



PHILIPP GUFLER'S "ZIRKELTRAUM [CIRCLE DREAM]"

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Memory is like a relay. It can activate all emotions, both experienced and imagined ones. New impressions of unfamiliar places can transform into experiences that can, with the help of memory, repeat older experiences, like the restaging of an event. This is how the [*Circle Dream*] describes a phenomena derived from ethnography: it is through the unfamiliar that the researcher experiences the constructed nature of his or her own. At his first solo exhibition for Françoise Heitsch, Philipp Gufler examines the socio-political conditions under which activities of memory emerge, including the identity-shaping narratives at play in the history of AIDS.

I Topography of Memory

Philipp Gufler's screen prints *Room for Artlovers (Modernes Rom [Modern Rome])* and *Room for Artlovers (Antikes Rom [Ancient Rome])* ape the suggestive powers and spatial formations of a portrait gallery. The template for this is the diptych "Ancient Rome" and "Modern Rome" by Giovanni Paolo Pannini, created for the French ambassador as a means of remembering his departure from the city in 1757. The sights of Rome and the poles of "ancient" and "modern" are grouped in a bipolar and artificial manner. Gufler reduces splendid painting galleries to black and white, compresses fictitious vedutas onto rectangular surfaces, erasing an enormous amount of information. The image carriers cease to act as switch points for memory, imagination or an exteriorized memory, but become records that reveal the patterns of representation and representability. It is through this reduction and subtraction that Gufler grasps the authoritarian gesture of representation present within the image. He positions himself both inside and outside of it.

II Memory and Einschreibungen

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Variations of repetition characterize the serial production of art. As is common in serial production, “what is represented” is pushed into the background, giving “how it is represented” a more crucial stance. In his series of screen prints, Gufler explores a spectrum of colours ranging from blue to red. Applied onto a mirror, the colours are not absorbed by the material. The physicality of the colour and its emotional register assume an independent existence.

This mirror screen print series is combined with detailed titles. Extensive excerpts from Hubert Fichte’s novel “Hanged Men’s Square” form the title of the series. They are collaged together with words, sentences, passages from the work of other authors and Gufler’s own notes and records. The combination of heterogeneous themes, text genres, writing styles, syntax constructions and vocabularies slow down their readability. Gufler entangles seeing with reading and the unreadable. He stresses the “what” through his use of the serial form; meanwhile, the mirror – hidden beneath layered pigments – highlights the “where” and doubles the space on a semantic level.

The artist is strongly influenced by author and ethnographer Johann Gottlieb Fichte and his critique of representation. Fichte’s approach to research, self-questioning and writing style are vividly apparent in the titles of Gufler’s series:

Where am I, when I write?

Here or there or in the centre or nowhere?

Yet: Life is a dream?

The nocturnal journey?

Circle dream?

To circumcise oneself with broken mirror shards.

The hermaphrodite.

Reflecting.

Becoming a Fata Morgana on the journey.

Between dream and dream.

Inaccuracy, self-perception and memory in Gufler and Fichte are an expression of emancipation from attempts at social normalisation.

III Forgetting, Repression, Remembering

In the 80s, the narrative surrounding AIDS was concerned not just with questions of medicine, but also ones of social politics and everyday homophobia. Many relatives of those who died as a result of AIDS refused to provide them with a dignified funeral. In June 1987, the reminder project “NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt” was initiated in San Francisco, that aims to establish a form of obsequy between private and public spaces in an attempt to ensure the deceased are not forgotten.

Gufler designed a quilt each for Munich-based author and gay activist Gustl Angstmann and singer and performer Klaus Nomi, who both died of AIDS, titled *Quilt III (Gustl Angstmann)* and *Quilt IV (Klaus Nomi)*. The varied use of materials and the applied form of valediction chosen for them follow the principles of repetition and the series, of condensation and interruption.

IV Survivors

Gufler’s own skin becomes the screen in *Portrait als Krise [Portraiture as Crisis]* in order to depict the controversial AIDS discourse. Lying in his bedroom, European awareness campaigns, feature film sequences, newspaper headlines and soundtracks about his own body conforming to no linear chronology are projected upon Gufler’s naked body. These projected time frames fragment his anatomy, with his face, his stomach, or his highlighted while the rest of his body disappears in the surrounding darkness or remains exterior to the scene due to his editing techniques. His movements in the bed undulate and break the

smooth projection. His body simultaneously becomes both archival screen and at the same time counter archive, whose movement disturbs the acts of arranging, classifying and objectifying. Many of the motifs seen in the video are derived from his extensive research into the AIDS crisis of 1980s' Munich, conducted at the gay and lesbian archive "forum homosexualität münchen e.V. [forum homosexuality munich (registered association)]." This simple stylistic device – projection – renders his own body as an image, which reflects over other images and consequently analyses their impact. Somewhere in between the body, the image, the body image, and sense of time, memories emerge. They tell of pain and anger, shame and fear, of love and lust. Gufler displaces such memories, disrupts their order and blends their narrative styles with his own works, relocating them to an indeterminate zone as a means of interrogating them. The temporal logic of "before" and "after," which distort subjectively perceived permanent conditions, are experienced in their permanent indeterminacy in the *Zirkeltraum* [*Circle Dream*]. In Gufler, memory is a space for creating new temporalities and counter figures in response to singular events.