethargic complaint, the tableau vivant carries the perpetual semantics of a recurrent temporality.⁵⁸ By this, the Lithuanian Pavilion may be characterised as breaking with the conventions of the ancient theatre drama rooted in the idea of climactic escalation,⁵⁹ for *Sun & Sea (Marina)* introduces a notion of eternal lamentations towards a state of perpetuity that offers no escape. Breaking with the idea of linear time, the loop-like performance dwells on an alternative reading of an eternal present by which the spectators come to live their own temporality. ‘Real time’ and ‘fictional time’ get blurred as a density of instants performed gravitates towards a construction and deconstruction of meaning along a continuum of enacted contingency.⁶⁰ In this respect, the audience is confronted with a notion of re-occurrence of events that denies and annihilates any possible escape from a seemingly ineluctable fate.

Operating at manifold levels *Sun & Sea (Marina)* induces notions of a total work of art by virtue of which a panoply of issues moves to the centre of interpretation. Scenography, music and text concur to render a piece that becomes reminiscent of a mosaic suggesting a reading as a palimpsest of meanings. The density of visual, sonorous and scenographic impressions inspires an immersive experience as the spectators on the mezzanine come face to face with their own thrownness in an ailing world whose alarming state has paradoxically resulted from their own behaviour. The dramaturgic impression is then mirrored by a theory of performativity as proposed by the Brechtian legacy whereby discursive and visible instants blend into a practice of performative investigation into social conditions.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Jones, 2018 (2012), p.16.

⁵⁹ Osburn, 1994, p.507.

⁶⁰ Heathfield, 2018 (2004), p.164.

⁶¹ Kobolt & Zdravkovic, 2014, p.12.

Thus referred to as epic theatre,⁶² *Sun & Sea (Marina)* dwells on an estranged engagement of the spectators who find themselves confronted with a crude depiction of an apocalyptic future. In line with the Brechtian techniques of scenographic alienation, a distance is created through the mezzanine setting of the Lithuanian Pavilion, meant to allow for a critical reflection.⁶³ The notion of detachment is then counteracted, for by emotionally captivating the audience, a modality of active involvement is achieved as *Sun & Sea (Marina)* requires the spectators to position themselves and take an active stance.⁶⁴ Accordingly, the performance is geared towards the audience who transferred into a position of engaged disinvolvement becomes a vital element within the construal of the enactment.

IV) *Sun & Sea (Marina)* – Theoretical Framework

An opera-like performance, *Sun & Sea (Marina)* engages at multifarious distinct levels by virtue of rendering a spectacle that appeals to all senses while simultaneously eliciting a cognitive-emotional response in view of the texts sung. The mise-en-scène of the artificial beach setting within the abandoned structures of the former military complex evokes a notion of disruption as the lines between fact and fiction get blurred along the depiction of a dire reality whose inherently pathological, morbid nature becomes an alarming premonition against an ecological collapse and social disruption. Set within pre-given structures of a current status quo, the Lithuanian Pavilion admonishes societal conventions as well as individual practices, thus addressing issues of global concern. In this respect, a theoretical framework shall be suggested which situates *Sun & Sea (Marina)* within the discursive field of pre-enactment, futuring and Arte Útil as ‘tools’ to think with. By this, recombinant, remixed and hybridised aesthetics deployed for a fabrication of the artistic

⁶² Nida Art Colony, 2019.

⁶³ Bishop, 2018 (2006), p.142.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p.143.

shall come to the fore – highly trenchant visual-performative comments that dwell on the political-conflictual potential of a creative critique.

1) The Concept of the Pre-Enactment

Whereas re-enactments are targeted at „re-living“ a previous moment in time, thus re-(in)stating past events⁶⁵ to the end that an “authentic re-experience” shall be rendered,⁶⁶ pre-enactments lean towards the future, for bound to model and thus render a specific configuration of a possible prospective outcome. Marked by an inherent liveness, immediacy and immateriality,⁶⁷ the performances conceived in this tradition ensue from a pre-given setting that serves as a framework and point of reference in which the spectacle is embedded.

