



I. CREATIVITY IN SOCIOCULTURAL CONTEXTS

PHILOSOPHY OF MATTER MANIPULATION IN BROTHERS QUAY' METAPHORICAL ANIMATION WORLD

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The paper deals with the concept of matter manipulation and its vitality in the Brothers Quay' works. The matter manipulation is not limited to the actual "matter". Brothers Quay perceive the acting "matters" as symbols and signs of human activities and relationships. For them, there is no fundamental difference between "matters" and living beings inhabiting their films. Matter manipulation is the process of "machine" production, reproduction, destruction, repair and deconstruction. The creation process acts as a magic spell, in which objects are transformed into something else. The *Street of Crocodiles* (1986) is an example of deep understanding of lifelessness as a mask, a kind of conspiracy, behind which unknown life forms hide. Brothers Quay' creative works tell us about autonomous existence of objects beyond their direct utilitarian purpose. The article will be devoted to such problems as synergistic vision of the world in which the material and the spiritual are inseparable. Despite the paradox of visual embodiment, it fits into a philosophical metatheory of the "new materialism", which transversely crosses streams of matter and mind, body and soul, nature and culture. The legacy of Brothers Quay open to us the world of ordinary, "banal" things, signs of time on their body shell, in contradiction with the dominance of endless consumption of new, intrusive advertising and cult of youth, in which there is no room for "sign of the times".

Keywords: animation, Brothers Quay, Central and Eastern Europe, Gilles Deleuze, machine, manipulation, matter, vitality.

Introduction

“A director makes only one movie in his life.
Then he breaks it up and makes it again”.

Jean Renoir

Brothers Quay (Stephen and Timothy), American directors and animators living in the United Kingdom came from the generation of the 1970s. An inspiration of their work has become the avant-garde culture of Eastern and Central Europe. Their works are filled with strange scenarios, parables about life and death; their films are full of literary, historical, mythological and philosophical allusions. Nearly all their works are one way or another connected with Central and Eastern Europe: they consider themselves successors of esoteric influences of Ladislav Starevich and Jiří Trnka, Valerian Borovchik, Czech surrealist animator Jan Švankmajer and, primarily, Bruno Schulz. In their cartoons, they work with the music of Igor Stravinsky and Krzysztof Penderecki, Leoš Janáček, Zdeněk Liška and Leszek Jankowski. The personality, literature and art of Schulz became a magical source of creative search to them. Following Schulz, they create their own Europe, which is filled with empty trams running off to nowhere, warehouses with unnecessary things and spare parts to them, revived handicraft tools that have become weapons in the hands of broken mannequins and revived dolls. Old clock, scissors grinder, movie projectors inspire horror and fear. All these “royal nullities” live in the Brothers Quay' movies.

Brothers Quay were born in Norristown, Pennsylvania in 1947. They enrolled in the Philadelphia College of Art and after graduating in 1969, they entered the Royal College of Art in London. They planned to stay in London for only 9 months to shoot the film, but eventually lingered here for almost 25 years. They shot their first short films in London; most of them have been lost. They conceive disappeared films as evidence of “lost time and forgotten moments”. Together with producer Keith Griffiths, they founded a studio *Atelier Koninck*, which has become a creative laboratory of surrealistic stop-motion animation. Simultaneously, they worked as designers of drama, opera and ballet performances, book covers and music records envelopes designs, matchbooks, posters, toys, dummies. They created a series of commercials and music video clips, including a series of *Silent Night* and Peter Gabriel video clip “Sledgehammer”, where they worked as animators. It seems that they tried to test themselves in every conceivable genre. For many years, when they practically had no possibility to shoot movies and had to literally survive, these “casual” works became a source of living for them. Nevertheless, everything what they touched immediately turned into a masterpiece (video clip “Sledgehammer” was announced by MTV as the most played music video in the history of the station).

