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JOSEF STRAU

THE MOUNT OF J

The Mount of

J



tabernacle on rosa-luxemburg-platz

each year there is a day to commemorate the escape from slavery and subjugation. usually there are more days for celebrating this, but there is probably only one which celebrates the period directly after independence is regained, when material loss means nothing compared to the force of independence. this day is the festival of the tabernacles. the tabernacles are the little huts with a minimum amount of physical protection, built as quickly as possible, dedicated to the life without possessions of property and slave labour, made as yearly reminders of the pleasures of eating, drinking, reading and talking together and having abandoned house, home and life of oppression. the original event was the exodus from egypt and the huts were made during the years of travelling across the desert.

The exhibition was scheduled to open on September 22nd, which happened to be yom kippur, the day of atonement. yom kippur's original aim is to once a year forget about troubles and bad moods with others and return these relations to a good or at least normal mood. as well it has the power to absolve you of all self-imposed promises and resolutions, which have begun to torture you, and as well and more importantly of oaths and promises you give to social groups for short advantage, which create obligations and dependencies for you. the main song on the day of atonement is "kol nidre". it can help to regain your independence, or in some cases, even liberate you, beforehand, of next year's promises. "kol nidre" became very important to many of the Jewish people, who were forced often under torture to convert to catholicism. so when evening begins and yom kippur has come to an end, you are ready to start building the sukkah, the hut of the celebration of the tabernacles. This year, this evening falls on sept 22nd and the hut should be ready by the thursday after, so we can leave our house and move in for a week.

At first it was planned to build a real size tabernacle hut for the rosa-luxemburg-platz and its neighbourhood - and to build one in complete accordance with all its beautiful rules. In a collective effort a few people would build it quickly and without losing much time for aesthetic considerations or even worse for considerations of taste. it was supposed that it would have provided a place for eating, as well as given space to the almost iconoclastic spirit of this symbolic event. but the actual procedure, both the building of this kind of non-building, a building against building, as well as the practical use of this little sub-pavilion was to be delayed for another year. instead, hastily assembled sukkot-related information and a little model of its possible form will be introduced as an introduction to a general survey of different questions, like "the artist as producer of a different space", "the artist as producer of object related narratives", "architecture as narrative space", "artist, producer of a fantasy space".

building the sukkah

How to build a sukkah? first we make three or four walls and then we make the roof out of plants. all different materials could be used for the walls. probably it is very helpful, to have in mind the great rabbi de Vries, who mentioned in some general explanation of the architecture of the synagogue, that the building is a sacred building, but it is not a sacred building. its function is just as a meeting place. saying this, he seemed to want to destroy in the reader any possible association with the form and idea of church buildings. one immediately understands what he is saying by this logically impossible contradiction. I had his sentence often in mind, when I was interrogated about what the galerie meerrettich is. or as it is often formulated "what it really is". the people of these questions obviously expressed a kind of identity problem, or an inability to understand language as a tool to express something clear and simple albeit contradictory or ambivalent. I said, "it is as simple as that, meerrettich is a gallery, but at the same time meerrettich for sure is not a gallery." but responding in this very clear and simple way, I would find myself in an even worse situation. my answer was not taken with fun or pleasure and the typical reaction was another question: "so what are

you, are you a gallerist or are you an artist?" I said, "well, when I am in the gallery, I am a gallerist, or at least I try to be, but when I am at home working I am an artist". To which my investigator would not be ashamed to ask "I wanted to know what you really are?" this dialogue happened for sure not just once. and even if the questions in themselves were not wrong, there was something wrong about them all together, and I kept wondering, what is the mechanism of the unpleasant feeling it creates. is it an obsession with identity, or of clean definitions, or simply a demand for purity? In between the lines, these interrogations seemed to express, "you can do everything, you can be everything, I am very open to everything, but I have to know what you exactly are" - the famous sentence "you have to say it". after these uncanny experiences with the new supposedly liberal culture of investigation, I would say, if the plans for building a sukka are too complicated or too ununderstandable for you, just leave it that way. you don't have to build one and you don't have to understand and most important leave the people who are building one alone and let them just do it.

so, if you want to build a sukka, think of it as the most simple form of a meeting space and the walls can be of any material - they should just be strong enough to remain stable, when the wind comes. it might be better, if you make four walls if there is a door in one of them. with just three walls a door is not necessary. that should be enough for the walls. the construction of the ceiling is more complicated. not every material is good for it. it has to be made of plants. different to the walls, it should never have been used already for some other use or made of a commodity or an object of use. we can use leftover material from trees, straw or similar material, wooden leftovers from boxes should be avoided, if the box has been used for other functions. it should not be edible material either and the wood should not be too much like boards, because they would remind us too much on the ceilings of houses. the halacha demands that the ceiling should be partly open, that you can see at least some of the stars during the night, but at the same time it demands that there be more shadow than sunlight in the sukka during the day. you should not use the material of the sukka for any other function during the sukkot week.