By these means, the pre-enactment is not concerned with portraying an absolute, singular script for a hereafter and hence refrains from propagating an objective vision of an indeterminate future, as this artistic technique on the contrary refutes a construal as a prescient proclamation of a reality-yet-to-be. Instead, staging a scenario that bound by the contingency of possible outcomes represents one out of many, the pre-enactment must be interpreted as a visual device geared towards addressing, speaking and visualising the future within a discursive format that recognises a joint agency in conceiving alternative realities. In this regard, pre-enactments “invent hypothetical scenarios, speculate about possible futures and set out to experiment with fictitious time(s) and space(s)” for concerned with generating insights into a pending present.⁶⁸ Discontinuities are rendered overt, hereby offering deliberative points of departure and discursive links for becoming a sustained reflection on premises of historical precepts. The pre-enactment accordingly

⁶⁵ Patrick, 2017:127f.

⁶⁶ Oberkrome & Straub, 2019, p.10.

⁶⁷ Gilligan, 2007, p.426ff.

⁶⁸ Oberkrome & Straub, 2019, p.9.

revolves around and propels a re-working of a contingent, uncertain future, that due to the potential of performance art becomes inhabited.

Accordingly, pre-enactments operate along a reversal of linear temporality for moreover concerned with an emphasis on the intrinsic “interdependence and interconnectedness of pro- and retrospection”⁶⁹ that breaks with the assumption of absolute time. Owing to the instant of iterability, any temporal linearity is collapsed, giving way to a perpetual performance of an own historical record.

Far from exclusively playing social roles or rendering a depiction of a current status quo, the enactments step out of their original, purely artistic context, spilling over into the sphere of a shared reality where they claim (f)actual (truth) status. This emancipatory act is reflected by a mediation of the imagery created as it experiences a transposition into the discursive realm of society. At the same time, the performative dimension culminates in a creative act that – marked by an intrinsic reference to the future – produces new meaning while establishing connections and constituting identities.⁷⁰

2) The Scope of Futuring and Arte Útil

With reference to Tania Bruguera, a concept of art is put forward that advocates usefulness as the condition for all creative output, thereby establishing a link to art as a tool by which a shift from “the passive realm of aesthetics or mere critique to one of action and activism”⁷¹ is due. In this respect, art is unequivocally directed at the spectators who find themselves confronted with an array of questions asked that are targeted at instigating a personal engagement in the matters addressed. Bruguera correspondingly seeks to “achieve social transformation and political impact”,⁷² an aim which boils down in the

⁶⁹ Oberkrome & Struab, 2019, p.10.

⁷⁰ Fischer-Lichte, 2013, p.12.

⁷¹ Bruguera et al., 2014, p.124.

⁷² Bruguera et al., 2014, p.127.

poignant term of “Arte Útil” (useful art). Beyond a mere depiction of a utopian world order, art then becomes a means towards envisioning, constructing, conceiving a future by virtue of creating actual facts that exceed any mere aesthetic reflection on a given status quo.

In this respect, Nato Thompson cites Bruguera who states: “I don’t want an art that points at a thing, I want art that is the thing.”⁷³ By this, an epistemic shift occurs as meaning is no longer produced along a cross-referentiality, but moreover ensues from the object that itself becomes a tool to think with.

The concept of ‘futuring’, by contrast, builds on an envisioning of the yet-to-be by dint of which actual facts are to be produced. Reverting to a performative staging of contingent processes, the artistic practice of futuring springs from a bringing-forth that by its very nature reveals bound by a temporality that points towards the still-to-come.⁷⁴ By these means, a realm of the possible, conditional as well as accidental is unfolded while concrete effects are installed by dint of an incorporation of emergent phenomena into a reflection of potential outcomes.

By virtue of deliberately staging social and political structures, both pre-enactments and ‘futuring’ envisage art as a tool to think with, to conceive and therefore to effect change.⁷⁵ In this respect, Arte Útil and futuring seek to mobilise society through the creative aesthetics of (performance) art, which beyond its visual poignancy becomes a practice towards alternative societal, cultural and historical configurations. As a result, the artwork experiences an appropriation by the audience that is called to active intervention. Any assumption of a static society is thus challenged and refuted, bearing moreover on the notion of a public sphere that claims its forms of resistance and agency.⁷⁶

⁷³ Thompson, 2012, p.17ff.

⁷⁴ Fischer-Lichte, 2013, p.11.

⁷⁵ Serafini, 2018, p.2.

⁷⁶ Butler, 2015, p.79.