Philosophy of matter manipulation

The concept of “matter manipulation”, as stated in the title, is not limited to the actual “matter”. Firstly, Brothers Quay perceive the acting “matters” as symbols and signs

of human activities and relationships, and secondly, for them there is no fundamental difference between “matters” and living beings inhabiting their films. The degree of spirituality of both “matters” and beings is nearly the same and they are deprived of acceptable attributes. These objects represent it as “pure difference in delivering it up to a *ground* <...> since the two coincide in this ground which is like a single and unique ‘total’ moment, simultaneously the moment of evanescence and production of difference, of disappearance and appearance” (Deleuze 1994: 42).

Brothers Quay’ manipulating “matters” as symbols of human actions, according to Gilles Deleuze’s works, fall in with the definition of cinema as “a taxonomy, an attempt at the classification of images and another signs” (Deleuze 1986: xiv). For Deleuze, movie, as such, is a different kind of practicing images and signs. The philosophy of cinema is an attempt “to turn the theory into a conceptual practice”. Similarly, Brothers Quay’ “conceptual practice” was filled with melancholy and despair. In an interview about the film *The Piano Tuner of Earthquakes* T. Quay notes that their “heroes” are unhappy or caught in some “elliptical cycle”. Brothers Quay themselves relate it to their literary preferences: Schulz, Franz Kafka, Robert Walser, etc. They cite the Walser’s words that can be applied to themselves: “I am there to be crazy, not to write”. When the reporter asked them during the interview: “Are the characters that appeal to you, literarily speaking, outsiders?”, they replied in unison: “The Losers. Absolutely”. The first full-length movie filmed by Brothers Quay and called *Institute Benjamenta* was based on Walser’s novel *Jakob von Gunten*. Argentine writer and literary critic Alan Pauls in the essay *Less Than Zero* notes that Walser, as well as the other “disobedient” to literary dogmas, used to always create something preferably anonymous, non-understandable and obscure, which would require only one thing from the writer: “come to naught”. The characters and matters from Brothers Quay’ movies are on this stage of “coming to naught”.

For the analysis of Brothers Quay creative works which, following Schulz’s statement that “lifelessness is only a camouflage”, it is necessary to refer to the definition of “machine” in its *Anti-Oedipus* interpretation. Matter manipulation is the process of “machine” production, reproduction, destruction, repair and deconstruction, in which the docking of “*conjunctions of flows*” constantly couples continuous flows and partial objects that are by nature fragmentary and fragmented” (Deleuze, Guattari 1987: 70). Deleuze and Félix Guattari give the example of a table which improves until it eventually turns into a monster and becomes “a dehumanized table” which lent itself to no function and self-protection. The vast majority of matters in films of Brothers Quay produce the same impression: tricycle, doll-baby implanted in the cranial cavity eye comb, old watches, projectors, cameras, scissors – none of these matters serves its traditional purpose any longer. Introducing the concept of “desiring machines”, Deleuze and Guattari endow them with an absurd property to work only in a broken state. This concept perfectly corresponds to the visual range of the Brothers Quay animation.

Suzanne Buchan in her book about Brothers Quay introduces the concept of “metaphysical playroom” which she considers an attempt “to resist unambiguous classification” (Buchan 2011: 52). In this “metaphysical playroom” both organic life and

inorganic nature find themselves as having universal will to become supreme reality. According to her, the philosophy of vitalism is organically included in the context of mystical hyperrealism. Re-interpreting metaphysics in terms of vitalism, Buchan emphasizes that universal will is the driving force behind all manifestations of organic as well as inorganic life. From her point of view, it allows the “banal events and objects to convert into holiday and simultaneously penetrates the hidden life of objects” (Buchan 2011: 33–34).

Brothers Quay' emotional and visual atmosphere starts to be a symbol and sign of matter manipulation not only in cinema and in animation. To them, matter manipulation is a mirror image of the real everyday life, human relations and actions, in which life and lifelessness are only a visual camouflage.

