







Footnotes on Aesopica

“I hope this finds you well in these strange and uncertain times”. There is an undertone of conspiracy. A misunderstanding and confusion towards something that is hinted, read in between the lines of headlines and footnotes endlessly referencing each other.

I’m walking through the National Gallery of Art in Vilnius, first public outing in months, and feel strangely overwhelmed by its massive architecture, built to accommodate so many, yet because of these strange and uncertain times, we are a handful.

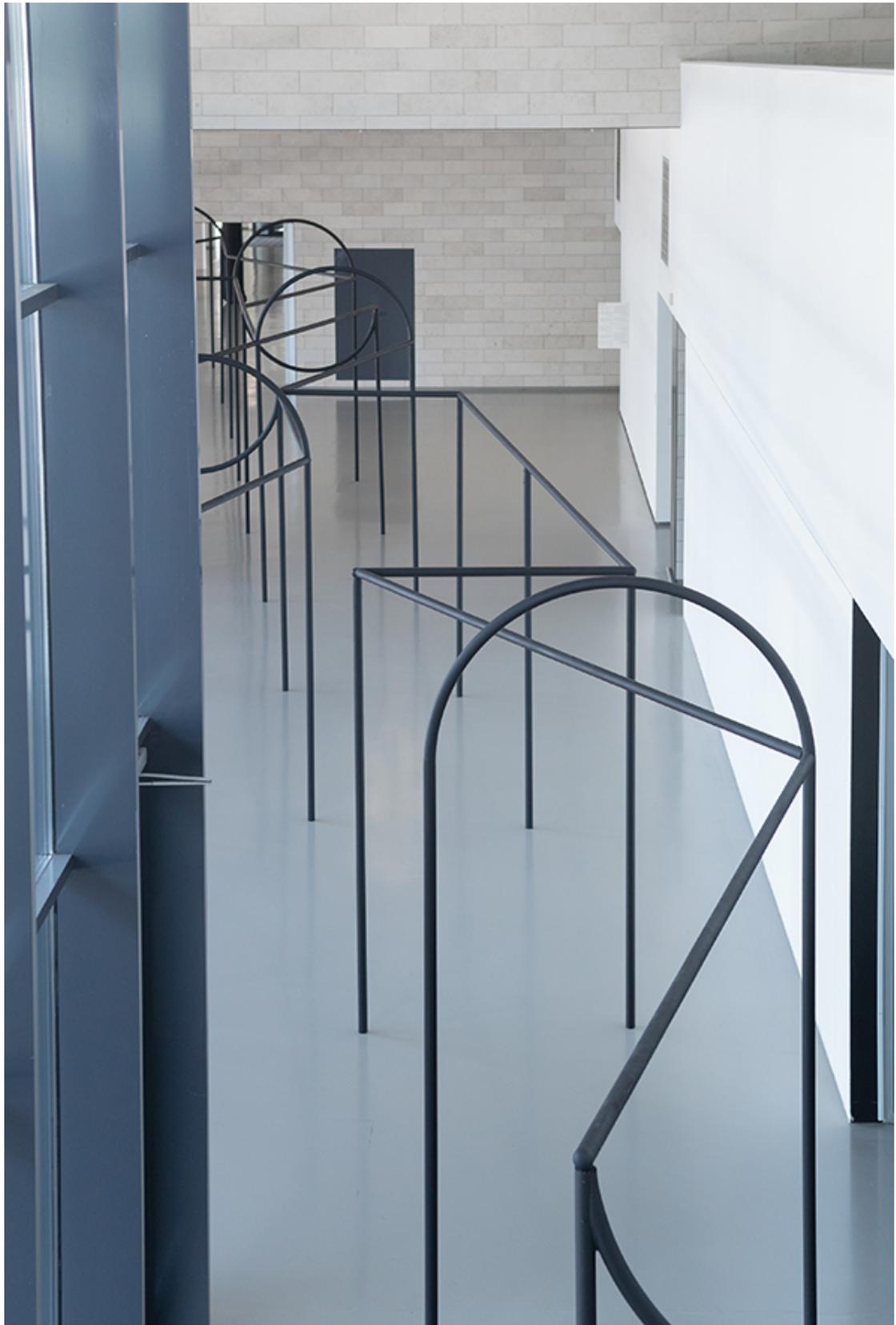
The architecture is there to intimidate, clearly. It makes me feel that the rebar wires in the concrete hold an intentionality that I don’t fully understand, I couldn’t, I am just a passenger. It is too large for my small steps, yet I inhabit it as I walk towards the exhibition.

