

Zabriskie points

A cartography of fragments

Individual outlined bodies of images set each other into vibrating relationships, enter into liaisons with splinters of outlines, concentrate themselves into striking, hard surfaces whose edges are made uncertain by very fine graphic formations – the results of a mammoth explosion which drift apart in slow motion like the final sequence of Antonioni's film.

The author of this deconstruction calls his procedure an „overcoming of photography“, but basically he puts every image into question which initially still reveals a connection with a reality which is to be represented. The starting point for this scepticism about images are analogue-media images with the most diverse origins: scientific visualizations, raster electron microscope pictures, nano aesthetics, comics such as Superman, pornographic images, satellite photos, stills from television and popular culture which were taken from the film or directly from the computer screen. Conceived of as material, these images are digitized and subjected to various image-processing programs in the computer. Pixels are vectorized into character strings by graphics programs. What was originally conceived of in the programs' intentions as the optimization of image quality, is now inverted into its opposite. Any similarity with the images on which this work is based evaporates more and more in the successive operations on the images: highlighting of contours, simplification of colours from chromatic transitions to coloured surfaces, zooms, rotations, distortions, warps, the building-up of surfaces layer by layer into solid bodies which then burst again.

„Take things from their context and process them (divide, reunite, displace, bend, colour in, burst, rotate, destroy, recompose, etc.)“ Wolfgang Herbold's technical instructions for digital mapping read like a MERZ manifesto of the electronic age.

Solid bodies which have already been reduced to surfaces in their transformation into images are now put through the Herboldian transformation machine. This machine is composed of various competing programs: Photoshop, FreeHand, Streamline, Illustrator, Cinema 4D - software instruments which serve the perfection of image manipulation and bravely uphold the attraction of simulation, are now employed for a visual investigation of the initial image.

The transformations do not take place only internally within the images, but also between the individual programs. The incompatibility of competing graphics programs becomes a stimulus for complicated translations which can never take place in a one-to-one relation. The dialogue of the programs which were brought onto the

image-processing market not for each other, but at best next to each other, is marked by losses. A pixel image stored in Photoshop is transformed into a vector graphic, processed, subjected to a 3-D rotation in a 3-D program. Because of the restrictions of the given program, it may only be possible to output the result as a pixel image. If the image resolution is to be increased, the images which have just been transformed are imported once again into another program which transforms the pixels into vectors. A lively exchange of image data takes place among the programs. The floating of the images, which has become theoretically proverbial, is here a component part of the image processing.

Accidents, unwanted remainders and mistakes are unavoidable at the intermediate stations of the transformation processes and are turned productively to the good. Contingent outcomes resulting from the difference between the artist and the program are integrated in further processing steps. The intuitively guided sequence of digital processing steps and the incomplete 'control' of the technology creates an intermediate space in which the computed images unfurl their own poetry. The question concerning the artistic substance of technical images or the artist's authentic trace through the work gives way to an intelligent collaboration which is situated beyond the naive polarity of art versus technology.

The flux of images is not given over to the light-headed momentum of the image manipulations. Individual steps in the work process are noted down to be employed consciously later as an instrument. Transformations come to a halt to manifest themselves in screen-shots. Provisional processing fragments are collected together in an archive or on the computer screen desktop so they can be accessed as required. Individual images are condensed into clusters, processed once again, blown apart, twisted, rotated, blown up into pseudo-spaces, to then decompose once more into nervous linear structures.

In view of these metamorphoses, the question concerning the original image is posed. Has one now come closer to the character of the digital image which up to now has comported itself on the monitor screen with analogue familiarity – pretended persons, landscapes and objects where really there were only algorithms? Despite all the twisting and distortion of the image data, remainders are still legible. The pinkish-brown flesh colour of the porno still of a nipple continues to irritate the searching eye which had no longer expected any flesh behind all these abstractions from the original body of the image. Do the transformations of the computed images reveal the structures of a visual surface which simply serves to communicate an obscured message? Can the transformational grammar of the linguist, Noam Chomsky, be extended to the language of digital images, or do such structural analogies prove to be wishful thinking and a

renewed attempt to discern a superstructure behind the interpretations of the surfaces? Isn't one surface replaced by another, and doesn't this controlled interplay of the surfaces demonstrate the interchangeability of visual realizations?