In search of inspiration: Schulz and matter manipulation

The phenomenon of the impact of Schulz on the work of Brothers Quay cannot be considered in isolation from their engagement in the arts and culture of Central Europe between the two World Wars. Regardless of the obvious impact of Kafka's and Walser's books and diaries, the Polish writer and artist Schulz took a special place in Brothers Quay' works. Their animated film *Street of Crocodiles*, based on a novel by Schulz, was a masterpiece, their “everyday mythological ascension”. The film recreated Schulz's mythical universe and simultaneously enabled the authors to investigate and bring to the screen their own creative ideas, which they called “rubble futility”. Brothers Quay passed the moods and emotions, which occupied Schulz's text. The atmosphere of a shopping street with a lot of show – windows, signboards and advertisements – is a prototype of the modern urban landscape, in which degradation of crafts and human relations developed. The action takes place somewhere in the Polish province between the two World Wars, when the towns reminded of living creatures, and people resembled the “walking dead”.

At a glance, it seems that the visual range of the film is far from the Schulz's text, but this is the case when artists follow the spirit rather than the letter. Nevertheless, the film shows city as “diverse architectonic polyphony”, and the *Street of Crocodiles* – only as “outskirts of country of unsure existence”, “ephemeral society”, which is full of incorporeal and spineless creatures. The population of this town consists of half-dead people with empty heads that walk in circles as if wound up, simulating different kinds of activities. *Street of Crocodiles* and other movies bring forth to our imagination the world of aberrations that exists outside everyday reality. *Street of Crocodiles* is a “stylized universe”, a system that includes vitalism, hyperrealism and Deleuzian conceptualization of space and time. Buchan notes that directors, creating their cinematic space, consciously construct a spatial logic of “*direct connections between discontinuous space*” where familiar forms are placed in a narrative field with unfamiliar ones” (Buchan 2011: 137).

The process of creation acts as a magic spell, in which objects are transformed into something else. Collected from disparate parts and matters (rusty bolts, dust, scissors,

matted hair, metal chips, pins and other “dead nature”), the objects only inspire fear. The visual range of *Street of Crocodiles* largely coincides not only with the same story by Schulz, but also with his frescoes and paintings. Grotesque figures of street inhabitants, or even entire microcosm, are similar to the above-described monster puppets and sand men in the spirit of E. A. T. Hoffmann.

The doll associated with the protagonist creaks with rusty hinges and bolts, which lead to the mechanical movement of its awkward body. The attempt of the puppeteer to liberate the doll with the help of rusty scissors giving it the illusory freedom to move in space looks as violence committed on the doll, and, at the same time, it is an attempt to breathe new life into a phantom providing it with autonomy from the man. This can be seen as both concession to forces of entropy and relocation of matter (exchange of heads, body parts). Deleuze calls this kind of phenomena in cinema “a very specific fury world”. Brothers Quay explain their attention to the so-called “disadvantaged objects” (the old clock, toys, household items) by presence of memory in them: “history is something they’ve brushed up against, and they hold all of history in their bodies” (Smith 2007).

The film *Street of Crocodiles* is filled with meaningless ritual acts, such as constant strange rhythmic movement, twitching, disintegration of inanimate forgotten matters. Brothers Quay warn that lifelessness is only a mask, a kind of conspiracy, behind which unknown life forms hide. Schulz reiterated that there is no dead nature. Brothers Quay’ dolls and phantoms are not dead; instead, they have a temporary, short-lived and unstable nature. On the *Street of Crocodiles*, the laws of nature are canceled: the acts of creation and evolution are replaced by the spontaneous act of self-creation. Polish writer Olga Tokarczuk notes that in this artificial world an act of self-creation is a mysterious phenomenon. The acts of “spontaneous” self-generation cohere with the process of cinema production and create a mystical, though at the same time physically perceivable world in which nothing is surprising.

In 2001, in an interview with Roberto Aita about the history of acquaintance with Schulz’s works, Brothers Quay gave a detailed description of Schulz’s spiritual influence on their animation. When they read the works of this “Polish Kafka” for the first time, they were not particularly impressed by the author. The second reading, however, helped them to understand animation as a type of metaphysics. “Thirteenth month of the year” is a metaphor that adapts itself well to the animation that lives on the margins of mainstream production. They explain that they want animation to be like a mark on the margins, grand Apocrypha, in the same sense as Schulz’s novels are (Aita 2001). Walter Benjamin, speaking about the works of Walser, emphasizes that it is not “the nervous decadent tension”, but the pure and lively mood of convalescent life (Benjamin 2005–2006). These words can be attributed to the Brothers Quay’ movies.

