

Inter Views

On the Mutability of Visual Appearances in Karø Goldt's Image and Text Apparatus

Based on the index appended to the images in this book, it emerges that the oldest photo included comes from the year 1995. It was shot in Bibertal in Bavaria and shows a bed in which the photographer's brother is not lying, but which belongs to him, according to the information about the image. The most recent photo comes from 2018 and was also created in a village in Germany, in Netzeband in Brandenburg. It shows a wall on which images have been arranged into a collage. Not so much with a decisive gesture, but instead with a gesture of succinctness, the artist merely specifies the function of the view suggestively, as a 'mood board'. This most recent photo and the oldest one are scattered among the nearly 150 other images included in the book. This collection, as one might perhaps call the photographs assembled, has not been subjected to any linear order with which it might be possible to read a chronological / temporal development. No other conventional system of order – recurring motifs or themes that can be aggregated in groups and/or formal / aesthetic analogies that make it seem sensible to put several images together in a series – underlies the images either. If one looks for a logic in the sequences of images that emerges from the images themselves and what can be seen in them, or based only on the technical data for the specific photo such as location and year of creation, or naming or simply characterising the object photographed, then this turns out to be an undertaking in which one might just as well scatter all the images on the floor – and we would, consequently, choose one image or the other merely selectively and based only on reasons that can barely be defined, and take a closer look at it.

Karø Goldt must have experienced something similar when she, with the plan in mind of developing a book about her photographic work, began navigating through her archive. The question underlying the initial phase of this project was: 'How can I organise my image archive so as to consequently arrive at a selection of photographs that makes sense?'⁽¹⁾ As we know, images alone cannot create this 'sense'. Since it is not (only) the optical model of the camera itself that gives rise to a 'truth apparatus', as the artist and theorist Allen Sekula writes, but rather systems of

archiving. The camera with its operating principles and visual products is only one part of a larger ensemble: 'The central artefact of this system is not the camera but the filing cabinet.'⁽²⁾ Sekula's focus here is on the variability of orders with which connections are codified anew again and again (before they are once again overlaid by new, different knowledge) depending on the context in which we put images or in what constellations we present them. Based on this understanding, the concept of a (not only photographic) archive denotes not only conventional processes for establishing an archive – recording, collecting, and saving data – but also a social dispositif in the sense of Michel Foucault. The archive 'links strategies of appropriation and safekeeping with those related to the creation of order, with demarcations and dislocation. In this sense, the archive represents a constant disciplining and ordering of the world'.⁽³⁾

In order to assign a meaning or a task to the images – if that is supposed to be the aim of the activity – or at least to produce some order in the archive, the first question – for the artist – must therefore be: What folders / what files can be established in the process of exploring the photographic material in the first place? And what folders / what files can we pull out of the filing cabinet so as to make an artistic work identifiable – for viewers – for example, as an artistic work, and so as to (in the best case) classify it as a self-contained project with a clear mission? And, further: What exclusions does a 'filing cabinet' produce as a result of its form of organisation? What / which information / which images do not find their way into the archive and its order? Is there any path to order that is not defined by inclusions and exclusions? And, finally, with a view to Karø Goldt: What path did the artist choose in her project?

Karø Goldt has themes – but she does not work through them systematically, but instead again and again docks onto circumstances close at hand. This might be her family. Or her immediate surroundings – the flats or houses in which she stays, and the views outside that they afford. Or her wanderings through the (art) history museums (primarily) of Europe and the objects and displays that she finds there.

Karø Goldt has a specific photographic style. In the broadest sense, it can be described as a documentary style (since nothing in her images is arranged) – but her work follows no documentary logic. The artist rejects any systematic, visually honed, or dramaturgically perfected working through of specific themes, with which paths through a sequence of images arise and correlations open up.

Karø Goldt – this becomes particularly clear in her filmic work, which is, however, not supposed to be addressed here – has knowledge of colour. She employs it in a targeted manner in her extremely

colourful and nuanced compositions. With colour, she imbues her images with atmosphere. Her type of photographic approach and/or her concrete photographic practice perhaps also becomes most clearly graspable in her handling of colour. And the idea of organising the scattered images based on colour also actually arose as an option for the artist. Looking for analogies here is simply obvious. But does such a decision not, in turn, force an admission of a pure formalism, which shifts themes and contents that might simply also be negotiated by means of motifs too far into the background? This ordering principle also has its catches – just as all those previously mentioned.