3) Framing *Sun & Sea (Marina)*

The visual as well as performative aesthetics deployed by *Sun & Sea (Marina)* situate the artwork within a realm of artistic deliberation as the scenery on the beach builds on a subtle critique that aims at unravelling a planet Earth out of joint. By dint of its vague, unsettling nature, the Lithuanian Pavilion “reflects the complexities of human societies”⁷⁷ while generating insights into global processes mirrored against a current status quo that owing to the ingenious language employed are rendered overt, portrayed towards an insinuated future scenario. Whereas in contrast to a strict definition of ‘pre-enactment’ or ‘futuring’ no concrete vision of a yet-to-be is formulated, *Sun & Sea (Marina)* nonetheless engages as a performative practice towards re-thinking alternative times to come. The opera performance, speaking with Andrea Pagnes, must be read as an “indirect provocation to the order of social, political and cultural norms”⁷⁸ whose inherently pathological nature is highlighted by virtue of a cunning interweavement of song texts and scenography. As the melodies unfold, the artistic enactment dwells on a creative bringing-forth as a line between art and life gets blurred towards a rendition of a concrete reality beyond a mere aesthetic reflection.

In this respect, a “vision of the world from within the context of art”⁷⁹ as formulated by Bruguera is rendered possible. Condensed to a humming beach, the world is dressed in the artistic imagery of a synesthetic experience by which a notion of immediacy is created. The live moment inherent in the enactment of *Sun & Sea (Marina)* then operates along a performative re-evocation of a given world that bears on a visionary act of artistic enunciation and creative ponderation towards a representation of an alternative reality.⁸⁰ As a result, the contingency of an uncertain future is appropriated by the images created since condensing and reverting a linearity of time, the performance constitutes a tool to

⁷⁷ Pagnes, 2016 (2014), p.90.

⁷⁸ Pagnes, 2016 (2014), p.90.

⁷⁹ Bruguera in Cippitelli, 2010, p.18.

⁸⁰ Jones, 2018 (2012), p.17.

‘think with’, directed at rendering, fabricating and producing a respective phenomenal factuality.

Speaking with Bruguera, art then becomes a mode of “living the future in the present”⁸¹ for no longer a mere instant of representation, the artistic enactment steps out of a rigid deliberative framework to claim (f)actual status in a jointly inhabited world.⁸² On these grounds, ‘Arte Útil’ is thought to intervene in people’s lives with the intention of becoming part of the respective existence.⁸³ As the Lithuanian Pavilion rolls out a dismal scenery of an aching planet, the performance aesthetics emerge as a call to action towards thinking, actuating and effecting a diverse society whose concern lies with a dire future scenario in both socio-economic as well as ecological terms. The cacophony of voices thereby reverts to an affective enunciation of a contingent reality for instigating a profound reflection about everyday practices that demand action, the possibilities of actualising a yet-to-be assume concrete shape.

Beyond pondering, presenting and fabricating alternative futures, the enactment furthermore dwells on the notion of a performative knowledge rendered accessible by virtue of an artistic technique that abides by a practical understanding.⁸⁴ *Sun & Sea (Marina)* accordingly transcends the realm of mere cognitive reflection or deliberative consideration as the imagery of the opera setting deployed evinces an inescapable reality whose alarming nature demands action.

⁸¹ Bruguera, 2012, p.196.

⁸² Ibid., p.197.

⁸³ Bruguera, 2012, p.197.

⁸⁴ Deriu, 2012, p.97.

V) A Diagnosis of the Artistic in *Sun & Sea (Marina)*

In order to gain a deeper insight into the artistic status of the Lithuanian Pavilion, an analysis of the performative semantics is due as the enactment moves beyond a purely representational setting towards a production of meaning through the imagery rendered.

Described as an artificial beach humming with ‘Songs of Nothingness’,⁸⁵ *Sun & Sea (Marina)* operates along the voyeuristic gaze of the detached audience whose joint spectatorship is turned into still complacency.⁸⁶ Owing to the spatial setting of the pavilion stalled to passivity, the spectators are muted into a tacit consent that bespeaks an anaesthetisation of the public sphere whose main interest and primordial focus – as represented by the vacationers on the beach – has culminated in the consumerist practice of a broad concern with their own wealth besides an exploitative enjoyment of leisure activities regardless eventual consequences conferred by such behaviour.

The innocently humming aesthetics of the Lithuanian Pavilion introduce a political as well as conflictual dimension which owing to an obscure latency acquires an even greater degree of saliency and explosive brisance. Speaking with Oliver Marchart, the true nature of art “resides in its complexity, obliqueness, and remoteness from every political practice”,⁸⁷ while bringing about “a reframing of material and symbolic space” as stipulated by Jacques Rancière.⁸⁸ Art correspondingly emerges as a critical technique and social practice directed at the discursive field of societal negotiation and political contention where power structures emerge and manifest themselves.