James Fiumara believes that the creative connection between Schulz’s and the Brothers Quay’ aesthetics has created one of the most unusual and original movie in the history of cinema. In 2010, Brothers Quay first reported about their new plan to “revolt against banality”: their intention was to make a feature film based on the book

by Schulz. *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass* will combine live actors' play with puppet animation. A maze of sanatorium corridors will be space wherein action takes place in the parallel timelike dimension. These plans are not yet fulfilled due to the financial difficulties; what is important is that once again they revert to Schulz.

It is necessary to emphasize that Brothers Quay, being avant-garde and celestial in all areas of their work, constantly declare in public their love for the spiritual teachers from the Eastern and Central Europe. Their pantheon, of which they are proud, includes those who have been infected with a literal pessimism strain (Kafka, Walser, Schulz). S. Quay calls such literature a library or a kind of "niche oddities". Fiumara defines Brothers Quay' creative works as "degraded aesthetics of reality", which embodies the Central European literature and cinema: the existential expressionism of Edvard Munch, the distorted reality of Francis Bacon, the style of early silent films, Švankmajer's cinematic surrealism, the industrial decline landscapes and David Lynch's pathological abnormalities.

In August 2012 – January 2013 MoMA (New York) hosted a retrospective exhibition "Quay Brothers: On Deciphering the Pharmacist's Prescription for Lip-Reading Puppets". In a book published for the opening of the exhibition, Edwin Carels, summarizing their contribution to the philosophical vision of modern world, formulates it as follows: "their animation opens his audience that the intervals are connected by bridges, parallel lines may be stopped, and all the meanings and feelings confused" (Magliozzi, Carels 2012: 19).

One gets the feeling that on the heels of Schulz, Brothers Quay did not attach so much importance to the films and literary works as to the fact that art is history of events of paradoxical perception and experience of reality that are merely provoked by its development.

Interview: we and I

Interview is usually not a favorite genre of creative people. Throughout their productive years, Brothers Quay gave so many interviews that the book consisting exclusively of them would become a full encyclopedia of the artistic process of the two directors of animation. Their interviews resemble a presentation of their creative credo and art history in general with a deep excursion into every topic under discussion. As previously mentioned, they are eager to talk about their predecessors in the genre of animation, names of world literature and cinema as sources of their inspiration, drawing such parallels with cultural phenomena that art historians and cinema critics might have never detected. Brothers Quay not only through their work, but also via interviews secured themselves in the context of primarily European cinema, literature and music. Their endless repetition of names and works seemed to breathe new life into sometimes little-known or even marginal names. Many times they returned those names to the Czechs, Poles, Austrians, and fit them into the modern and postmodern context. "We" is their favorite pronoun in an interview. They note that in the creative process they do not seek to take each other's imagination. The Brothers Quay' imagination is predominantly taken by the topic of "Other" or even a "double". In general, it is close

to the concept of Michel Foucault. Deleuze in his book *Foucault* notes that a double is considered not as a projection of the internal, but rather as the internalization of the external. The principle of two mirrors means that each of them turns a mirror not as much at himself or another, but rather back to life. In fact, they have stressed it many times that life for them is primarily literature and libraries are their temples. Although, in these libraries they are mostly interested in their bottom drawer. Their films, they also relate to those works of art that are to be placed in that “bottom drawer”. In conversation, they do not just end up one another’s phrases, but always use the collective pronoun “we”. “Who better than identical twins can feel with the other?”. As if entering a dialogue with the hero named Felisberto from their animated film *The Piano Tuner of Earthquakes*, they do not consider that the words “I like living in someone else’s fantasy” refer to them. They rate their work together as “the pit of our collective imagination”. Assessing their education in the field of animation, graphic design, illustration and painting, they define it as a peripheral that, in their opinion, does not allow them to “ask our dolls say”. They simultaneously push a completely different argument in favor of their silence: it sets the images free and motivates the viewers’ imagination to interpret. In this sense, animation for them is more like ballet, where choreographer sets the rhythm, but there is no dialogue.

