

## Dejan Atanackovic: Golem Project

It seems that the ritual of creating a golem, as described in ancient writings (*Sefer Yetzira*) does not have a specific practical purpose. It was only in the 16th century that the creation of the Golem of Prague had to serve the purpose of protecting the ghetto. More likely, the creation of a golem is strictly an educational act, some sort of a thesis, a final exam that a student of Kabbalah needs to pass. It is a demonstration of power that is hidden inside the language (the letters of Jewish alphabet are considered as elementary particles of the world, both the substance and the instrument of creation). The Golem legend is a story about the mystical use of language, a language in which every single part is a carrier of (coherent) meaning. In the interpretation of what is written, every syllable - of Torah or Talmud - contains the sense and substance of God's name. In a way, the story of golem regards an attempt of man to defy nature, through an (incomplete) imitation of Godly act, by acquainting *order, syntax, diction, code* (nowadays, many of these linguistic terms are part of terminology used to describe the DNA structure) and gaining knowledge of or within language that in the last instance endows one with the ability to create artificial, soul-less life forms. At the point when such power happens to be materialized (and this materialization is strictly anthropometrical) as a rule, the educated ones understand that certain faculties of language are not meant to be abused.

Thus, the creation of a golem in older versions of the legend is followed by the immediate (self) destruction of the creature. Most often, golem is mute, although in some cases it is he who verbally warns the people of the evil they committed by creating him. The Hebrew word *golem*, which stands for a shapeless mass, appears in a single passage of the Old Testament. In Psalm 139.16 (*Lord, Thou hast searched me and known me...*) the word *golem* refers to the state of man (Adam), a moment before he was endowed, through his nostrils, with a soul. The legend of the golem of Prague, which remained a part not only of Jewish tradition, but a part of central European imaginary world, particularly developed in German Romanticism, among all previously mentioned aspects has maintained the idea of guilt, wrong-doing, and abuse of knowledge. In the folk tales collected by brothers Grimm, a golem will smash his creator at the moment when the latter will try to erase a life endowing word from golem's forehead. Later on, in a somewhat different world, at the beginning of the XX century, Gustav Meyrink will transform the golem legend into a novel (*Der Golem*) about a society contaminated by anxieties, concealed hatred and resentments, over which a phantasmagoric figure of the golem is rising upon. Here, golem is, at the same time, the narrator himself, a man without memories, as well as a mystic body formed by collective fears.

In the Yugoslav wars (1991-1999) the problem of imposed identification led to a particular form of idolatry in which none of the traditional or civic values were spared from reevaluation. The creation of an imaginary golem, of the national language and geography, took place as a mythic re-design of the national being: in the rhetorical discourse, specially in one so filled with patriotic and historical references, the national state was often compared to an enormous anthropometrical body, of which the range of mountains was the back-bone, the rivers were veins and arteries, while the significant historical and religious locations were the heart. In this case, greatness was needed in order to enclose an entire country in a unique body, instinct and reason, and therefore in a unique, common and equally divided guilt. It's interesting to note that this rather archaic reasoning was efficiently carried forward through electronic media and therefore was part of an essentially technological and partly interactive process, the result of which was the forming of - through language - the images of greatness and of the union between the earth and the body.

In the aesthetic analyses, the idea of greatness (magnitude) may be related to the rhetoric of the sublime, an aesthetic category particularly observed in the late XVIII century, in the dawn of the Romanticism and the awakening of the nations. In the writings of Kant and Burke, the sublime is associated with powerful emotional states, with the greatness that provokes fear and the minuteness (of

man) that entails melancholy: it is the sublimity by which those spiritual experiences that regard a relation between man and God, and man and destiny, are strongly pronounced. It is, however, important to emphasize the importance of one element of mediation - a *distance* from which the experience of marvel or horror may be translated into an aesthetic experience (sublime). Therefore, from this safe distance, man's stature is measured out in front of the immensity of mountains and oceans, human life is observed in the terms of fleeing time. The English garden, an example of this now fashionable thought, appears to be left to causality, proposing instead accurately built landscapes to represent the mystery of nature, including traces of a remote human presence, of carcasses, abandoned monuments and grotesque figures. Out of the pages of gothic novels, we see the creeping out of ghosts, vampires and the very creature of Frankenstein, fruit of a 'modern' Prometheus, a rather evident counterpart of Paracelsus' homunculus, or of the kabbalist golem.

In the times that followed, through the regimes and ideologies of the XX century, we can suppose that the balance is shifting, that the center of the sublime experience is physically moving into the cement constructions and metaphysical desert of the industrial and technological society. In the condition of loneliness of the cities of millions, contaminated and paranoid peripheries, and bureaucratically deformed destinies, the power stepped out from its institutions into lives, language and habits of subjects, readily and naturally satisfying the man's desire of frightened veneration and inferiority in front of an authoritarian principle.

Bearing in mind its rhetorical applicability (sublime, as aesthetic category is, after all, an off-spring of classical rhetoric) it is not hard to find a connection between the aesthetics of the sublime and totalitarian, propagandistic practices (socialist iconography and architecture, political speech, media) as well as to recognize a particular language of power with the goal of controlling man's innate response to a higher authority.

In the year 1920, Paul Wegener will accomplish one of the most important works of German expressionist cinema in which the golem will be overwhelmed by romantic tragedy and thus promoted into a very peculiar emotional personality. Some time later, this author will become, along with Leni Riefenstahl, one of the leading activists of nazi-propaganda cinematography. Golem, in the tales of I. B. Singer and Elie Wiesel will remain a tragic metaphor of resistance and sufferings of the Jewish people. The *Golem Project* is dedicated to responsibility. The responsibility, in this case may be interpreted as coherence, or better as that human quality which a man kills consciously and in silence, knowing, in the depth of his soul, the results of his doing, even when he claims the contrary. Every day, somewhere in the world a new and invisible golem is being formed, sculpted by collective fears and anxieties, egotism or ambition, individual (and specialized) desire for power.