

OHNE TITEL

Einführender Text von Thomas Macho im Künstlerbuch INTERVIEW von Karø Goldt

1.

Images and texts have peculiar and contradictory relationships. Their frequent disputes concerning hegemonic dominance go hand in hand with the threat of escalation, iconoclasm and book burnings. Images showing the faces of God or the prophets are forbidden, as was recently demonstrated in the controversy involving the Danish 'Muhammeds ansigt' caricatures; ostensible sacred images, symbols, sculptures or buildings may not be simply described, reproduced or translated. The ban on images corresponds to the lists of incriminating books, whether in the form of the Catholic *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* (since 1559) or the black lists issued in Nazi Germany by the Reich Chamber of Literature. Images and texts still collide in everyday academic life. Is it legitimate to employ pictures merely a means of illustrating written discourses? On the other hand, should image and text – as is so often the case in art historical tracts – be kept strictly separate, nipping from the outset any potential dispute in the bud? Does it make sense to utilize texts as pictorial elements? What functions do picture captions and picture descriptions fulfil? And how should photo essays or visual argumentations be read, for example in Otto Neurath's pictorial statistical works?

In his influential 1766 treatise on the Laocoön Group and the *Limits of Painting and Poetry*, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing famously undertook an attempt at conciliation by suggesting that the diverse artistic genres be classified with the help of the concepts of time and space. He associated the visual arts with spatiality, music and poetry with temporality.

The juxtaposition of the moment in a sculpture is confronted with the juxtaposition of sounds and narratives, the simultaneity of images with the sequence and succession of texts. Plato already seems to have had this elementary distinction in mind to the extent that he differentiated thinking as *nous* – as the perceptive view of the general and of ideas – from thinking as *dianoia*, as a successive development of arguments and conclusions. Philosophers have frequently operated with two concepts of evidence since then: the discursive and the epiphanic.

The plausibility of a logical deduction was contrasted with the plausibility of a spontaneously attained conviction; in many cases, our knowledge derives from a contingent 'brainstorm' rather than obtained by employing a tried and tested methodology.

Those who celebrate poetry, music or *dianoia* as forms of temporal expression do not characterise images solely as spatial appearances but also as timeless. As Lessing very explicitly does, images and ideas are associated with the eternity of the moment, with the sanctity of perpetuity; the pious reverential respect paid to images predates the high point of Byzantine icon painting; a belief in images that in turn is capable of explaining some iconoclastic frenzies. In the process, one can argue against Lessing's attempt to gauge the boundary between painting and poetry by noting that pictures likewise enable if not compel a certain temporality, namely a temporality of perception that, for example, could be experienced long before the invention of chronophotography or cinema by means of reflections, perspectival deceptions, movements and anamorphoses. For this reason, Oswald Spengler already emphasised that a 'picture of Claude Lorrain or of Watteau does not really address itself to the bodily eye any more than the space-straining music since Bach addresses itself to the bodily ear.' 'In reality,' he continued, 'tones are something extended, limited and numerable just as lines and colours are; harmony, melody, rhyme and rhythm no less so than perspective, proportion, chiaroscuro and outline.' 1

2.

Spengler's thesis can be easily demonstrated with the help of the history of cinema, which, although it began silently, was by no means still and quiet. Silent movies were in fact pretty noisy. The enforced sacrifice of the voice was compensated by pianists, orchestras and specialists for sound generation. Music was even played during film shoots by small bands and ensembles, ensuring the appropriate atmosphere on the set. During cinema's trailblazing years, multiple films were often shot simultaneously on adjacent sets, with the result that competing musical accompaniments sometimes confronted each other: funeral march versus dance music. Musical accompaniments alone were naturally insufficient in the long run. Voices were still missing, and their place was famously taken by intertitles on which the respective spoken texts were written. Even Alfred Hitchcock, the British greengrocer's son who would one day be knighted, began his unparalleled career as a film director in the 1920s designing and drawing intertitles for the Ufa studios. Filmic narration was consequently represented by the intertitles in a curious competition with the accompanying music, albeit clearly separate from the images.