In an interview with Taylor Jessen Brothers Quay emphasize that their films are based not as much on the laws of drama as on the laws of music. Verbalization is of biggest trouble to them, the powerful range of emotions simply does not fit into words. “We are the other people”, they say about themselves. An analogue of their wordlessness was found in the works of Luis Buñuel – in his film *Un Chien Andalou* (from French: *An Andalusian Dog – author’s remark*) in particular, where everything has been said in the images and music. “It was what most impressed us”. Buchan also notes that this is what they owe their attachment to silent cinema to, which is also reflected in a more common gesture instead of a dialogue, comparison and image composition instead of the continuity of the narrative.

For Brothers Quay, the “us and me” self-realization and its public demonstration are in a way a part of the manipulation process, in which they use the philosophy of manipulation of the material and non-material that they have already mastered in their film works. Behind the outward appearance of the two directors’ ease in relationship, uniformity of thought and sensation, as well as their formal resemblance, the difference between their intentions, creative approaches and methods in achieving the striking cinematographic and, on the whole, creative results is not always visually exposed and articulated.

Conclusions

The Brothers Quay’ creative works tell us about autonomous existence of objects beyond their direct utilitarian purpose. This vision of the world in which the material and the spiritual are inseparable, despite the paradox of visual embodiment, fits into the philosophical metatheory of “new materialism”, which transversely crosses streams of matter and mind, body and soul, nature and culture. There is a process of self-organ-

ization which, in the words of Manuel De Landa, with an intense force of morphogenesis generates all the structures that surround us. The Brothers Quay' emotional and visual atmosphere begins to be a symbol and sign of matter manipulation not only in arts: by them, matter manipulation is a specular reflection of everyday life and human actions in which life and lifelessness are only a visual camouflage. The legacy of Brothers Quay open to us the world of ordinary, "banal" things, signs of time on their body shell, in contradiction with the dominance of endless consumption of new, intrusive advertising and cult of youth, in which there is no room for "sign of the times".

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MANIPULIAVIMO MATERIJA FILOSOFIJA BROLIŲ QUAY METAFORINIAME ANIMACIJOS PASAULYJE

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Santrauka

Straipsnio objektas – manipuliavimo materija ir jos vitališkumo koncepcija brolių Quay darbuose. Manipuliacija materija neapsiriboja tikrąja „materija“. Broliai Quay veikiančiąją „materiją“ supranta kaip žmonių veiklos bei santykių simbolius ir ženklus. Jų manymu, nesama esminio skirtumo tarp „materijos“ ir gyvų būtybių jų filmuose. Manipuliacija materija – tai „mašininio“ produkcijos, reprodukcijos, destrukcijos, taisyso ir dekonstravimo procesas. Kūrybos procesas – tai tarsi magiškas akimirksnis, kurio metu objektai transformuojami į kažką kita. *Krokodilų gatvė* – tai neįvybingumo kaip kaukės,

tam tikros konspiracijos, anapus kurios glūdi nepažintojo gyvenimo formos, gilaus supratimo pavyzdys. Brolių Quay kūrybos darbai byloja apie autonomišką objektų egzistenciją anapus jų tiesioginių utilitarinių tikslų. Straipsnis skirtas tokioms problemoms, kaip sinergetinis pasaulio, kuriame materija ir dvasia yra neatsiejamos, matymas. Nepaisant vizualiojo įkūnijimo paradokso, jis pritaikomas „naujojo materializmo“ filosofinei metateorijai. „Naujasis materializmas“ skersai išilgai kerta materijos ir sąmonės, kūno ir sielos, gamtos ir kultūros klotus. Brolių Quay palikimas atveria įprastinių, „banalių“ daiktų pasaulį, laiko ženklus jų kūniškumo lentynoje, visa tai priešpastatydamas neišsenkančiam naujosios įkyrios reklamos ir jaunystės kulto vartojimo dominavimui – pastarojo sąlygomis nesama vietos „laiko ženklų“ kambariui.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: animacija, broliai Quay, Vidurio ir Rytų Europa, Gilles'is Deleuze'as, mašina, manipuliavimas, medžiaga, vitališkumas.