the calendar

he sent me for christmas a beautiful green american pocket diary. i was not sure how to "read" this present, the binding is hand-made with a stitched spine and gilt-edge pages of extremely thin paper, from the same mill which produces the banknote papers of the sterling. it has been called a secret social passport used by sigmund freud, grace kelly and the princess of wales. so many, many people did not have it, great people did not have it, like einstein etc. but most shockingly it looks like it is made out of crocodile skin. i hope it is not, as a vegetarian i don't want to show dead animal skin as a passport. but its special light green color fortunately destroys any evidence of nature or animals. the green hand painted cover gives it a more feminine impression, along with the golden numbers 2007. how come one chooses an object like that for me? was it really chosen for me - maybe was chosen by someone, who did not know me and i got it because there wasn't any other use for it? so all together, i did not use it. during the summer i started to finally clean up all the mess the organization of the galerie meierreutich in the pavilion left in my apartment. all the papers, invites, booklets from artists had to disappear. this job really gave me back all the energy i earlier used to have and it made me start living again under new and more organized principles. i only saved the pretty calendar from the mountain of garbage, and put it into my pocket when i came back to the apartment, the garbage finally gone, i had an empty desk again, after the years of meierreutich - four years and two months, like world war one, as a polish friend said to me. ,i am an artist again now, and just that,' was the new motto after the four years and two months, like the first world war. i put the green pocket diary on the empty desk, its pages still empty and it seemed too clearly that the next step was to start filling its pages with the dates of the pe

tist's career and suddenly i loved organizing again: the dates of my openings. my
xt opening is an opening of my show at the pavilion! september 22nd! i looked on
at day and the printed paper said: „Yom Kippur“ (Day of Atonement). i had already
ggested to have the show run for only one week, that must be enough. i opened
e next calendar page and the printed letters on the page said „Succot“ (Feast of
bernacles).

kkot looks on first observation like another religious holiday. of course it is,
t different to many other holidays its content does present something which is
t necessarily religious. i never had a very clear idea about it, and i still
n't, but practically, it expects from you, if you participate, to leave your
use for a week, or at least for the day, hoping that you forget your property for
time and remember the life without house and home, the time of exodus, as it is
lled in the book of moses, the long period following the exit from oppression,
member the ones who exchanged their homes for nomadic life, who left their houses
or tents, changing to independence and selbstbestimmung.

xt versus architecture

everyone knows that the egyptians were very obsessed with architecture was the hate
or the jewish population by the egyptian rulers first, or was the jewish population
st put into the slavery which was necessary for their architectural aims.
obably both in some ways, but definitely an obsession with architecture was at
east the medium for the horrible social developments. the oppression became
o terrible that the Jewish population decided to get free of it and leave the
untry, which was very difficult because the architectural society was very
ependent on them.

ie jewish population succeeded and they could leave and decided to live without
rchitecture - the results of this enormous step is still influencing our daily life
nd it is still a model for progress and culture.

ie two main results were the development of the first written law, a simple text
egulating society and a text applying to everyone equally. an unbelievable step
n the middle of the total irrationality which mostly characterized the judicial
pects of life until then. the second development was the first written text about
istory, probably history was something not even considered before, but more
mportantly it was the first kind of literary text. a text which describes not only
vents but as well dialogues, and even better is able to reflect the difficulties the
escribed characters sometimes have, when confronted with decisions and situations.
veryone knows about that, but what is important is that this society obviously had
ome awareness of the radical possibilities of the new independence and freedom
nd the newly developed qualities of both the written law and the written stories,
hat they demanded from the members of the society to take these two elements as
he primary elements of their lives and their social relations, and to never fall
ack into the darkness of the architectural oppression and slavery. since the
eneration of not only architecture, but as well of art-objects was so important
or the oppression and dark primitivism of the social relations, it was told to
he members of the new society to never ever succumb to the worshipping of art
nd architecture. we can see easily that all progress in society and literature
n the following thousands of years was a result of giving these up. simply said:
rchitecture is evil, pure evilness, if introduced to social realation, if you want
house built, you need slaves, that is the problem of mankind, if it is looked at
s a history of architecture.

his is the reason why to celebrate sukkot every year is the happy celebration and
early renewal of the anti-architectural and no art covenant. of course we have
o make art and architecture still, but its bigger cultural significance could be
uestionable.

the lamp shade as a fantasy space.

the invention of the lamp shade as a second universe.