It was the invention of the talking film in the early 1930s that ultimately revolutionised the relationship between text and image, script and camera. One of the ideals propagated by film director Robert Bresson – whose life, which lasted from 25 September 1901 to 18 December 1999, encompassed almost the entire 20th century – included the demand not to write texts but movements with the help of images. *Cinematography* is comprehended very literally: 'CINEMATOGRAPHY IS A WRITING WITH IMAGES IN MOVEMENT AND WITH SOUNDS.'² Bresson exemplarily demonstrated the weight of this expressly theatre and opera critical ideal based the autobiographical practices of the country priest in his 1951 film *Journal d'un curé de campagne* von (Diary of a Country Priest). François Truffaut followed him nearly two decades later with his depiction of the physician and educator of the deaf Jean Marc Gaspard Itard, who he repeatedly shows in the 1969 film *L'enfant sauvage* (The Wild Child) noting his observations on the methods and attempts to educate the wild boy of Aveyron. Bresson's and Truffaut's films require almost no music and only very little dialogue; the picture writing was decidedly not supposed to be accompanied and annotated by any affective melodies or voice-overs. But one was not seeking a synthesis of the arts. 'If the eye is entirely won, give nothing or almost nothing to the ear (and vice versa, if the ear is entirely won, give nothing to the eye.) One cannot be at the same time all eye and all ear. When a sound can replace an image, cut the image or neutralize it. The ear goes more towards the within, the eye towards the outer. A sound must never come to the help of an image, nor an image to the help of a sound. If a sound is the obligatory complement of an image, give preponderance either to the sound, or to the image. If equal, they damage or kill each other, as we say of colours. Image and sound must not support each other, but must work each in turn through a sort of relay.'³ Cinematography is not a stage or a museum, it is precisely a movement notation, which is why Bresson did not hire actors, but merely 'models' instead. They were not intended to represent, simulate or signify anything. Bresson took Lessing's concerns seriously to a certain extent – while radically overcoming at the same time the boundaries between painting and poetry, between images and texts.

3.

Karø Goldt conceived a very different type of picture writing. She extracts the context from her expressive photographs by deleting all references to the time and place where the pictures were taken as well as the intentional programmatic of possible picture titles. The titles derive from the bibliography of a now nearly forgotten book. Published in 1982 under the title *The Turning Point: Science, Society, and the Rising Culture*, it was written by the now 79-year-old Vienna-born and Berkeley-based physicist Fritjof Capra. A bestseller in its day, Capra's book was a kind of bible of the New Age movement that was shaped by an optimism that, when viewed from a present-day perspective, makes a wholly utopian impression. We no longer believe in a 'turning point' but more likely in the approaching doom caused by climate change and environmental disasters, civil wars and terrorism, mass migration and digital fascism.

Karø Goldt does not propagate any programmes or theses in the interplay between the utopian

and the dystopian; she merges moments that do not tell a story any more than a bibliography represents a theory. In his programmatic 1971 book on *The Birth of a New Age*, David Spangler claimed that this new era began at Christmas 1967; the opening number of the 1968 musical *Hair* celebrated *the dawning of the Age of Aquarius* in the spirit of the teachings on astrological world ages. In order to counter the agonising burdens of historical consciousness – with all its horrific memories of two World Wars and genocide – one was supposed to seek life in the here and now, in keeping with the Buddhist maxim: ‘the past is already gone, the future is not yet here; there is only one moment for you to live: that is the here and now.’ But this ‘here and now’ eludes access. Its perception must be tirelessly sought and trained; there is usually no easy path to enlightenment. The present moment, continuously fluctuating between the no-longer and the not-yet, is not bright but dark; it is dimensionless like the point where the lines of the past and the future purport to cross. The darkness of the now, the experienced moment, was frequently addressed by Ernst Bloch of all people, the prominent utopian thinker in his writings from *The Spirit of Utopia* (1918) to his final works. At the very start of his wide-ranging major work *The Principle of Hope*, which Bloch wrote between 1938 and 1947 – and hence over twenty years after *The Spirit of Utopia* – during his exile in the United States, he wrote that the here and now is ‘a utopian category, in fact the most central one; even though, in contrast to the annihilating circulation of a Nothing, to the illuminating circulation of an All, it has not yet even entered time and space. Instead, the contents of this most immediate nearness still ferment entirely in the darkness of the lived moment as the real world-knot, world-riddle. Utopian consciousness wants to look far into the distance, but ultimately only in order to penetrate the darkness so near it of the just lived moment, in which everything that is both drives and is hidden from itself. In other words: we need the most powerful telescope, that of polished utopian consciousness, in order to penetrate precisely the nearest nearness.’⁴

Karø Goldt has constructed such a telescope in the darkness of the experienced – and read – moment. It is worth taking repeated glances through this mysterious telescope of nearness..

1 Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*. Ed. Arthur Helps and Helmut Werner. Trans. Charles F. Atkinson (Oxford University Press, New York, 1991), p. 219 – 220.

2 Robert Bresson, *Notes on the Cinematographer*. With an introduction by J. M. G. Le Clezio. Trans. by Jonathan Griffin (Green Integer Press, Copenhagen, 1997), p. 16.

3 Ibid. pp. 61– 62.

4 Ernst Bloch, *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* Trans. Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice and Paul Knight (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1986. vol. 1, p. 12.