Now, when I write that the sequencing of the images in Goldt's book at first seems arbitrary and no different than as if all the images had fallen out of the book and lay scattered on the floor, then this is only correct insofar as classic systems of order ultimately do not apply here. But that does not mean that there is no order. It only runs counter to our notions of how photographic material is organised.

What ultimately paved Goldt's path through her archive, and, consequently, to her book project, *Inter View*, as well, was – curiously, or in other words: unexpectedly – a list of literature that she found at the end of a scholarly book.⁽⁴⁾ The photographer accidentally stumbled across copies out of the book, respectively the bibliography appended to it. The claim that the titles of the books listed in it announce fascinated her just as did the diagnoses or promises that they make – underpinned by the authority of the authors' names, which leaves no doubt that their work is scientifically well-founded. But also the sound that arises merely by chance as a result of the alphabetising of the titles to form a list, won Karø Goldt over. Found in it – as she describes her perception – was a poetry of its own, which only comes to light if one separates the list from the text, for which the titles (according to their original purpose) served as (scholarly) reference.

What would happen, the artist asked, if she began to match these titles with her images? What new perspectives on what is depicted would then open up? And vice versa: What do the images then do to the titles? How do we read and understand them if they no longer (have to) serve as a reference for a scholarly text, but are instead assigned to an image?

From the planned project of providing an overview of her own photographic practice, a project that threatened to fail if based on traditional selection criteria, with Fridjofs Capra's bibliography for his book *The Turning Point* at hand, what smoothed the way for Karø Goldt was suddenly a new conceptual approach: a system to which she might subordinate her images.

The artist's decision to work along the lines of the found list of titles from A to Z (in this book:

from A to O) and to suspend her images from them, however, not only augured – in a metaphorical reading of Capra – a ‘turning point’ for her project, with which a new, additional dimension of perception suddenly opened up with respect to her photographic work. No, with this decision and possibly without knowing or without formulating it as a strategic objective in its own right, Karø Goldt also added a twist to such artistic practices that are informed by the dispositifs of archiving and further processing, as they have meanwhile become commonplace in interventional and political artistic practice. Just like her colleagues, in her artistic practice, Goldt makes reference to the increasing interleaving of scholarship and art. But how does she make this productive?

The concept of an archive as an objective source and as a system for organising knowledge has become more and more destabilised in recent years. The intrinsic connections between archive, documentation, and memory that previously applied have become more and more disconnected. The question of the relevance of the (also photographic) document has also been posed anew in the course of these developments; its speculative and only preliminary potential has increasingly moved into the foreground of spaces for debate. The archive itself and what it can be has consequently changed ‘from being an institution to being a process’.(5) In the course of this development, artistic practices themselves no longer only arise from existing archives in which they intervene in a critical way, but are instead increasingly producing their own archive-like collections of documents and narratives. They ‘construct a kind of archive – temporary, provisional – and compile collections, taking material found in archives or discoveries that lead to archives as a point of departure for their research. So, on the one hand, the point is to imagine archives that do not exist but would be necessary, and on the other, to add something to archives that is lacking, that is repressed or excluded in them’.(6)

If one can, based on this development, however, very clearly read – as the art theorist Reinhard Braun has shown for an entire generation of visual artists – that the interleaving of artistic and scholarly practices is becoming more and more evident, at least in the field of contemporary art, and that what is frequently concerned – and linked with a clear political aspiration – in artistic projects today is showing blind spots in history as well as blind spots in scholarship, and establishing ‘other narratives’ with one’s own work (or: ‘intervening in the production of knowledge’, as Reinhard Braun writes(7)), then, with a view to Karø Goldt and her *Inter View* project, one must say that, here, art and scholarship are two ends that are juxtaposed and influence one another to a certain extent, but simultaneously also recognise that Karø Goldt is by no means interested in adding ‘other’ or ‘new truths’ to this scholarship. Although she is aware, in the sense of Karl Popper, that knowledge is always replaced by new knowledge, that ‘truths must not be mistaken for certainties’, (8) and hence relativises scholarship’s (alleged) demand for objectivised knowledge from the outset. At the same time, she is also not interested in any way in the imperfections within various forms of

knowledge production. Or in producing new / other knowledge / truths. Her project is not a political project. She does not intervene in existing 'truths' that find their basis in scholarship, for instance, by supplementing these 'truths' with other / new 'findings' through an analytical process.

