

THE OBJECTS OF NON-OBJECTIVE PAINTING

Lecture, held at the symposium *ABOUT THE DIFFICULTY TO SPEAK ABOUT NON-OBJECTIVE PAINTING*,

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About my painting *NOBODY*, 220 x 220 cm, oil on canvas, 2000 - 2003

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen:

A picture without an object, that is a non-representing picture, will never exist. It would miss the notion of a picture. But what is the object of a non-objective painting? A distinct sense of non-objective painting asserted, however, could not be found either by mere descriptions of our perception nor by polemic statements, insinuating a lower intellectual standard or a less developed consciousness in objective art. Every distinguished work of art leads to most demanding anthropological, social, psychological, and philosophical issues. Not so much under constitutional or deductive aspects but from a viewpoint of authentic formal concern. Thus let us regard this formal relation a bit closer:

Objective painting proceeds in a dual way. It refers to a (real or virtual) object while the manner of pictorial representation holds a (more or less convincing) *plead for the interest* in the chosen motif. Pictures with different objects can therefore deal with the same item and pictures showing the same object can speak about very different items; just because the intention, factually realized by a representation, determines the meaning of its physical appearance much further than the visualized object. This primordial role of the intention becomes particularly striking when we regard a picture in a mere aesthetic way. We can experience a landscape drawing, for example, as sensible or phoney, as courageous or anxious, sober-minded or debauched, and so on. That means our aesthetic judgment operates with notions neither fitting into the presented scenery nor address mere sensual qualities nor to an anticipated final purpose, derived from the conceived origin of the work. Our presumptions refer instead, simply, to the *attitude* encountered through the manner in which things and persons are factually visualized while we are unfolding the overlapping issue and actual meaning of the given representation.

The same applies to *non-objective painting*. Non-objective works, at first sight quite similarly can also deal with very different items and vice versa, because the factual intention of a representation determines the actual meaning of its physical properties, in non-objective as well as in objective art. A significant difference lies solely in the purity, in which the act of rep-

representing as such is radically exposed as non-objective painting offers no distinguished gestalt beyond the picture. That means, on the one hand a kind of painting is promised which wouldn't be chained to reproduce present rules of the world any more, a creative art from its very beginning, which would surrender the interest and passion, evoked by the work, completely to our personal freedom. On the other hand the lack of a distinguished object may also open the door to sheer privacy and accidental determination, ruining the common subjective validity, expected from every work of fine art. Therefore, every non-objective painting demands firstly a sufficient answer to *why* there is in this particular case not a distinct figure present so that the apparent vacancy of this formal narrative function can approve itself as a conclusive variable during the process of viewing. Principally, three motives deserve general recognition:

1. The impulse to paint itself demands to be clarified, whenever the motivating item is broadly unknown yet or the interest evoked seems to be ambiguous. In such an unsettled situation it can be helpful to suspense the arbitrary act of choosing a motif and to follow instead spontaneous, non-classified representing moves, to build a visual basis for a deliberate introspection afterwards. We already know from psychoanalysis that two staged heuristic procedure as well as through a wide variety of ritual trance techniques of traditional societies.

2. Apart from psychological reasons which can motivate us in the mentioned technique of introspection to avoid any direct reference to familiar things, there are also possible objective substantiations. Representations can namely refer to empiric facts without focussing the whole historic complex, yet to explore hidden details and implications that are otherwise not considered. This investigative impetus pushes sensual qualities of the paint and the technical facture of the picture into the foreground, to present an available and elaborated sample of the subject in quest.

3. Finally products of pure reason have to be taken into account, sheer intelligible constructions which have a priori no physical properties and, consequently, can not be individualized at all. In this case the object referred to is a conception of an idea. The picture then tends either to evoke the impression of strict incommensurability by contrasting the mere mental origin of the intended idea as harsh as possible with all the literal components of its physical representation like conceptual art does. Or it pursues criticism, tries to enlighten a metaphysical figure by giving an inexorable example.

Each of these three presented arguments could perhaps even separately legitimize an apparent lack of a recognizable object. Without a convincing legitimating however the constitutional transcendence of the picture will necessarily be lost, nothing left than a plain visibility

with an accidental metaphoric sense at best. But it has also to be accomplished that the enumeration above follows a reductive analysis. In fine art indeed the named aims and motives have to complete and mutually explained. Thus any remarkable work of non-objective art must define its subjective roots, explore lateral conditions of its historical background and last not least it has to expose the urge of the metaphysical idea involved, exactly as any distinguished work of objective art must find an individual substantiation by comprehending distinct incidents to a self evident story. In both disciplines of painting it is not varying their fundamental narrative function, but the weight, which is put on the different intentional aims and the degree of their realization, factually achieved.