I can hear the echo of this intention and that of my footsteps as I walk down the long hallway. My footsteps are footnotes laying on the ones before me, slippery and muddy, quoting and perpetuating the ones that preceded.

Conspiracy makes me think of plotting, which is what we did that day. After trying to meet at various parks for several hours we finally sit at a café and order wine, they only sell it by the bottle and so we stick to beer, much to my disappointment as this doesn’t sit well in my stomach, it’s like eating soup.

I recall a text by Stefano Harvey and Valentina Desideri in which they begin by saying that “today it is not possible to live except by way of a conspiracy. But equally, it is impossible to live today by way of a plot. To live now, to create modes of life, forms of life, we must seek a conspiracy without a plot, a conspiracy that is its own end, a conspiracy for itself.” (1)

The eerie music from the film is still tingling in my ears and we begin to plot. The initial tone is full of paranoia. Stories about the old structures getting in the way of female artists and academia establish themselves first, this is the obvious; but take on different meanings as we move forward. We’d both, coincidentally, been trying to talk to people born in the 1930’s in order to understand some of the Soviet processes of translation and cultural transformation, but had persistently found a form of reluctance that one might want to call paranoia, or just an apathy towards remembering.



She proceeds to tell me about Aesopian language, a cryptic communication that was practiced in Lithuania between the 1960's-80's. In this communication system several layers of meaning overlap, predominantly to navigate a state of censorship and to convey forbidden or taboo subjects and opinions, with no guarantee that the receptor of the message is going to pick up on the cues.

The non-formalization of the language makes it so that it can be appropriated and interpreted from different angles, subjectivities and absorbing multiple layers of meaning. Another form of paranoia can be inducted here, one which arises from not ever fully knowing whether one has misinterpreted the intention of the conveyor, hence opening a space for the poetics of paranoia (from Greek, *irregular mind*). According to a Lithuanian language handbook, when a word or phrase becomes an interjection, its nominal meaning weakens and its emotional one becomes more apparent.

Aesopian language appropriately borrows from *Aesop's Fables* as an oral tradition. Fables keep a simple and permeable structure so as to travel liquidly from mouth to mouth, employing recognizable imagery and popular culture as vehicles, absorbing and expelling meanings as dirty sponges circulating through the motions of cultural generation. Verbal registers become personal, capable of navigating through different languages, ideologies and generations. Enabling the interlocutor to grab on to the analogies that they empathize with, emphasizing the implied meanings that they hope the listeners will catch on to. Although their emotional context might be complex and difficult to utter, they employ simple metaphors, mnemonic devices and unadorned symbolisms retold with the language one chooses to ascribe, becoming easy to carry from body to body and from a generation to the next.

For the sake of it, I asked her what could be the contemporary intention behind employing Aesopian vocabularies in structures already plagued by complexity, as personally I'd been trying out blunt sincerity as a form of emancipation from the cacophonous landscape. What proceeded was a dissection of emotional translations, extraverbal modes of communication and unutterable narratives that could be explored by modes of paranoia, conspiracy and Aesopian plots. Perhaps in between these lines one can find modes of expression that are both plural and local, expansive and specific, outlining a plot in a pattern that is always reshaping itself.

