‘As Gertrude Stein never said, a tongue is a tongue is a tongue is a tongue ...’

STANLEY G.
2017
Tongues are muscularities through time
a licking and tasting and contemplation of authority and power simultaneously inside and outside needing moisture entering the conversation or not sometimes tongues are about being silent or being silenced or forcefully inserting a voice or purposefully shutting up
these tongues are virtually indestructible jesmonite soft messengers for the future haunting the future communicating the incommunicable pleasure dismemberment connection expression and a being quiet
(hold that tongue)
In *Decolonising the Mind: the Politics of Language in African Literature* (1986, p.9), Kenyan author Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o writes:

Berlin of 1884 was effected through the sword and the bullet. But the night of the sword and the bullet was followed by the morning of the chalk and the blackboard. The physical violence of the battlefield was followed by the psychological violence of the classroom. ... The bullet was the means of the physical subjugation. Language was the means of the spiritual subjugation.
For Thiong’o, ‘Language as culture is the collective memory bank of a people’s experience in history’ (1986, p. 15), and, it is this epistemological rupture and trauma that the tongues seem to address, though initially they erupted as dream objects.

In 2015 in Harare, after a conversation during a tea-break with mbira-player and singer Hope Masike and clown performer Chipo Chikara, we spoke about censorship and having to be careful of what one utters in the Zimbabwean context. I wake up the following morning with this image: the walls have tongues.

Back in Stockholm, filmmaker and PhD colleague Mia Engberg describes the wall as a ‘dyke gloryhole’ and I warm more and more to this idea, the way it centralises womxn’s sensual pleasure. It makes me think of Baubo and the erotic as Audre Lorde describes it, as being a source of womxn’s power:

The erotic is a resource within each one of us that lies in a very deeply female and spiritual plane. It is firmly rooted in the power of all our unexpressed and unrecognized feelings. ... The erotic is a measure between the beginnings of our sense of self and the chaos and power of our deepest feeling. ... The dichotomy between the spiritual and the political is false, resulting from an incomplete attention to our erotic knowledge ... the erotic is the nurturer or nursemaid of our deepest knowledge.

2 Audre Lorde reads ’Uses of the Erotic’ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xFHwg6aNKy0 (accessed 14 August 2018).
I sculpt the tongues in 'profuslina' and sculptor Pelle Åkerström forges them in jesmonite, Bergman Konstgjuteri AB in Stockholm. Photos: Stacey Sacks

the Walls Have Tongues or Peace the Old Fashioned Way. Multi-media installation at the Research Pavilion, Venice Biennale, Utopia of Access, 2017. Photo: Stacey Sacks
Tongues are political.

During an interview with Tuija Liikanen, Senior Lecturer of Body and Movement Interpretation in the Acting Department of Stockholm University of the Arts, she shares with me the fact that she’s had several surgical procedures performed on her tongue. Liikanen ignites a new understanding for me, about tongues potentially being connected with the ways one orients oneself in the world, with directionalities. When part of her tongue was cut away, she shares how she needed to re-orientate her sense of which way was ‘forward’, almost as if the tongue is both an inner and an outer compass directing how we face the world, a registering of both ‘front’ and ‘off-centre’. Is the tongue connected with balance too? The tongues I construct reinforce the singularity/situatedness/specificity of the subjective experience but I am hoping they also explore its potential plasticity in a field of forces.

Artist-researcher Sher Doruff (2016, p.486) writes that Felix Guattari placed orality at the intersection of simplicity and complexity. Judith Butler (1993, p.xii) describes performativity as ‘that reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains’. Tongues are deep-throat connectors to notions of discursivity and silencing.

They provide access as much as they bind.

They collapse and multiply complexities.

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3. The interview took place on 16 April 2019 at Valhallavägen 189, Stockholm.
tongue exercise

stick your tongue out your mouth
push it further
feel the deep pull
and stretch
keep it out until it goes dry
until the discomfort becomes unbearable
BLANK offers to sculpt your 'tongue'

TONGUE SCULPTURE
DONE HERE.
Enquiry below
Signatures of Civilization, a temporary sculpture, Valhallavägen Studio, 2018.
'... as Marx never said, tongue is a real movement which abolishes the present state of things ...'

STANLEY G.
2017
From hanging out in online forums I’ve learnt quite a lot about tongues. There’s something I quietly enjoy about the Swedish public paying me to research tongue-ing but my advice is, if you can avoid it, don’t google images of tongues, you’ll see things you’d wish to un-see.

Tongues emerge as an important element of my excavations into plasticity, power, animation and the speech act. Have you tried talking without a tongue? What are we using these magnificent, taken-for-granted muscles for?

For me, tongues are also an encounter with deep time and origins. In Vilnius, Lithuania, at one of the amber museums, I witness a one-day fly trapped in deep orange amber. A one-day fly perfectly immortalised in tree resin for millions of years, a sublimely trapped stash of infinite knowledge and mystery. Amber captures the history of life, it is a mummifying propolis trapping plants and animals in frozen moments for tens of millions of years. It makes me think of humanity’s precarious and arbitrary existence, compared with all that came before. In Walter Benjamin’s essay “Theses on the Philosophy of History” (1968/1940, p.263), he shares:

‘In relation to the history of organic life on earth,’ writes a modern biologist, ‘the paltry fifty millennia of homo sapiens constitute something like two seconds at the close of a twenty-four-hour day. On this scale, the history of civilized mankind would fill one-fifth of the last second of the last hour.’
Animals with tongues have them because they evolved from a common ancestor that had a tongue, and it did not impede their ability to survive. Most fish and their descendants have tongues but arthropods, insects, arachnids, myriapods, worms, jellyfish, anemones, corals, crustaceans, mollusks (clams, snails, squids, octopuses), not to mention trees, lack tongues. It makes me wonder, how and why were these bodies excluded from this fleshy lump of muscularity?
REFERENCES


