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## THE WORLD AS A WHOLE IS OUT OF FOCUS

### On Karø Goldt's Photography

When I asked Karø Goldt the almost naively simple question as to why she practised photography, her reply was both astonishing and complicated. Photography, she said served her as a means of making reality „more real“. My impression was that she perceived this maxim in even more radical terms for herself. It seemed to me as if her pictures were proof that reality actually exists, that – as venerable philosophy has it – something is and not nothing.

The prevailing perception here suggests that we can „objectively“ get on the track of the existence of reality by using a machine, a recording apparatus between oneself and reality: the machine does not aim to prove anything to itself, which is why – unlike us – it has probative force. The machine as a prosthesis of our self-assurance! Karø Goldt's former painting could not achieve this; the subjective aspect interferes in painting too much. To me, there is a peculiar ambivalence to Goldt's motive: on the one hand it has a legal aspect – the aim is to furnish proof. On the other hand, the aim is to make reality – that is on trial - „more real“.

Reality must be put on trial with the aid of an objectifying apparatus because its level of reality is insufficient to prove that it exists. I understand this as follows: with the aid of the camera, Goldt must intensify reality so that she, being the special person as who she exists, can „subjectively“ satisfy herself of the existence of a reality that exists apart of her but which equally contains her. It is photography with which the photographer establishes contact to reality – instead of reality perhaps we should say: the certified existence of something or somebody. Unlike a theory of knowledge: we only see that something (or somebody) is if we have photographed something (or somebody).

To me this is quite astonishing because I have a quite different view of the world. Goldt's motive to do photography compels me to make my own view of the world more clear to myself. I believe that everything I can ever understand or see in the world is (to me) immediately there. This belief, also referred to as „fundamental trust“ approximates fairly closely to stupidity, or – at best – naivety. But such a belief is also practical: I do not need a camera to assure myself to myself, to assure myself of my fellow-men and our common world. The reflection of which I am capable takes immediacy as its material, not in order to intensify it but rather to analyse it, i.e.: in order to deconstruct reality, to prove its artificiality, its madness. I am ungrateful for the naivety bestowed upon me. The pictures I make of reality prove to me, if they prove anything at all, that nothing real exists. It could be that the photographer and this author-viewer are connected by a reversed, paradoxical relation to reality.

This means one thing for certain: in Goldt's pictures I do not see what she sees in them, i.e. Not self-assurance and nothing of a „more real“ reality. What is more, I am not a thorough critic, I only see what I want to see, and that is solely what catches my eye. While in one respect this may be arbitrariness, it does follow certain principles: the age-old idea that art tells tales of people has great power over me. According to this, art history is a history of the human race; The history of the human race, as „reflected“, in the true sense of the word, in our history books, is the history of deeds, of facts accomplished, that often enough initiate an artistic play of interpretations. In art, the human being features a priori in his non-ascertainability; what Gombrowicz calls „the mugs“ suggests that the ascertained human being who has become his own mask is mockery of human possibilities.

So my eye was caught by the portraits and self-portraits of Karø Goldt. Making a portrait of

oneself means discovering and revealing something inside, oneself that exists in the immediate environment, in everyday life, concealed in oneself. This is why self-portraits never resemble the portraitee. They always have a touch of cognise Karø Goldt in her self-portraits, for example if she were to pass me by at the local market. But what can we recognise in her pictures? In abstract terms, I recognise the *conditio humana*, i.e. something we have often seen but which we can never see through and which, as a result, we wish to see anew again and again: the face is the expression of pain, of pain already suffered and pain to come; future pain has a field, a wide field into which it will be inscribed. In one of her pictures the young woman is standing very lonely in front of the camera, not without protesting about being in the world in the first place. That's how I see it, and I also have seen pictures of her in which eroticism replaces discretion: our own body, that can express pain, can also arouse desire. When the viewer becomes a voyeur, then he is supposed to look more closely or look away. Pornography is always in the eye of the beholder, the body of the woman he desires exists for itself alone, and once we have seen this, even „as a man“ we can recognise the erotic, i.e. The artistic aspect of the nakedness suggested in the picture.

I see the male portraits with jewellery with a certain irony. To my mind, there is nothing sobered-up about the male narcissism in these pictures. The bare-chested portraitees, it seems to me, are hindered in freely displaying their God-given vanity by the camerawork. This is most probably also why the lower part of the men's bodies is kept safe and warm under the cover. I assume this impression of preventing vanity is due to the fact that the photographer does not aim to show men wearing jewellery as much as, above all the „naked“ fact, as it were, of the existence of men and jewellery. But Karø Goldt's work by no means contains factual elements alone; we see flowers rivaling skyscrapers in size. It is not my intention to overinterpret the symbolic aspect of this proportional relation; for example, it might well mean that organic growth can rival technical, architectural growth. But I will take this opportunity to re-count a biological anecdote that the collector and ophthalmologist Rudolf Leopold once related on television: his father was a natural scientist and, for this reason, always visited the Museum of Natural History but never the Museum of Art History which is opposite the Museum of Natural History in Vienna. One day the son was tracing his father's path, if not following in his footsteps, and came to the Museum of Art History; here he realised there, a parallel to nature: art. Karø Goldt's flower pictures manipulate this parallel; they make these flowers, these products of nature and horticulture, huge and, as such, the beautiful plants eclipse the architecture of the city!

There is a photograph that is not, to my mind, significant for the photographer's work but which has captured my imagination beyond measure – for an egocentric reason, of course. The picture shows something that I also aimed to show in one piece of my writing. After reading my book „Der Stadtrat. Eine Idylle“, a critic rightly wrote of a „flickering of consciousness“. As I see it, this flickering of consciousness is the aesthetics of blurredness; this aesthetics is not without problems because it assumes an affirmative or at least not a clarifying relationship with regard to our perceptive deficiencies. Karø Goldt's photography shows a urban vista, the bed of the Wienfluss river and the landscape of houses to the left and right: the two Wienzeilen. But the boundaries of the details become blurred to the eye; the photo is not out of focus, rather the photo exploits a particular, „beautiful“ blurredness of seeing. Everything that is solid is transformed into reflections of light and perhaps the world is seen like this before we have settled in to it, i.e. Before we have ostensibly become familiar with it.