Sun and Sea (Marina) operates along lines of subtle disruption as the seemingly idyllic scenery of a beach vacation contrasts with the texts of the songs performed – a disquieting suspension of inner coherence that becomes indicative of an artistic critique. Invoking the notion of the sublime that lies at the heart of the Lithuanian Pavilion, Slavoj Žižek

⁸⁵ Sun & Sea (Marina) Leaflet, 2019.

⁸⁶ Barone, 2019.

⁸⁷ Marchart, 2019, p.12.

⁸⁸ Rancière, 2009, p.24 (b).

poignantly hints at the paradoxical nature of the adumbrated which in his words abides by the “conversion of the impossibility of presentation into presentation of impossibility”.⁸⁹

The mise-en-scène of *Sun & Sea (Marina)* accordingly breaks with a concept of art primordially targeted at generating aesthetic value while thus refuting the assumption of a purely contemplative notion ascribed to visual phenomena. Instead, the performance demands an understanding of art as an operative field of action concerned with the production of meaning.⁹⁰ Invoking Nicolas Bourriaud, the Lithuanian Pavilion is no longer an object belonging to the „world of products“,⁹¹ for having moved beyond the operating system⁹² that generates „limited, defined, restricted, mobile, tradeable works of art“. ⁹³ Moreover, *Sun & Sea (Marina)* must be read as an operative intervention that reposes on an artistic practice embedded within an architecture of action along the complex network of multifarious components.⁹⁴

As a consequence, the Lithuanian Pavilion requires an interpretative approach concerned with an epistemological-theoretical shift from ‘artwork’ to ‘work of art’ in order to allow for a focus on the practices and dynamics at stake, thus underscoring the processual aspect of artistic production as invoked by Barbara Bolt.⁹⁵ Accordingly, a detournement occurs as the analysis moves away from any engagement on a purely representational level as a mode of thinking that fixes the world into a static assemblage of predetermined configurations.⁹⁶ In this respect, an interpretative shift can be stated, departing from art as a mere mirror towards a reading of the artistic as an engaged and engaging aesthetics of visual strategies within the cultural-political as much as social-institutional realm.⁹⁷

⁸⁹ Zizek, 1991, p.144.

⁹⁰ Kobolt & Zdravkovic, 2014, p.10.

⁹¹ Bourriaud, 1995, p.59.

⁹² Wulffen, 1994, p.50ff.

⁹³ Kleine-Benne, 2006, p.5.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p.18f.

⁹⁵ Bolt, 2004, p.5.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p.9.

⁹⁷ Malzacher, 2015, p.11f (a).

Apprehending art, by contrast, as a practice of “*poetic revealing*”⁹⁸ and thereby reverting to its inherent dynamic potential and performative productivity, an alternative logic emerges that posits and positions the respective artefact(s) along a new paradigm of visual aesthetics⁹⁹ in line with the pragmatics of a theory of practice as stipulated by Pierre Bourdieu.¹⁰⁰ The practice of art leaves and exceeds a merely aesthetic realm as it furthermore grows into a mode of epistemic speech along creative intervention and thus beyond an exclusively linguistic approach to the world, for invoking pictorial and iconic discourses.¹⁰¹ *Sun & Sea (Marina)* correspondingly abides by an artistic practice which by dint of its performative nature is targeted at a gradual disclosure of a wretched planet Earth and an exhausted society, a both visualised as much as visualising process of reflection that can be likened to a stream of consciousness. As a result, the aching world unfolds gradually under the eyes of the spectator, carried by the humming, unswerving tunes that imperturbably spirals the scenery sung of towards its own cataclysm.

Songs of idleness. Songs of exhaustion. Songs of everyday concerns. *Sun & Sea (Marina)* offers structures of reflection and patterns of thought that culminate in a subtle disruption of those logics of practice that govern a world which has come close to the abyss of its own relentless machinations. The depiction of an exhausted world recurs to a re-presentation in a Heideggerian sense, a setting out before the audience which simultaneously posits the emancipated subject in relation to themselves.¹⁰² The contemplating subject accordingly appropriates the world by virtue of a cognitive act that turns the image of the object beheld and contemplated into an entity of representationalist thought¹⁰³ from which further insight and knowledge ensues. ‘Enframing’ as a mode and as a practice in which everything comes into open reveals the inquisitive nature of art as a “craftsmanship of knowing”.¹⁰⁴ Likewise, the instant of *poesis* as a “bringing forth of

⁹⁸ Bolt, 2004, p.9.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p.9.