For many years now a floor lamp stands just behind the pillows of my bed. It was a very practical thing. It doesn't look practical, since probably the bed would be better against the wall rather than having a small space in between, a space reigned by the white and silver floor lamp. It was not practical as well, because had to get up from the comfortable sheets in order to turn it off before sleeping. But I refused to make any changes for many years. Then, once without planning I took a green ribbon, which was bought for wrapping a present, and attached it to the little metal chain that switched the light on and off. From then on I could turn the light off without getting up from the bed. Still I was not sure if this sudden decision was really made only to spare me this last moment's effort before sleeping. I think the lamp, or rather the interior of the lamp shade was some mysterious object for me. But why? Lying down in bed with the rest of the apartment a dark zone, looking up into the golden interior of the lampshade from far below was a reminder. Many people believe it is a very retarded quality if people remain in their youth once they get older. But I thought of myself as remaining in a much earlier state, the earliest pre-language state sometimes and tried to search for the situation which gave me this mysterious feeling. It was the time when the few objects one had experience with seemed to stand in for the whole universe. Or there was already an ability to experience many objects of this universe and give them names even, but it could not be used since the objects were just the few of the little room around you. So they replaced the universe of objects and thus were endowed with a dark mysterious aura. For me that object was an actually quite ugly lamp which was fixed on the wall above me and I had nothing else to meditate on, nothing else to project all my capabilities on than the inside of the lamp shade. As well it was the last object before darkness and it remained as strange afterimage once in darkness, sending out... so my desire to find security or better to find the comfort of still living with just a few objects and giving to them too many qualities in my imagination is found in the lamp behind the pillow. The last object of the depressing reality and the first object of the dark but comfortable world of dreaming.

When I put the ribbon on, for a long time I thought, this was one of the few practical, meaningful and good things I have done in my life. But the reason, the true reason was not practicality, it was an effort to create a physical relation between me and the mysterious space within the lampshade, to make a kind of imaginary, but still physical ladder to this in between space of dream and reality. Today after finally going early to bed with a book, I read: "es geht um die beide perspektiven der werterfahrung" (schopenhauer 436)

the sukkot event is not just another religious holiday, in some ways it can almost be interpreted as a memorial day of a post-revolutionary society. it is dedicated to the period after the liberation from oppression in egyptian society. while passover celebrates the event of the revolution like escape from oppression, sukkot has the function of reminder of the transformational period. if you celebrate it, you are supposed to quickly build in a few days a tent and stay there for a week, or more usually one night and one day. the blessing of sukkot. yom kippur is over and sukkot is in front of us already and we start preparing the tent.

schnitzlers story

the beauty of the celebration of sukkot possibly derives probably partly from a kind of almost utopian spirit, which echoes from its descriptions, or maybe a arcadian spirit. the spirit of a society which has dropped all forms of social and material dependencies, projecting its memory into future, "you were saved then, you were unharmed, uncorrupted"

I think it was schnitzler, the writer of the beginning of the 20th century, who had a father who was a great admirer of literature and art, but most of all an important scientist, as a child schnitzler saw his father always in the role of a

