

Remembering Forgetting

Is my arrival in the world a new start or am I determined by the genes of my forebears? What are my forebears to me? Do they belong to a common history and do they deserve collective remembering or are they just a subject for desultory family talk over Sunday dinner? Do we have anything to do with each other, not just yesterday, but today? Can I and do I need to experience other people's lives? When does empathy stop and totalitarianism start? What does it mean to be conscious of one's own and/or the collective past, what does it mean to be thrall to it?

The Amela Frankl triptych consisting of three performances, *For a Beginning*, *Ballad of Two Grave Blocks* and *This Too Shall Pass* is an ode to the agitation that derives from these questions. To an agitation that comes into being in the class of the individual and the general, in the superficial disunion of past and present and in the attempt to demarcate them. So as to have it out with them, instead of turning to the future that would be supposed to suppress and substitute for some ancient and unfinished tales, Frankl determines to go headlong into what once was.

The first performance, *For a Beginning* (2013) poses the generational question "Does a common past mean anything to my contemporary?". In order to provide an answer, Amela Frankl explores the fate of the organ once placed in the old Koprivnica synagogue, devastated in WWII, after which it ended up in the nearby Catholic church of St Anthony. By its recontextualisation, that diurnal organ whose sound we have been used to hearing during celebration of the mass, has become an object of wonder and has once again absorbed our attention with the objective of interconnection. By setting up a common attitude to the past, we become contemporaries, those who cope in time moving from the same point of departure, framework that links and forms us and directs us one to another.

Frankl's performance takes place in the ruined synagogue in which on a video wall there is a live transmission of a recital of Pavo Mašić on the organ that once belonged to it, now used for celebration of mass of the Catholic church. It is not unimportant that what is at issue is a subtle gesture of a conciliatory artist who did not want to take the organ from the church in which it is used today, but did want to enable the public after a full 72 years to hear the sound of it in the synagogue again. Such an approach is an admonition and a recommendation to all those who, as is most often the case in our public space, are not able to create a dialogue about the events of World War II.

While the organ once again made a place of worship out of the ruinous synagogue, Amela Frankl squeezed juice out of fresh oranges. Fruit and music, material and spiritual nourishment, time and eternity, vitalism and immortality, the old synagogue and the modern video wall, oppositions that bring each other out. Can the scent of the fresh orange bridge the gap between what was once and our present, reanimate the past? Will it at least remind us of it? Or do the oranges have some other purpose? Giving the audience the tasty drink, Frankl manages Proust-like to link the refreshing drink with the fate of the synagogue. Juice that we will many times subsequently drink, perhaps each morning, will recall to us the music that resounded through the synagogue. And the

remembrance will in all likelihood be pleasant. Did then Amela Frankl manage to get through to the individual, to condition his/her present, not allowing them to forget the past?

In the next performance, *Ballad of Two Grave Blocks* (2015) Frankl speaks out about the “inherited family burden and the manner in which it can be coped with”. Unlike the first performance, she now raises the individual problem to the level of universal, and resolves her own family drama about the appropriate storage for the great-grandparents’ grave stones before the audience – in the finest Zagreb park, Zrinjevac. “Do you perhaps recognise yourself in this case of mine?” is a question that hovers over the performance. Is my fate yours? Where do *I* come to an end and *we* start?

The fate of my family as part of the common past is a demand for collective memorialising, in the form of a social paying of last honours in the theatrical rapprochement of the classic opposites, beauty and death. Zrinjevac and gravestone. Nobody after all interrs his loved ones in his own back yard. When ever possible, the rite takes place in a shared shrine. But Frankl here too is provocative, for she, as it were, asks – What have you done with the graves of your dead? Where are your dead? I do not see them in the finest park in Zagreb. Have you forgotten them?

Sigismund and Marija Frankl are the names of her ancestors that are there on the Zrinjevac memorials. Frankl, as she says, determined to find peace for all the living and dead actors of this story. As there are some graves without monuments, she draws attention to the opposite – to monuments without graves, a memorial that has survived the mortal remains, a symbol without content.

In the contemporary age, marked by technical and scientific progress, there are attempts to overcome mortality with various biological and medical means. Also there is active work on treating age, understood as a pathological process, and its suppression, as one can expect, is followed by the cultivation of eternal unwrinkled youth. Since the western objective is zero dead, these processes are accompanied by the doing away with mourning black, as time of grief, because of which there is an ever more present negligence with respect to mortal remains. But the results of this negligence are felt not only by the departed.