¹⁰⁰ Compare Bourdieu, 1977 (1972), p.72ff.

¹⁰¹ Belting, 2008 (2005), p.7ff.

¹⁰² Heidegger, 1977, p.132.

¹⁰³ Judovitz, 1988, p.75.

¹⁰⁴ Latour, 1986, p.3.

something out of itself”¹⁰⁵ operates along techniques of ‘unconcealment’¹⁰⁶ towards an apprehension of the world. This apprehension then takes place beyond scientific paradigms of an appraising evaluation within a categorical opposition of right and wrong for exclusively held accountable to and by its own autonomy, art has the power to uncloset new modes of realising, understanding and knowing.¹⁰⁷

Art as *techne* and aesthetic practice then “emerge[s] in the involvement with materials, methods, tools and ideas of practice”.¹⁰⁸ This practice recurs to and builds on a performative processuality which desists from producing an artistic artefact since rather concerned with rendering a work that abides by its own ephemerality. On these grounds, an implementation of a co-temporality occurs by which *Sun & Sea (Marina)* breaks with the linear structure of the “opera lirica”¹⁰⁹ for both performers and spectators jointly assist along the fabrication of the artistic as an expressive reflection.

Pursuant to Peter Osborne, the operatic performance becomes a „discursive mode by which ontological effects are installed“,¹¹⁰ while meaning is produced at a site of happening that is marked by specific characteristics.¹¹¹ Two elements reveal of pivotal importance to performance art, primarily consisting in the architectural form that subsequently blends into a symbiotic inter-relation with the body of the viewer.¹¹² The artist-trio of the Lithuanian Pavilion plays with both in a virtuoso manner by disjoining architecture and human body through the mezzanine setting while at the same time counteracting any separation by dint of inviting the public to spend a day on the beach. The idea of inter-action is thus counter-acted, as the experience of the performance operates along a disruptive setting of disjoint spheres while simultaneously reverting to

¹⁰⁵ Bolt, 2004, p.59.

¹⁰⁶ Compare Heidegger, 1977, p.11f.

¹⁰⁷ Fink, 2018, p.9.

¹⁰⁸ Bolt, 2004, p.65.

¹⁰⁹ Brollo, 2019, p.63.

¹¹⁰ Osborne, 2001, p.147.

¹¹¹ Ibid., p.148.

¹¹² Ibid., p.149.

the incorporative force of art by dint of an integration of the two realms of production and reception.¹¹³

It shall thus be seen how the manifold semantic aspects coalesce and amalgamate into a powerful imagery of artistic speech.

VI) The Powerful Imagery of *Sun & Sea (Marina)* – A Call to Action?

Awarded the Golden Lion for the best national contribution, a closer examination of what renders the Lithuanian Pavilion within its chosen mode of representation so powerful moves to the centre of reflection. Whereas most art about climate change operates along logics that are meant to scare people into action¹¹⁴ while simultaneously paralysing the audience with eulogies that invoke apocalyptic scenarios,¹¹⁵ *Sun & Sea (Marina)* ventures a different approach. A mere depiction of a status quo, no judgement is pronounced, no solution offered, as the performance moreover becomes a mirror of an abysmal, tormented reality whose estranged nature reveals ever more ungraspable by virtue of the dissociated setting of the artificial beach humming with songs of fateful premonition observed from the two-storey mezzanine structure that separates spectacle and audience.¹¹⁶

No pointing occurs in *Sun & Sea (Marina)* that quoting Terrence Mosley “creates a clear division between the person pointing and the thing being pointed at” – a pointing commonly resulting in isolation.¹¹⁷ Instead, the Lithuanian Pavilion moreover engages along a performative semantic of quiet portrayal while thus building on an approach which is both inclusive and implicit.¹¹⁸ The opera performance addresses the spectators indirectly as the individual beachgoers represent various stereotypes that serve as templates for

¹¹³ Patrick, 2017, p.8.

¹¹⁴ Halperin, 2019 (a).

¹¹⁵ Barone, 2019.

¹¹⁶ Lystlund Matzen, 2019.

¹¹⁷ Mosley, 2018, p.82.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

different types of precarious behaviour. As a result, the operatic artwork “moves towards the public”¹¹⁹ as *Sun & Sea (Marina)* offers points of reference that reflect a global status quo in general as well as Western practices in particular.