Scholarship merely serves her as a field that formulates hypotheses. Nothing more. And precisely this becomes relevant for her *Inter View* project. In his book, Capra may have formulated promises that are preceded by an analysis of the present with scholarly aspirations. The bibliography attests to such aspirations. (On a side note: In the end, this conventional form of protection did not necessarily help him achieve a more profound credibility for his scholarly work, as one can ascertain today.) But: Karø Goldt is not interested, for instance, in splitting hairs with Capra or intervening in his project. She merely bursts open the logic of the enterprise through liberating one part of this enterprise in order to do something completely different with it. She makes use of the hypotheses, diagnoses, and promises that open up with Capra's euphonic list of literature so as to supplement the perspective on her *pictorial* work with a new / different perspective (this assists her artistic work, consequently, not vice versa, by broadening existing insights with the help of art; her art remains to a certain extent 'free'). With this, she shows – and this is the truly interesting and simultaneously 'simple' aspect of the work – that the reception of photography cannot be codified, that how we perceive what appears on a paper surface in the photographic process of development, in the course of which the up-to-then merely latent image is given form and expression, is mutable. What a photograph 'shows' is in no way certain either. Photography here is similar to scholarship to some extent: A call for objective representation also precedes it – but it (photography) has naturally never been so. Photography instead remains a project that – like scholarship as well – is contingent. It is not only a project that has its profound basis in reality – since every photograph remains connected with reality; it is the basis from which it draws – and shows 'what was' / 'what it was like'. It is furthermore, however, simultaneously a project that always – inescapably – exists in the tension between visibility and representation. *At the same time*, it therefore *in no way* shows 'what was' / 'what it was like'; photography remains linked with representation. Over the course of time, for instance, during which an image might solidify into an icon, or else – just as well – slip into meaninglessness. The perspectives that we cast onto an image, and that inevitably change as times change, are decisive. Despite its equipment-related prerequisite, which specifies a certain power of reality, photography remains a project that tells of the mutability of visual appearances.

Perhaps Capra's bibliography was coincidentally ideal for highlighting precisely this moment and dealing with it for *Inter View*. Perhaps (almost) any other list of titles would also have had similar effects – something that might possibly also provide comfort for the fact that the artist initially falsely attributed the list of literature from Fritjof Capra's *Turning Point* to another (and more well-liked) scientist, namely the anthropologist, biologist, social scientist, cyberneticist, and philosopher

Gregory Bateson, a state of affairs that did not even occur to an expert on him, Ranulph Glanville, author of the first text about Goldt's project and this book (on which she has now already been working on for a long time due to all the wonderfully productive trials and tribulations). He was instead absorbed by the question: 'What can artists do with academic references?' (not realising that art – at the latest since the modern era – itself already 'wears an academic hat', to continue using Glanville's diction and to situate art in the academic field as a matter of course). He, Glanville, arrives at the conclusion that Goldt's pairing of images in *Inter View* are 'keys to unleash emotional responses', which the scholar, with a view to the titles of the books with which the artist's images have been matched in this project, would never have recognised or anticipated. If Glanville remains entirely in his role or discipline and shows himself, with a view to the work of Karø Goldt, to be 'surprised' by the art (an aspect that continues to be an important function of art or perhaps should be), in light of Karø Goldt's strategies, one must, therefore, in the field of photography, however, perhaps supplement Glanville's 'surprise' with another facet that puts the mutability of visual appearances itself at the centre of the considerations.

Let us once again take a look at the earliest image in this book, which – as we know from the index appended – shows her 'brother's bed' in Bibertal, and was created in 1995. What other / new facets open up in how the image can be read through the addition of the (book) title *Mental Health: Progress and Problems?*(9) It is a reading with which viewers *can* ask themselves whether it provides reference to her brother's mental state, to the progression of a disease and the problems that result from it. We naturally only do so if we know what the location and subject of the photo is, information that Goldt, however, only provides in the index that is appended (and does not place directly under the image). If we do not think that we need this information (which is plausible), the image remains much more open to interpretation; in any case, it is no longer necessarily connected with the photographer's personal history. Although: Does it do so in the first place? Was the image actually intentionally selected and matched with the corresponding title, which now functions as an intensifier of what is only subtly intimated in the image itself? We don't know. Since the question appears on the horizon of possible interpretations just the same, whether the photograph was simply matched with the title in an associative process from a – so as to stay in the picture – conglomerate of photographs scattered over the floor, and such linkages are just as arbitrary as they are speculative.