For the Italian philosopher Giambattista Vico, along with religion and marriage, the interment of the dead was the foundation of civilisation. Cultured world disappears in time of war and epidemic when bodies cannot be ritually buried. Non-interment or inappropriate interment takes us back to the state of barbarism. Anthropologically considered, interment of the dead is important symbolically and practically. In many religions a properly performed funeral rite is a precondition for the soul of the dead to be persuaded to the world of the spirits, without which their this-worldly existence will be prolonged and they will interfere with the normal life of the community. In a similar way, classical, archetypal literature, since Antigone, has stated that the fight for a proper burial of loved ones is an existential necessity and the basic task of the surviving family members. At a practical level, it is worth recalling that research has shown that enabling ritual treatment of death, an appropriate and gradual farewell with the departed, tends to reduce psychological stresses and even rates of suicide among the survivors.

From this point of view Frankl's feeling of distress is a reflection of the suppression of the past, the generational discontinuity of modern families, in which life begins with birth and ends with death. Sensing that her unease springs from the violence of the present with respect to the past, she gives herself over to melancholy, desperately seeking proof of the unbreakable links with the forebears, outside the inherited hair colour and talent for carving. She discovers it at the level of the unconscious, the symbolic, in the joy at round figures. Her great-grandmother was born just a century before her. This is a sign, just as the funerary memorial is a kind of memo of the existence of continuity. The deceased vanishes, the stone lives forever. The marble remnant is equally an expression of the human fear of death and confrontation with it through an attempt at overcoming it. It takes the shadow from the deceased for it finds for the one who is no more a motionless place in space, making him once again visible, existing.

Man and death. Dialectic of trauma and fascination, magnetic attraction and Olympian flight, suppression and obsession. In an attempt at surviving this battle, Frankl finds a Pythian solution – transferring part of the burden to the community, to her contemporaries. The spirit of individualism in the West is in contrast to the spirit of collectivism prevailing in Africa. In it there is no fear of death for the individual is willing to sacrifice himself for the society to survive. And he does not anyway see himself as something distinct from this whole. Something of this has remained in Western societies in the institution of for example a shoulder to cry on. Easier for two, still more so for three. Thank you, says Frankl at the end of the performance.

In the last performance, with the telling title of *This Too Shall Pass* (2017), she gives an engaged answer to the question from the previous performance - if I have not managed to get through to you and my family story still means nothing to you, that does not mean that it's all the same to me what happened with you. From this point of view, she appropriates the drama of an individual she does not personally know, raising it to the rank of universal performative act.

The performance *This Too Shall Pass* is inspired by an exhibit in the museum in Jasenovac Memorial Site, the former Ustasha death camp. The ring of an anonymous inmate on the inside of which the words "This too shall pass" were engraved. Paradoxically but truthfully what scares us most, our own transience, is the best consolation. Life will pass, all the good in it, and the bad as well. There is nothing but eternal change, says Heraclitus. "This Too Shall Pass," Amela Frankl engraves on the wall with a sander. *This* will pass like this performance, *this* will pass like the tragedy of the death-camp inmate. Not only this, but we as well. Amela has to vanish, for her work to retain sense.

What when man, as embodiment of mortality, recalls transience? He is in fact pointing the finger at himself. And what actually is *this*? It has no name. What we don't want to remember we will give no name the easier to forget it. Won't give it an identity. But with its non-framing, *this* becomes still more dangerous, darker, inaccessible. We are scared most of what we cannot fathom. Uncertainty. Chaos. Only those secrets that remain unuttered are dangerous.

The question “does really just everything pass?” recalls to us that it is necessary to discover the way in which time moves. If time moves circularly, in an eternal return of the same, then our forebears are our contemporaries. *Homo* is after all *universalis*. On the other hand, if time is linear, and man is the creator of the world, as the Enlightenment idea of progress tells us, it is expected to form and adjust memory of it. If it is the creator of the future, nothing will stop it intervening in the past too, which is also its work. And third possibility of the experience of time, trust in eternity, again finds resolution of the past for in the opposite case its shadows will always follow us, peck at us like the eagle the liver of Prometheus.