The Lithuanian Pavilion correspondingly withstands any reading aimed at construing of the performance as a concrete manual or handbook for action as no precise instructions are formulated that might render or constitute a codex of behaviour towards the realisation of ‘a better world’. On the contrary, by virtue of the representational modus chosen, *Sun & Sea (Marina)* moreover refrains from any form of judgement, accusation or proscription as the beachgoers innocently relish in hedonistic pursuits, hence abandoning themselves to their trivial personal concerns that appear far removed from critical ponderations on a world that is intrinsically out of joint. Moreover, the apocalyptic play is dressed in the colourful, fun-inspired gown of purported innocence and gormlessness, for never explicitly addressing the immediacy and urgency of the pressing issues our planet has come to face. The apparent dissociation and discordance brought about by the unsettling song texts against the backdrop of the oblivious, unsuspecting beach idyll thereby gains momentum as the rupture elicits an echo of reflections towards an attempt of reverting the obvious ignorance prevailing.

Sun & Sea (Marina) functions as a subtle allegory for the idleness of mankind to take action, perspicaciously illustrated through a beach-scenography of naïve, unperturbed vacationers whose trivial concerns combined render a poignant depiction of a grim, dismal reality. The performance draws on an understanding of knowledge (production) closely tied to a continued questioning of purported certitudes,¹²⁰ an investigation of a conflictual reality through a fragmentary discourse rendered by the parallel though disjoint chants of the individuals on the beach. As voices are lent to a range of different characters who jointly participate in the enactment of the beach setting, the operatic aesthetics can be likened to a political act of speech by which speaking with Jacques Rancière the

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Pérez Royo et al, 2013, p.28.

boundaries of reality are subject of a transgression towards “new forms of collective enunciation”.¹²¹

The operatic format chosen correspondingly allows for a generation of insights since given its intricate complexity the Lithuanian Pavilion appeals to the senses and as a result moves beyond a merely cognitive experience. Ensuing from the performative semantics of the continuous loop, a specific temporality is introduced to *Sun & Sea (Marina)*, a processuality that breaks with the assumption of an artistic practices meant to render a final product as the ongoing performance by contrast re-produces its own meaning in ever shifting new configurations.¹²²

A multifaceted immersive reality is created by virtue of the mezzanine setting which beyond separating spectators and performers, in addition deploys the properties of light engineering to envelope the audience in the sombre atmosphere of a dimly lit wooden attic. Both the spatial separation as well as the intensity of illumination collude, thus rendering a clear division between audience and performers which seemingly insurmountable introduces a physically experienceable rupture – a caesura that is furthermore mirrored by the textual breaks evident in the narratively disconnected songs struck up. The libretto songs operate along a distinct linguistic register//index, meant to reveal by concealing in a cacophony of discordant voices.

By this, the rhetorical device of irony serves as a means of unveiling the underlying deficiencies and grievances, disgraces and mischiefs of a modern society as by dint of a frank and candid self-reflection, insight into a seething reality is rendered possible - a reality on the cusp of an imminent apocalypse that consonant with the slowly unfolding tunes inexorably assumes concrete form.

The lack of a concrete solution consequently calls upon the audience while addressing the enlightened individual that in light of the portrayed status quo of the world becomes the template of an emancipated citizen expected to assume full responsibility for their own actions. It is the self-reflective spectator who finding themselves among the cast on the

¹²¹ Rancière, 2010, p.139 (a).

¹²² Peters, 2013, p.9.

artificial beach comes to ponder their own involvement in a reality out of joint. Situated along the interstices of “socially and politically engaged art”,¹²³ *Sun & Sea (Marina)* invokes techniques of knowledge production whose subtle rhetoric employs dialogical patterns geared towards a proximity between performers and spectators.

On these grounds, the mundane beach scenography moves beyond a strict art/life divide as explored by Martin Patrick, for rather „blurring boundaries“ as the setting reflects those very holiday habitus of a leisure society in a consumerist (Western) world.¹²⁴ In *Sun & Sea (Marina)* life interferes with art thus rendering a stage of re-interpretation, re-consideration.¹²⁵

Tunes, song texts and scenography accordingly amalgamate into a tableau vivant that is not only visually seducing, but moreover intellectually confronting¹²⁶ for held in a state of tacit implicitness the audience is compelled to uncover meaning from within a „bewildering network of questions“. ¹²⁷ Invoking Nicola Shaughnessy, these questions are then to become “practices which have the potential to challenge, innovate and transform” by dint of “respecting and promoting individual agency as well as embracing collective identities”¹²⁸ for elicited by an underlying tone of crude irony and cynical sobriety covered in the cloying, mawkish gown of seemingly innocent pop songs a process of reflection is invoked.

