

First published as blogtext by **Jennie Klein** for **RAPID PULSE#5 Performance festival**.

PETER BAREN Chicago 2016

Peter Baren's performance from his newest series *Blind Dates With The History Of Mankind (Rage and Time)* addressed politics as well, albeit in a less literal, more metaphorical manner. The performance, which takes its name from Baren's book of the same title, references a history of revolutionary ideas and actions. Originally trained as a painter and visual artist, and also with a background in theatre productions, Baren created a Gesamtkunstseffekt, or total artwork that involves all of the senses in a transdisciplinary spectacle of movement, language, text, and texture.

Baren's *Blind Dates With The History Of Mankind* addressed political language. In this case, it was the Socialist/Marxist language of the avant-garde. *Blind Dates* grew out of the Ark series. These performances, which harked back to the spectacles of the [Vienna Actionists/Hermann Nitsch](#), included fog, saran wrapped performers, dervishes/dancers, blindfolded performers (including Baren), molasses, and mopping the floor. *Blind Dates With The History Of Mankind* drew specifically upon several of Baren's earlier works, including *Ark: Featuring Blind Dates, Orphaned Whisperings And Other Unknown Pleasures* from 2007-12 and *Blind Dates With the History of Mankind* (Venice, Italy 2013—the first performance in the BDWTHOM series). The former included a man, eyes covered with a censor bar reading while riffling Peter Sloterdijk's *Zorn und Zeit* (Rage and Time), in which Sloterdijk characterized rage as a psycho political force throughout history, while the latter distilled the earlier pieces into a molasses stained white shirt which Baren carried along with a texted wirra (Australian boomerang) for four days.

BDWTHOM (Rage and Time) began with Baren's trademark fog. Entering the space, Baren, his eyes covered with a black censor bar, wrote the word Hope on the floor, in several languages, making a kind of spoked wheel-like diagram. "KEEP YOUR VACUUMS CLEAN!" (1) was heard during the process. Periodically Baren would lead other performers into the space, at first two saran-wrapped and molasses drenched runners (PROGRESS PROGRESS), who move sideways alongside the asclepius (infinity sign) until clashing into each other, until the next clash, again and again.

Next a figure, also with censor bar, in a suit who moved from spoke to spoke and read riffled fragments from *Rage and Time*. Shuffling from one spot to the next one, after every repetitive action this figure would finish the fragment with bringing the book towards the face and a deep sigh was produced. A (string of) white handkerchief(s) was pulled out of the chestpocket, one by one. At the end of performance the string ended up on the floor. When one of the runners would be in front of the reader while speaking aloud, this figure would intensify running on the spot until no more text was exclaimed... and continued sideways again.

"NOS, O POVO CEGO?!" (translated: ARE WE THE BLIND PEOPLE?! (2)) was heard in between actions. Last a sock clad whirling dervish was lead in to rotate slower and faster on the spot.

The performance ended when the man in the suit had completed the circle of spokes. Baren led the running figures out of the space first, then the reader and as last figure the dervish.

Baren's performance concluded with a meditation on labor, ideas and political action. The audience began to clap, but it turned out that the performance had not yet ended—Baren returned with a mop and bucket, exhorting again the audience to consider "PEOPLE HAVE THE POWER!" (3) while cleaning up the mess. Dripping molasses, sweat, politics, rage and frustration—all was mopped up at the end, cleaned up and sanitized. But can rage, politics and revolution be so easily washed away with the sweep of a mop? The answer is NO. Baren emphasized his refusal to capitulate by singing aloud "THERE IS A GARDEN AT THE BOTTOM!" (4) when the mop and stained shirt were held up. As the audience huffed around, moving in and out of the space, unsure of whether or not the performance had ended and no doubt hoping to be included in the festivities that followed the final performance, Baren stood alone, continuing to insist that he will keep texting on!

(1) "KEEP YOUR VACUUMS CLEAN!" Songline by Nasmak

(2) "NOS, O POVO CEGO?!/ARE WE THE BLIND PEOPLE?!" Songline by Moyseis Margues

(3) "PEOPLE HAVE THE POWER!" Titlesong by Patti Smith

(4) "THERE IS A GARDEN AT THE BOTTOM!" Songline by [The Associates](#)