Amela Frankl, then, has written three unfinished tales, tales against forgetting, present perfect, not preterite. She provides no conclusion. The stories are unfinished for they come into being in dialogue. She has no wish to enforce her own perspective, but to open up a space for interpretation, to set the story in motion. A story that will contain what she presented, but develop in different directions. Something like a children’s game of repeating of words, and linking on new ones, in which everyone in the circle repeats the previous words and adds his own creating a tale together – “today – today I – today I was – today I was rainy”... The narrative must always remain incomplete, open for new subjects, for every encounter with the past requires it to be re-examined, in order to disenable that dogmatism that is, the opposite to pondering, the genesis of evil.

Frankl focuses on the relation of individual and community, studying it at three different but complementary levels, sketching out an answer to the question of what our responsibility is in engaging with the past. The first, the awakening, level of her performance is an attempt at an objective approach. She deals with the relation of individual to common history. In the second, subjective, dimension, the emphasis is placed on experiencing, the possibility of setting up links between the community and individual, in this case, one’s own, history. Finally, synthetically, Frankl’s performance is self-engaged, for it determines to take on the responsibility for the telling of other people’s past, showing what we can learn from it.

The feeling of the need for such an ethical conduct with respect to the past is the act of its being turned into history, for it, the teacher of life, always contains a moral dimension. Like every process of maturation, the need for an ethical review comes with years. The closer that man, a time bound, mortal creature, is to becoming part of the past, at least materially, the more he wants to make those who are no more contemporaries, secretly hoping that he will meet the same fate. Be a hero, whose time never passes.

Unlike historians, whose basic task is correctly to put in order the phenomena named, Amela Frankl as artist wants to penetrate beyond that, reveal presentiments. Although the names of the malefactors and the number of the dead are important issues, the meaning of history goes beyond them, sometimes circumvents them, for this is an issue that touches on the pith and marrow of the human being, self-determination. Only if we manage to step back from the seductiveness of the dilemmas that derive from the concrete historical action and reaction will we be able to attempt to discover why it is the way it is.

Socrates taught and the oracle of Delphi preserved forever the purpose of the philosophical and universal human quest that lies in the knowledge of the self. In the modern lust for adventure and for subjugating the world, peering into the jungle of the Philippines and the oases of the Bedouin, there actually is hidden a search for purpose and for discovering one's own being, which is not completed with the miles taken, but starts in the stoical address to one's own interior. But this gesture does not represent a call for exclusive solipsism. In fact, the opposite, enclosure in the sense, as the foundation for the dialectic of inner and outer, the one and the many, me and the world, is a precondition for authentic opening up to others. On these lines later philosophy, particularly Hegel, explained that the correspondence of what is in me, my desires, with what is outside me, in the sense of the common good which in Hegel is realised by the action of the absolute spirit is the precondition of freedom. It is also the continuation of Kant's founding of morality in working from duty, in the sense of the categorical imperative, the content of which is ancient wisdom that teaches my every act must be such as for me to wish all to imitate it, that it holds good as a general rule for all. In this place morality and freedom are founded in a unity of individual and community for between them there is no clear line of demarcation.

Just as there is no line between me and others, no such line can be drawn between past and present. Remembering, preservation of the past in the present, prevails over Berdyaev's sickness of time, the diagnosis of which is a false division of time into past, present and future. It resists the objectification of time, the understanding that it is something external, independent of the subjective impression of the world. Past exists only in present, in which via the memory what was conceived in time is retained. In the *Confessions* of Augustine in which he goes over his life, as well as the well known paragraphs about his youthful desires and the finding of faith, we can find several perspicuous observations about remembering, memory and forgetting. Augustine finds memory not just an expression of the fallibility of the human mind, but, unexpectedly, the discovery of the strength of remembering. When we say we have forgotten something, it actually means that we remember it, for we confirm thereby that there is something beneath, something that is temporarily hidden from us by the veil of experience that stops us from seeing that is beneath it. Forgetting tells us that this something is not lost forever "Great is this force of memory, excessive great, O my God; a large and boundless chamber! whoever sounded the bottom thereof?" asks Augustine and concludes: "yet is this a power of mine, and belongs unto my nature; nor do I myself comprehend all that I am".¹ Through revelation of the past, by an active participation in the creation of memory, Amela Frankl, seeking herself, once again bears witness to this mystery of man in time.

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¹ Confessions, Book 13.