Sun & Sea (Marina) dwells on a reading of art that speaking with Patrick, “gives a cause and motivation to voyage beyond [those] ordinary perceptual limits“¹²⁹ that determine, contain and confine an understanding as well as construction of reality within the boundaries of a rigid objectifying quantification of the world. Instead of rendering a mere enactment or plain depiction of a global society, the opera performance is rather interested in suggesting alternative futures. By building on an artistic narrative, the Lithuanian

¹²³ Franceschini, 2018, p.41.

¹²⁴ Patrick, 2017, p.2.

¹²⁵ Ibid., p.3.

¹²⁶ Ibid., p.125.

¹²⁷ Ibid., p.125.

¹²⁸ Shaughnessy, 2012, p.3.

¹²⁹ Patrick, 2017, p.5.

Pavilion gains momentum since contingent, imaginary realities are insinuated by virtue of portraying an aching planet Earth whose fate shines through as inextricably dependent upon a reconsideration of exploitative human, primordially Western practices that push both society as well as the environment towards the apocalyptic scenario sung of.¹³⁰

VII) Towards Another Future?

A beach opera performance that captivates due to its rich visual-acoustic rhetoric in conjunction with a scenography that underscores the songs texts performed, *Sun & Sea (Marina)* abides by its “world-making” capacity as speaking with Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift “new notions of what the future might consist of”¹³¹ are implicitly portrayed, shining through a critical engagement with the seemingly apathetic, lethargic cast on the beach.

The Lithuanian Pavilion enthralls with its affective dimension, a prescient capacity of visual rhetoric which deploying the logics of artistic speech through its memorable, poignant aesthetics induces engagement. Emphasis is placed on the experience of the opera performance as an “artistic medium social practice”¹³² hereby offering a tool for creatively and daringly thinking alternative realities. At first glance reminiscent of a zestful, naïve pop song whose unaffected and simple-minded temper exudes an air of innocence, *Sun & Sea (Marina)* claims further engagement beyond the purported sugar-coating which cracks open as the crises addressed “unfold easily, softly [like a pop song] on the very last day on earth”.¹³³

Long after leaving the Marina Militare Arsenal complex, the songs continue to echo and reverberate in the minds of the unsuspecting, oblivious spectators – idle melodies of

¹³⁰ Qiu, 2002, p.25f.

¹³¹ Amin & Thrift, 2013, p.9.

¹³² Sholette, 2015, p.109.

¹³³ Sun & Sea (Marina) Leaflet, 2019.

laconic complaint that under the artificial sun on a fake beach have become etched on the memory – comparable to the effervescent sound of the sea irrevocably captured for all time in the spiral-shaped body of a seashell.

Sun & Sea (Marina) accordingly becomes a powerful parable for suggesting an interpretation and reading of art beyond an exclusively aesthetic approach to the world as modalities of visual rhetoric are explored whose inherent nature bears on a productive capacity geared towards performing – and thus speaking, modelling as much as creating – a future. Whereas the semantics of artistic critique might easily get lost within a conundrum of solitary arias, it is the cacophony of voices of the Lithuanian Pavilion by which a lasting impression is created. At best dire in the final analysis, the depiction of the global status quo sung of instigates action – in order to escape the catastrophe of a looming future. By this, *Sun & Sea (Marina)* surpasses and exceeds the realm of a purely acoustic-optical spectacle for moreover operating along an emotive, cunning dimension of the artistic that inextricably elicits a concrete response.

Still hovering in a state of paralysed, apathetic horror, an epiphanic realisation dawns on me as a brief glance about causes me to registrate the paradox of my surroundings. The seemingly idle scenery, the allegedly soothing sound of the sea, the supposedly warming sun. My attention is elicited by a rotten plastic bottle whose surface is glittering in the scorching sunlight. Slowly, I compose myself and get up. A zillion thoughts keep whirring through my mind as I walk over to the forlorn object – and bending down, I pick up and remove what contradicts the integrity of an aching planet Earth.