illiant figure in the society, who expressed clearly his opinions and entertained
ny with his conversation abilities. that was the only father he knew, but once
s father took his son with him, when he went to a big society to some castle,
ere many of the most powerful aristocrats met. suddenly he perceived another
ther, who agreed with the princes and counts, even when they expressed the
ggest stupidities, he would agree, so he said to his father: "how can a member
the aristocracy of the mind obey to the aristocracy of coaches and horses". it
ok revolutions, and maybe even wars were motivated towards this change. it took
l these violent procedures like world war 1 and events before and after to change
is order. don't forget therefore that it is easier to follow and enstrengthen
ese social dependencies, but it often needs violence and confrontations to
ssolve them. the period after these events is a great time, people don't obey,
is out of fashion to. the book of exodus describes even, how in the period
fore passover, before the moment of revolution and exodus, people are for the
st part relatively well and have houses and things they never had before. the
araoh's regime tried to make them feel good in order to keep the advantages they
d from the jewish producers going. similar processes appeared in the millenniums
ter the original exodus. but the energy of the original exodus was so big, that
e first book of literature was written, laws equal to everyone were written, in
neral a huge excitement for writing appeared. still today there is discussion
er who authored what, but possibly it was the wild enthusiastic effort of many to
rticipate in the writing process and editing process. but there was one aesthetic
ohibition in this very productive period. it was the prohibition of idolatry. a
ear result of the understanding that formally the slavery in mizrahim (egypt)
sulted from the egyptians' obsession with architecture and luxury idol desire.
terature does not need slaves. even personally art and architecture results in
cial dependencies while writing and reading liberates you or at least gives you
areness. therefore the new rule, then for the post-exodus future, the ideal, was
just carry the text and disappear from house and dependencies. the only object
the text scroll. keep the papers and go and g-d will bring you the sukka, the
t by the evening, one theory says, that sukkot, the plural of sukka, was as well
e name of the place of the first stop during the exodus, a little town with empty
ts they could move into. the huts were all the same and enough for at least
0.000. since the city of sukkot in the middle of the nowhere of the desert, was
de by adonai, el schaddai, the elohim etc., in just one moment, the long long
estion is why did he do it that way, the same way as described here and the same
y people do it still today all over the world. they could have been castles in
e middle of desert as well, since his power is everything, anyway, for sure it
came a practical model which was easily imitated. how many were in sukkot? at
ast 600.000, but other quite reasonable estimations are almost 3 million. when
ey left together they at first tried to start quickly to be out of the security
nes of the mizrahim. so they walked three days and nights nonstop before reaching
kkot. who were they? for sure they were mostly jewish. the worst treatment of
l the slaves were given to the jewish. but for sure there were others as well,
mpathizers of the jewish revolution. some people, like freud in his last work
eculate that even mores, the poetic and prophetic leader wasn't even of jewish
igin, some people quite question freud's last obsession with mores, since it was
itten after he moved into exile, after his whole original family disappeared in
e camps to be killed there soon after. another influential figure of the exodus was
e mysterious poet and magician jethro, who was not jewish and who influenced mores
ry much. these kinds of cousins of the jewish movement were natives, but became
nd of traitors to their nation. they were the dissidents and always in Jewish
story very highly appreciated, although on the other hand people of Jewish faith
ways tried to avoid any form of missionary activity. quite the opposite. the
y of sukkot is the celebration which explicitly expresses the desire to include
iends or people, who are not sharing the same faith.

note on the author.

last summer, months after the final event of galerie meerrettich, meerrettich's disappearance was still a reason for relief. the dismal overload of increasing administrative duties was just too overwhelming. the relief of having most of the time to just prepare some exhibitions or similar events was very seductive, but slowly some desire for more social duties and for possibilities of collaborative production returned. there are for sure some issues, which can only be addressed that way and actually these issues were not really addressed enough during the meerrettich's time. so in some conversations possibilities were formulated, apart from the issues themselves, the structural frame should not be a spatial frame. not alone, because it creates the necessity of organizational formalities in any case but more importantly it would be metaphorically a wrong signal in the context of a city where the organization of spaces is so dominant - to say it maybe slightly more exaggeratedly, where organization itself and space itself are dominant values, whatever the general context is, we thought that instead of having a space or a magazine, the issues would be better addressed in the maybe old fashioned model of the Art Action Group. since the desire for a post-meerrettich program has still not developed enough and since good programs are often the result of a lucky coincidence, Art Action Group has still not developed any event. but in some way the introduction of the idea of sukkot, the celebration of the nomadic hut and its many symbolic and its many cultural impacts appeared as a great opportunity to both tell the story of a great tradition with lots of beautiful references, as well as to take it as a long existing vehicle for creating a space, which expresses at the same time the refusal of many implications of the space, produces an event of celebrating a kind of space/non-space attitude. therefore it would have been wonderful to in fact create a collaboration which works on both, the realization of the space/non-space and as well as a theoretical space for negotiating the cultural background of the sukka of course and the what is called iconoclast theoretical implications of it. the sukka turned into just a tiny model for the exhibition, more as a reminder, quickly assembled in the studio with left over material from some other art production, like lamp and lamp shade. the text of the poster should be a introduction to the general thematic field of sukkot, but is interrupted by very speculative notes on its possible implications. for sure due to the quick realization many mistakes will be found in the formulations. but quick realization is the principle of sukkot, even in case there would be time for a slower production effort. it is just addressed to a small local public to consider possibilities for the realization in another year. the text is sometimes, as if written by the famous foolish cat murr, almost voice of "das-ding-an-sich", which believes it is a writer and adds its text into another book, sometimes even distorting or destroying its original. for sure its text is not understood as expression of a generalized view of the culture and tradition, which created the sukkot, but just a few possible speculations surrounding the procedures of this celebration day, and of course an expres-

sion of the wish to consider its introduction into environments like rosa-luxemburg-platz.

note on the author as fool and producer of a fantasy space.