Harvey and Desideri outline themselves that "this conspiracy cannot produce a new person, a new world a new subjectivity, a new



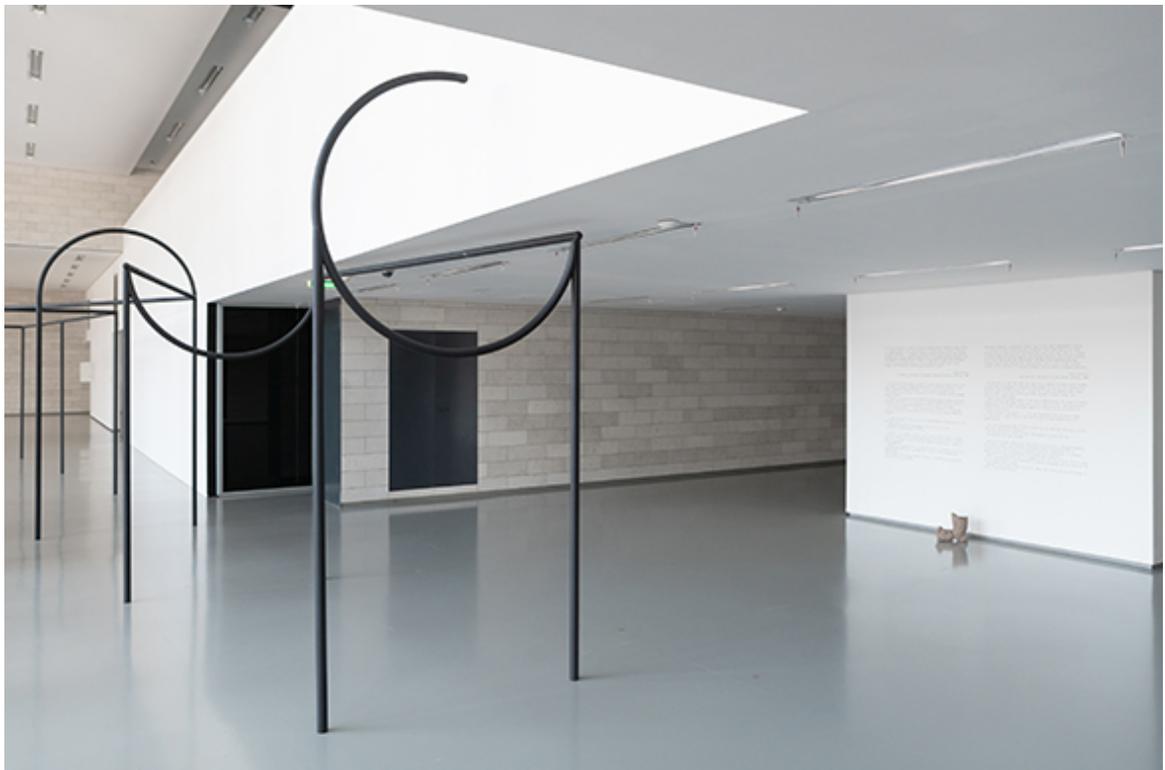
consciousness. Much less can it conform to the plot of others, the plot of the police. This conspiracy can only produce more of itself, and those who enter into this conspiracy without a plot produce themselves through a kind of complicity that takes sides against any plot, any attempt to plot a path, a future for others or oneself”. (ibid)

There is a shot in the film that particularly caught my attention, where someone is repainting a house, cleaning the windows. I found care in this monotonous movement, slowly, calmly, brushing over the weathered paint, removing the sweat from the windows and the cobwebs from the corners. A wood piece might be rotting, humidity perhaps. Or mites biting away from the core, I imagine. The wood pieces get replaced, among a few other suffering from the same condition. Over the course of the months, the years, all the pieces get replaced, but the house stays the same. Nobody thought of rebranding or changing the name although every integral part of its original structure is long gone.

They took the old pieces of the house and made a shed out of it. There isn't a culture for throwing things out, you never know if things will stop coming in the colorful metal containers again, so its best to save it all. Nobody thought to call the shed a house.

1. A Conspiracy Without A Plot, Valentina Desideri and Stefano Harney, 2013, The Curatorial: A Philosophy of Curating, p.125
https://www.academia.edu/6163351/A_Conspiracy_Without_A_Plot_by_Valentina_Desideri_and_Stefano_Harney?email_work_card=title

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