We could apply the same mental game with a view to the aforementioned *Mood Board* from 2018, which was matched with the book title *Dissection of the Psychological Personality*.(10) With the

location and year of creation in mind, information that we can obtain from the index appended, new perspectives on the picture *can* open up, and a personal-biographical component comes to the fore – but this only occurs if the subordinated information is also identified as belonging to the picture apparatus. If we only look at the organisation of the respective double-page spreads in the book, which bring together two pictures that are always positioned in the same place in the picture print space and traverse the book as if hung up on a line, and, moreover, the book titles are also always positioned in the same place at the bottom, but their further bibliographic details remain subordinated, then this fades based more on the personally oriented approach to reading the pictures. Even though, it might be added, one must definitely notice that all of Karø Goldt's pictures emanate an atmosphere of the private – an atmosphere that here, in this book, is reinforced by reading the index and picture titles together at some points and weakened at others.

What becomes clear in any case – the surface of the photographic picture always remains the same. The ascriptions, however, vary. They depend on the knowledge, lack of knowledge, intuitions, expectations, ideas, et cetera, with which we enter into looking at the pictures. Starting from here, it perhaps makes sense to proceed with George Didi Huberman, who dedicated himself to the mutability of visual appearances, and with whom it becomes clear that viewing photographs is a process that can never be concluded. For instance, when he writes: 'The only things that appear are those which are first able to dissimulate themselves. Things already grasped in their aspect or peacefully resembling themselves never appear. They are apparent, of course, but only apparent: they will never be given to us as appearing. What then is necessary for an apparition, the event of appearing? What must happen just before appearing closes itself within a presumably stable of hopefully definitive aspect? There must be a unique and momentary opening that will mark the apparition as an apparition. A paradox bursts forth because, in the very moment that it opens itself to the visible world, appearing is destined to be something like dissimulation. A paradox bursts forth because, for but a moment, appearing gives access to the here below, to something that suggests the contrary or, better yet, the hell of the visible world – the realm of dissemblance.'⁽¹¹⁾ Such an open approach to reading leads not only into the inner world of the viewer, but also leads to the recognition that, in photography, what is visible and what can be expressed exist in a state of tension. Karø Goldt makes it productive.

Maren Lübbke-Tidow, April 16, 2018

- (1) Karø Goldt in a conversation with the author, July 3, 2017.
- (2) The complete quote is: ‘In short, we need to describe the emergence of a truth-apparatus that cannot be adequately reduced to the optical model provided by the camera. The camera is integrated into a larger ensemble: a bureaucratic-clerical system of “intelligence”. This system can be described as a sophisticated form of the archive. The central artefact of this system is not the camera but the filing cabinet.’ Allan Sekula, ‘The Body and the Archive’, *October*, 39 (Winter 1986) pp. 3–64, esp. p. 16.
- 3) ‘Editorial’, *Camera Austria International* (Graz), trans. Michelle Dawn D’Atri, no. 51/52/1995 (‘The Archive’), pp. 1–2, esp. p. 1.
- 4) Fritjof Capra, *The Turning Point: Science, Society, and the Rising Culture* (New York, 1984).
- 5) See Reinhard Braun, ‘Editorial’, in *Camera Austria International* (Graz), trans. Michelle Dawn D’Atri, no. 138/2017, pp. 1–2, esp. p. 1.
- 6) See Reinhard Braun, ‘Learning from . . .’, in *Camera Austria International* (Graz), trans. Michelle Dawn D’Atri, no. 138/2017, pp. 89–95, esp. p. 90.
- 7) Even though it is clear that such archives must frequently ‘remain provisional and incomplete, precarious and controversial’. *Ibid.* p. 91.
- 8) See Karl Popper, *Objective Knowledge: An Evolutionary Approach* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971).
- 9) The complete bibliographical data is Philip Berger, Beatrix Hamburger, David Hamburg, ‘Mental Health: Progress and Problems’, in John H. Knowles (ed.), *Doing Better and Feeling Worse* (New York, 1977).
- 10) The complete bibliographical data is: Sigmund Freud, *Dissection of the Psychological Personality* (originally, Vienna, 1933).
- 11) From George Didi Huberman, ‘The Paradox of the Phasmid’, as cited in *Perforations: After the Remainder: Calls, Comings and Desiderata*, Robert Cheatham (ed.) (U.S.: Fort!/da?, 2014), p. 620.