

Review of *Broken Theory*

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Mandelstam wrote on “the awareness of a minute’s power”, which almost certainly stands for a minute’s power of awareness. Sondheim expands this minute towards the limits of logical and syntactic structures, establishing language as rather a studio, or a room, than a home of being. This temporary residence belongs to someone else, furnished for the purposes of others. Perhaps, language is burglar: it breaks into the residence – the apartment – of being. How much can it carry?

“Reading itself becomes suspect” – but we’re not sure if writing is, since everything writes with whatever is available. Writing is – out of necessity – honest, open, bottom line of thinking. On paper, digital or otherwise, claim coincides with the truth behind it. Writing cannot be verified without addressing facts that are reflected by writing. Facts, in the meantime, are not there: everything changes in the process of writing, as if writing itself was changing this – was the change. Sondheim’s agenda is the agenda of outside, his writing is *on* the world. His speech strives to reach the other side of the “blank wall”, the other side of paper. Bunin wrote “Everything is within me, and I am within everything”, but this transition never goes smoothly. Language and reality communicate in a manner that resembles Morse code. Sondheim reveals

procedures of thinking in their technical side, frames thinking on the run, captures a thought that is unready to end. What would be the end? Sondheim gives many parallel structures, as lists, giving us a hint: end of a thought is a verbal pattern. Only way to reach the other side of the wall is to keep a phrase – a thought – unready, and Sondheim redirects his thinking outside.

To be *on* something means to be on the surface of something, but this is not the case with *Broken Theory*: it's rather about being on the verge of something. World is on tip of the tongue, and vice versa. In the meantime, thinking is in the meantime: *Broken Theory* starts from the middle (with analyzing a corpus of texts), "thinking through the world", inhabiting the enormous, densely inhabited space. "That is inconceivable... that anything can be said", one would add – that anything *still* can be said, have a solid floor – a ground – to be claimed. The book sums certain things up, but if summing up outlines shapes or borders of phenomena – it sums nothing up, it adds to the already uncertain boundaries of thoughts and events.

The book is an event, a case: unframed and uncovered, it proceeds through pages and chapters, rooting itself deeper into the inconceivable initial experience. Sondheim writes: "Does experience always translate in text?", while he's making each text an experience: this is important. Does an experience translate into another experience, does it persist, and to what extent? While concentrated on elusive, transparent and invisible states, texts in *Broken Theory* are very focused on their subjects; this focus is rooted in concern and anxiety, and more – urgency of the matter. If this book is a testimony, it's a strange testimony, written from the middle of experience and coinciding with experience. Text *is* experience – sometimes interrupted, often vague, but each time – vital. In a way, text spirals deeper into its own syntax, but this doesn't spare it from the surface – the world that the text is on.

Being breaks into language; pages are holey with meanings. Text is a texture – background for the losses. In the meantime, marks both precede and outlive their meanings. Our birthdays are prescheduled for years when we'll be gone – Sondheim's Birthday in year 5000 will be Monday (mine – Tuesday). Likewise, there were Birthdays before the birth.

People share their temporariness with meanings. Meaning remains human.

Words remain human. Human remains.

Sondheim's writing is subject-oriented phenomenology. Unlike object-oriented "long lists" by Harman, Bogost and others, his lists are often lists of losses: "destroyed villages, torn flesh, mutilated faces". Like some of his texts (for instance, the one that ends with "m" instead of "me"), these lists seem to have no end - both abrupt and endless. End is technical: it's not supported by urgency within a mechanism. End is the outer necessity, being breaking into the textual. End shapes all that precedes: "what is visible has been killed".

Body is text: "the body is a collocation of scars". Body is texted. Body breaks into, and is broken into: "This is a form of giving, this devouring". This exchange is internal, and it constitutes economy of drama – written coinciding with the read, output of experience matching with input in terms of its value, but not quite – in the essence. "Blank wall" of living is balance between the felt and the written. This balance is never complete, and – negotiating continues: Broken Theory contains dialogues, and, in broad sense, acting. Enactment: slices of code, commands, words to execute rather than describe. Bottom lines of writing: writing-presence.

Matter is retained by writing in a form of writing, loss is retained in a form of loss: *Broken Theory* reclaims practice

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