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DESUBJECTIVATION AS TRANSFORMATION. ON BODILY PRESENT IN KARL SAKS' "PLANET ALEXITHYMIA"

In his „Antinomies of Realism“ (2013), a book on the poetics of literary realism, cultural and literary theorist Fredric Jameson usefully differentiates between emotion and affect. He redesignates „emotion“ as „named emotion“ and reserves the term affect for those bodily sensations and perceptions that somehow (still) resist symbolic language and meaning. For Jameson, emotion and affect also belong to different temporalities: „named emotion“ is carried by a „coherent“ subject that „meaningfully“ connects the past to the present and the present to the future, whereas affect belongs to pure bodily present of sensations and perceptions that somehow precede or underly subjectivity, symbolic language and meaning.

This presentation is a bystander's attempt to reappropriate Jameson's theoretical framework to describe the transformative effect of Karl Saks' „Planet Alexithymia“ – and by hypothetical extension, of possible other examples of contemporary performance art as well. I claim that the affective space and presence established in „Planet Alexithymia“ has the potential to reduce the viewer to pure bodily present, to a state that precedes language and meaning where subjectivity is temporarily dissolved or taken apart – and later put back together in a reconfigured way when the linguistic apparatus of symbolic meaning inevitably re-establishes itself. Thus, „Planet Alexithymia“ is a good example of how the affective dimension of (performance) art decisively contributes to what Jacques Rancière called the (re)distribution of the sensible – in other words, how it transforms the ways it is possible to perceive, think, say or do. Transgression, in this sense, is not social, psychological or physical, but ontological.

Biography

Jaak Tomberg is a co-professor of Contemporary Literature at the University of Tartu, Estonia. His research focuses on science fiction, utopia, and philosophy of literature. His two monographs focus on the poetics of Science Fiction, and his next one will be about utopian imagination. Besides research, he regularly writes literary criticism.