since the (german) word "kater" means both tomcat and hangover, the early 19th century writer e.t.a. hoffmann could have secretly been addressing both meanings. as you might already know, the idea of his book is that instead of writing one, he would simply edit the writings of his tomcat. (the cat being unaware that it is not able to write a text had nevertheless proceeded with this foolish ambition.) but as the tomcat has penned his manuscripts in an already published book, (that of a well-known orchestra director's autobiography), he has quite some difficulty in distinguishing the original text from the notes of the cat. often not succeeding to, he decides to publish both, leaving to the reader the decisions, which writer wrote the more interesting text. I am using the word foolish with special emphasis and even pride, having become able to use it with clear awareness and secured consciousness due to earlier research. is an artist the mirror of an universal deviation of conscious and unconscious production of its objects, or just a divided entity in general? For a long time, I was unable to explain regarding artists and art I liked, what the qualities were that led me to appreciate them - I mean in a deeper sense, in a sense of fundamental direction, in an existential and transcendental direction to gain definitions for the artists. role in an discourse, which should echo the deep space of related philosophical definitions during all the centuries, just find help in my private struggles in search of the name for my own place in always changing role images, wishing as well to investigate about artists I liked, what the qualities were, that I appreciated. so I played the role of an organizer, of a gallerist, to see them work closely, and found myself confronted with the continuous questions raised by some visitors to explain in a general way what qualities of other artists I liked, asked why I chose to work with these artists in meerrettich. often I liked something in them what I could never explain that easily, because what I thought sounded stupid, but was good for me, for instance the suspicion that certain and very highly valued works of art or poetry are not exactly resulting from the intentions of the artist as a person, but they are more expressions of some other voice, another voice more or less still connected to his/her individual personality, but is not expressing his persons subjectivity, even when expressing subjectivity. The same even with his rational intentions, they appear as his rational intentions but they are not, they are rational intended looking productions, but seemed not to be made by the person as an artist, but by the person as producer, which sounds still stupid to me, as a very simple operation made complicated.

the chief assumption of all theories about the fool, has always been that there are two kind of fools: the fool and the artificial fool.

in medieval times interpretations to the existence of the fool were almost central to many scholastic considerations,

until the moment when erasmus published a long speech on fools which strongly opposed the church's condemnation of the artificial fool. as a catholic priest he had the authority to destroy the dogma of the church, which until then had exclusive power over philosophy and a complete monopoly over text production. unfortunately erasmus had resolved the problem in a such way, that many interesting contradictions on the matter were discredited. but with the new discourse on the fool he initiated the movement of reformation. usually before erasmus the interpretation of the fool was based on the assumption of a general contradiction between the fool and the artificial fool. artificial fools intentionally pretended to be foolish, to become lords of misrule, and were therefore perceived as having sinful character. his desire for practicing self-decoration, although in its negative formulation, is still a result of the most dangerous sin, pride, even in cases of the performance of self-humiliating and exhibitionist qualities. his exhibitionist confessionalism was perceived as negative form of pride. but to make his soul even more determined to hell than the soul which is sick and filled with the worst pride, is his intentional similarity to the real fool, who is described as a holy person. similarity is a most important issue. the fool is in reality not a fool but is a person who is so much dedicated to the eternal heavenly being and only appears to the earthly people who are living for material advantages, to be a fool. the artificial fool destroys the monopoly of holiness by seeking intentionally his similarity for narcissistic motives. the real fool is a witless person close to god, because in the scriptures it is said, that "which is foolishness to god, is wisdom to men and what is weakness to god is strength to men" (1Cor. 2,25) for people of faith there is the witless man of holy character and there his mimic, the fallen man.

But could the soul of the artificial fool be saved? In children and fools, the devil has no influence. Therefore the artificial fool uses the representation of the fool, in order to be evil but not punished, claiming the idiot's immunity. in medieval times or even later both fools often felt called towards the end of their lives in pilgrimage and willed significant religious bequests. one can recognize him. unlike learned men, who fear to loose their reputations by losing an argument, he pretends to know he is an idiot and therefore never hesitates to answer any questions, defies categories, shows dislike of judgements and shows pretended stupidity, is enjoying paradoxes instead and preferring to write of distant lands and ancient times.

the sukka could be the object expressing internal/external qualities of the single spatial object making it both sukka and artificial sukka, including traditional and contemporary narratives. the text on the sukka involves the same procedure, it is an almost pre-existing narrative about its building practice, but rewritten it includes maybe too many and too unusual personal remarks, similar to the remarks produced by the foolish cat, which believed to be able to be a writer.