Thus on what else we can rely on, if one has first to find out the factual intention of a picture unless its issue and specific meaning can be experienced at all, even in non-objective art? Actually two different attitudes become relevant: As recipients we can only additionally activate our power of judgment, trained by former discussions of other works to form a convincing narration out of our present sensations and notions spontaneously emerging during onlooking. As a painter one can furthermore recall the narrative structure of the picture to reveal connotations otherwise not to be reflected so easily. Finally, I would like to outline this possibility through one of my paintings, yet without prescribing a distinct interpretation. The following report is just meant to be an additional offer. Anything beyond would contradict the dialogical aspirations of my work. My painting shall gain meaning and validity through the attention paid spontaneously by free discretion and shall tell a far more interesting and intelligent story than I could offer myself.

The comparatively crusty texture of the predominant green mottled painting *nobody* evolves out of several hundreds, thin semi transparent layers of oil colour, painted with alkyd resin, in innumerable punctual touches between the hand wide brush and the tense surface of the canvas. The brushstrokes are shifted in varying directions, velocity and pressure among the separate films. Their application followed strictly an "all-over" rule, taken as an anti-compositional principle, deliberately provoking chance as an integral part of the work. In contrast to that the different tones had been developed during the working process for each single layer by distinct intuitive decisions. Since March 2000, I proceeded to brush every working day thoroughly one or at most two layers onto the former, smoothed and polished the drying paint in a subsequent process so that the time and the variety of the colours, embodied in the slowly growing and gradually reopening texture, could still be sensed but not be literally read. As there seemed no end in sight after two years, I started to document the additional films on

drawing cardboard, to reassure myself and to convey my procedure. Therefore the tones of the latter 115 layers can now also be viewed individually as separate colour charts. The former not documented films, at least as twice as numerous, comprehend a far broader spectrum.

The sequence of the colour charts as well as the dense interplay among the structure of the paint and the tones changing according to the actual visual angle, allow assuming that the creation of this painting did not underlie an already scheduled plan. On the contrary, it is the result of continuous work, with an unpredictable outcome. So for an anxiously long period I couldn't say even in general terms, how the projected painting should look, whether it has to be more colourful or monochrome, more dark or bright, grey or intense and so on.

Yet, I knew from the very beginning in an almost explicit manner that at this time my work has to target the mental structure of the judgment, which determines our experience with others as well as our experience with living nature and our notion of art. I wanted to approach the *plot* of the epistemological question imposed by these different fields of experience. Thus the projected painting had to trace and recollect the common constitutional characteristics of our intentional relation towards persons, towards living beings and towards art works. And it was also quite soon predictable that hereby the intuitional signs of the evolutionary and potential capacities will become relevant, as an existentially mediated feeling of time, evoked by the conscience of our personal finiteness. But the ongoing work taught me very quickly that the picture to be painted couldn't represent a variety of several acts. It had to become one solid, specific act, a distinguished and at the same time conclusive work, which avoids any settled *gestalt* ready by the obvious form of its construction, so that the impression of shapelessness would exclusively derive from its intelligible nature, and not from opaque physical properties like an extra large size, very intense tones, a hidden skill in its production and so on.

But, how could a single painting approach all these requirements even closely I couldn't even imagine. I could only rely on the unique chance deriving out of the fact that we do not literally perceive a painted object, we define it instead of by our power of imagination: An imagined or represented object consists - in strict opposition to a perceived one - but in the conscience, actually realized. A vague perception of a tree, for example, refers always to a distinct object. In contrary a vague imagination or representation of a tree refer to a broadly undetermined object. And exactly this epistemic difference allows non-objective painting to unfold its subject gradually, not only its particular item, intention and form, by the productive interplay between creation and viewing during the working process, as long as the progress of gradual distinction is not incidentally interfered by lateral connotations, leading to opposite intentions.

Therefore I tried to evolve different moments of representation in a long process of painting, erasing the controversial meanings, connoted and associated laterally, by the latter layers and hoping to achieve at some point in time a complete and conclusive picture, which can approve itself as an autonomous art work, achieving an inexorable symbolic meaning by onlooking.

At this point I would like to stop with my description and to start with the discussion. On request I will outline with pleasure the plot of the mentioned epistemological question, the resulting theoretical and practical problems in our experience with other persons, biological beings and art works in greater detail. But first I would like to invite you, ladies and gentlemen, to choose the issues to be discussed. And I am grateful to hear any questions and remarks. Thank you for your kind attention.