Illustrations

III. 1



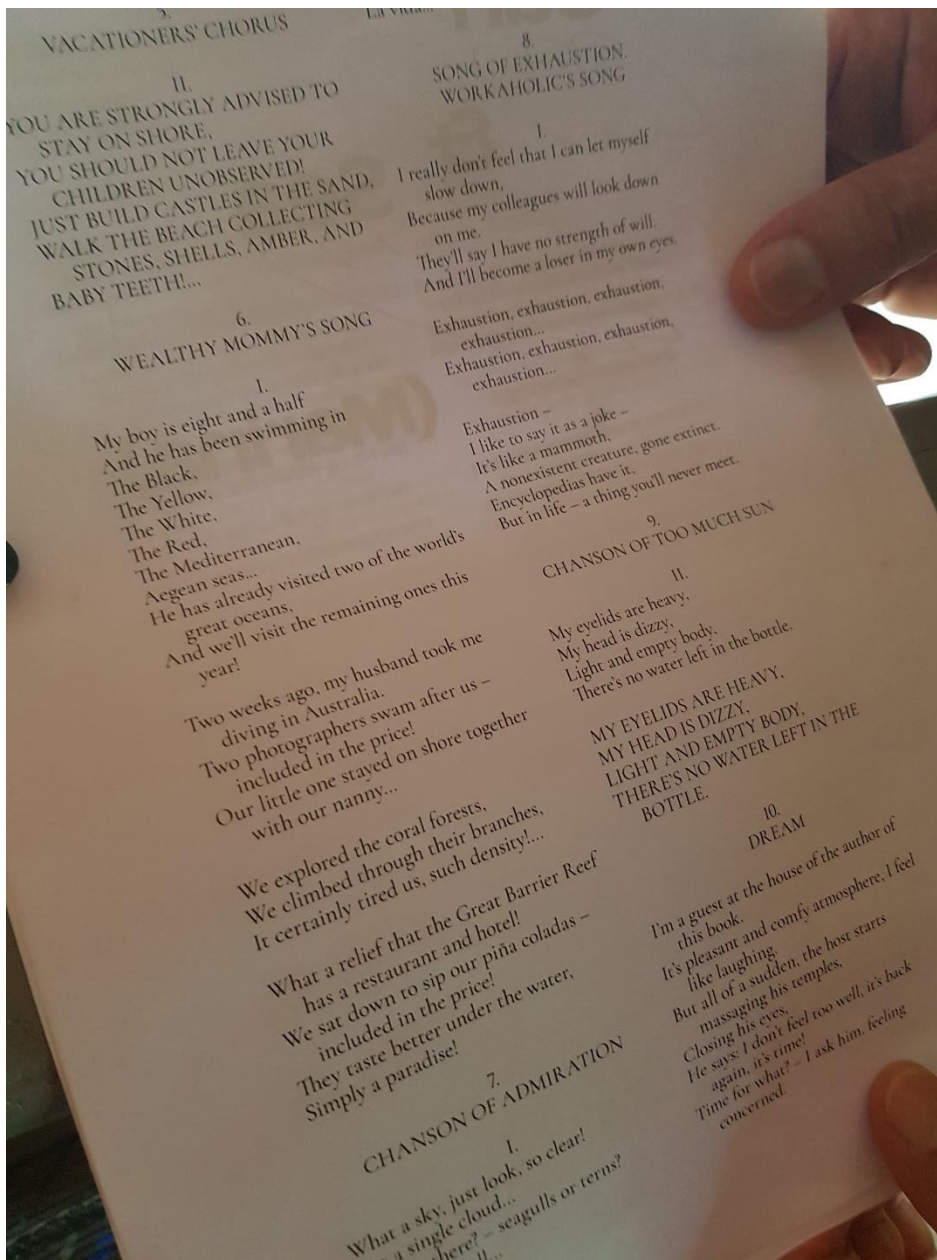
III. 2





III. 4





Register of Illustrations

III. 1

Sandra Welte, Lithuanian Pavilion Scenery, Photography, Private Collection
(14.08.2019)

III. 2

Sandra Welte, Lithuanian Pavilion Beach Setting, Photography, Private Collection
(14.08.2019)

III.3

Sandra Welte, Lithuanian Pavilion Mezzanine Setting, Photography, Private Collection
(14.08.2019)

III.4

Sandra Welte, Lithuanian Pavilion Audience, Photography, Private Collection
(14.08.2019)

III.5

Sandra Welte, Lithuanian Pavilion Libretto, Photography, Private Collection
(14.08.2019)

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