The microcosm of these worlds of images is fragmented and gives expression to the pleasure in a continual dehierarchization of its objects. Everything is in a state of flux, caught in processes of metamorphosis. The malleability of the reality stored in the image is celebrated sensuously and the transformation of all visible phenomena is declared to be the sole constant. The pull of the fragment unfolds a startling appeal and suggests the beauty of ever new, unstable compounds. The elements enter into new relations, each particle can become an attractor and radiate a force field which holds the embedded graphic particle right up to the periphery. Relations act at a distance, everything is connected with everything else, but the family relations remain extremely distanced. A segment of a circle leads, on a long leash, a black scribble which approaches an orange patch of colour which in turn had its analogue origin in the medical image of a blood test.

For Herbold there are approximations of content and relations with technical drawings and scientific representations whose claim to truth he mistrusts. Even scientific images which get closer and closer to their objects with microelectronic precision are subject to permanent interpretation. Image-producing procedures are not legible without a set of rules and thus have unintentionally high imaginative potential. In the last few years, artists have increasingly come to congregate around this blind spot of scientific non-ambiguity to undertake their interrogations between art and science. Subjective cartographies are developed and the mapping becomes a procedure which provides a provisional definitional location for heterogeneous structures ranging from the work of memory to the human genome. Maps have become processual structures, scores for elements which behave like actors, change location and navigate. Electronic music sometimes causes similar reactions, noise which persistently hisses in the most diverse ramifications, traces of branchings, and condensations and which really does not need any words. The visual counterparts of this music are found on CD covers and in alternative music boxes which enable their visitors to make a collage of sound samples. Further parallels are suggested to a score for a strange music which does without rhythm in favour of a multitude of unexpected breaks, and to the early architectural drafts of Bernhard Tschumi or Daniel Libeskind in which movement is everything and stable spatial co-ordinates are of lesser importance. Paths which go their own way, condense into Utopian spaces, post-constructivist architectures which celebrate their tendency toward weightlessness.

Network structures, rhizomic growths emerge apart from fashionable theoretical discourse about them. Closed bodies, entities, in their extension perhaps even identities, are pleasurably deconstructed and enter into new relations. The dialogue of fragments unfolds an enormous power of attraction and the interplay of modular forms mirrors something of the appeal of staging oneself in new performative acts over and over again. There is no death in these worlds of images because every destructive act is followed by a new forming. Image forms are exploded, miniaturized to unrecognizability, but they are not lost. Each particle contains the potential for another formulation and can become a component in an unknown constellation. When approaching Herbold's image transformations, one is tempted to employ the language of animism which conceives of motion and vitality as the drifting apart of formerly close systems that have been broken open. The vitalism of the fragments can presumably only be maintained in the fiction of the image and its transformations, but here everything transforms itself once again without knowing of death. Only here is every disaster the starting point for a new creative act, only here can processes be initiated, interrupted, reversed or left to chance. Only here can a computer print-out temporarily stop the dance of the pixels and the vector graphics to provide an image of the pleasure in breaking forms open.

In the fiction of the image, the risks of physical, bodily experiments have been suspended. The explosion has long since taken place, individual blown-up pixels flutter around hollow bodies which have found sanctuary behind a contour line resembling a beam. Each form is unstable. It can be made smaller and smaller to the point of invisibility, staccato-like dabs, chance spots, apparent irregularities in the paper. At the edges of the glossy, standard DIN formats, the chromatic dust gets lost and disappears from view – the reverberations of a poetic chain reaction.

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