

Relaxed Tension

Fabrics of the World

Out of control – the autonomy of growth: In the work of Birgit Knoechl performative intensity meets subtle dramaturgical interventions. Burgeoning installations reminiscent of cellular reproduction hover in sections of rooms, transforming the space with a presence intensified by light and shadow.

The installation “out of control – the autonomy of growth_0II” (2007) in her Bauernmarkt studio presentation in Vienna is lit from below by neon tubes. It is an artistic act that revokes all forms of spatial camouflage and points to a suspended dialectic. Birgit Knoechl’s large-format works intervene in the space while producing it; they ostentatiously confront and shape the found architecture of the studio and exhibition spaces. Up to fifteen-meter-long cut_outs intertwine into these arrangements. Spacing methods flow into the performative, module-like production process, interacting proportionately with the emerging spatial situation as an environment. It is a method that refers to the complex processual quality in the creation of spaces. At the same time it achieves an interventionist cutting of spatial structures. The installation “out of control_revisited – the autonomy of growth_0IV” (2006–08/2012) in the Albertina unfolds its effect from the corner of a room, illuminated from above by light spots. By examining the overall arrangement, striving to attain a complete overview, by stepping back, we as observers enter into a dynamic fabric, a visual-spatial game, and into a subliminal spatial shift.

In his book *The Poetics of Space*¹ the French philosopher Gaston Bachelard deals with “topophilia”, with the analysis of spaces of bliss. The perception and notion of space, the experiential dimensions, the imaginary, spaces that take on the quality of a refuge form important reference points. In psychoanalysis such spatializations (usually in connection with visual memories) are called “topoanalysis”. This also implies investigating and envisioning space as something experiential along with its indifferences.

Birgit Knoechl works with performatively augmented aesthetic parameters to animate us from a “wild side” to an open experience of art. Her departure point draws from art historical and theoretical research, such as questions of performativity.

¹ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (New York: Orion Press, 1964 [1957]).

The expression “performative” was introduced into language theory by the philosopher John Langshaw Austin in the 1950s. Austin coined the term to refer to the active character of speech and to illustrate how an extralinguistic effect also manifests in speech acts. In 1955 he held a lecture on the subject at Harvard University and a publication followed.² Transferred to the artistic domain, the performative expresses the reality constituting dimension of an artwork.

Here a tendency toward anti-establishment surfaces. Can art be critical after it has become the best friend of capitalism? Power structures were “physical” in the disciplinary societies of yesterday. They were visible and tangible authority, which had a normalizing effect on patterns of behavior. It works differently in a post-disciplinary society: Authority is no longer imposed from the outside rather subtly “from within” – the power ensures that those effected by it want exactly what they should want. In the publication *Kreation und Depression*³ (“Creation and Depression”) Christoph Menke and Juliane Rebentisch provide key texts on post-disciplinary society. One of their core questions: If the neoliberal competitive society draws its standardizing role model from the image of the creative artist (“self-fulfillment”), what then becomes of art as a field of pure aesthetics in the Kantian sense? Does it atrophy into the head coach for the power of imagination, as Michael Makropoulos states? In her art Birgit Knoechl opposes this vacuum with a non-conformity and an unwillingness, calling upon the existence of a post-autonomous subject and its potential to step out of the chaos of increasingly restrictive neoliberal lifestyles.

Hence, the repetition of the phrase “out of control” in the titles of her installations is no coincidence. A loss of control happens when the complexity of interactions surpasses our receptivity and imagination.

As a political term “out of control” describes a demonstration concept in which demonstrators try to scatter a number of times and regroup at other locations in order to dissolve the borders between the demonstration march and the surroundings. The concept “out of control” is based on a decentralized organizational structure and uncontrolled movements. Etymologically the term “control” originates from the French “contrôle”, in the old spelling “contrerolle”: “contre” being “counter” and “rôle” a roll, registry, list. The “Contre Role” initially meant keeping a duplicate registry or roll to check the data of an original. Control derived from the registry is externalized memory and the attempt to replace the future with the expected values of the past with the help

² John Langshaw Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962).

³ Christoph Menke and Juliane Rebentisch (eds.), *Kreation und Depression – Freiheit im gegenwärtigen Kapitalismus* (Berlin: Kulturverlag Kadmos, 2011).

of an archive. In keeping with Jacques Deleuze, a control society would be a society of predictability, a society without a future – that means without events. Contemporary flows of data are causing enormous shifts. Today archivology has made way for a queryology, a science of query retrieval systems. Whoever submits personal data in social networks like Facebook doesn't know at the point of submission or afterwards who is going to use the information. Data from social networks are passed on in massive volumes, encrypted connections cracked. 2013 went down in history as the year of data breach.⁴ A phenomenon that researchers call the privacy paradox manifests here. Although the protection of the private sphere is found to be very important, little is being done to this end. Faced with exact planning and the itch to gain control over systems and materials through ordering methods, the opportunities in opening oneself to a dialogue with the phenomena of losing control lie in stepping out of the existing reality or one negotiated through certain relationships and procedures and performing temporal transfers to create constructive, unexpected interventions.

Birgit Knoechl subjects her motifs to spatial expansion, varying her formal vocabulary built on modules. First an ink drawing is made with different layers and nuances. Worked over in numerous layers, the paper attains a haptic dimension through the opaque materiality created by the deep black ink, which emphasizes – hardly visible in its entirety – the vibrancy of the paper as material. Over the course of the years she has created an immense number of paper works, initially based on Japanese ornament. Beginning with cut_outs in combination with drawings, a work developed with organic line structures and geometric forms – from organic, rhizomatic, biometric to fractal, crystalline, geometric forms and the exploration of how these can be brought into a relationship with one another. Variations in the repetition of the formal grammar, shifts, and a fluid act aimed at change converge. Birgit Knoechl has earned a degree of freedom through her laborious work cycles. In her cut_outs she opens up the two-dimensional realm of the medium of the drawing, applies the methods of sampling and resampling, performs a new and redefinition of the line in the drawing through the cut, crafts room drawings right in front of the eye, defines fields of passage in the interstitial. She exploits the line's potential to "presentify", which art historian Max Imdahl describes.

The graphic flow enters into a performative duality. The artistic, performative process is a very intimate, self-encircling dancing act, which incorporates physical movement

⁴ Cf. Michael Seemann, "Die Privatsphären-Falle", *ZEIT ONLINE*, October 9, 2013, accessed August 18, 2015, <http://www.zeit.de/digital/datenschutz/2013-10/privatsphaere-ueberwachung-nsa-seemann>.

rhythms and haptic sequences. This process is subject to a certain fascination for biomorphic, network-like structures in paper whose blackness exhibits a detonating effect of hybrid forms in the numerous superimpositions, despite the frailty of the material.

Birgit Knoechl cultivates a kind of Garden of Eden, opposes all hysteria of cosmic malediction, and exposes anarchic ambiguity through the oscillations in her installations, which fascinate recipients with their allusions. At the same time, she offers different interpretations of the form and meaning of the medium and suggests a performative ethic. Overwhelming in their physical, vibrant presence, the installations seem open and permeable, providing access to the ongoing investigations on how to replace Euclidean spatial constructs and their inherent relationship with power with other models of perceiving space.

Liberated from a linear temporal development, the installations by Birgit Knoechl attain a timeless consistency; they are disconnected from time. Space is demonstrated as an agile element in a dialectic context and made tangible as a spiral of being, rotating toward and away from the center. Being has no fixed location. In confrontation emerge fabrics of the world, which demand skepticism toward every authority of a controlled statement and evoke a clear detachment from a Euclidean understanding of space.

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