

HERCULANEUM

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Culturali – Parco Archeologico di Ercolano





















THE REMAINS OF TODAY

Dieter Roelstraete

Quel che resta dell'oggi

Was vom Heute übrigblieb

The idea that guides my reflections on the concept of the work of art is that archaeology is the sole means of access to the present.

– Giorgio Agamben, *Creation and Anarchy*

Only in recent years have I come to understand, and truly appreciate, the oft-repeated claim that most of us working in the expanded creative or cultural sphere – artists, musicians, thinkers, writers and the like – will only hit upon one or two really great, that is to say *original*, ideas in our professional lifetime. Judging from its unexpectedly long, seemingly inextinguishable afterlife, mine appears to be the “way of the shovel”, i.e. the idea that a discernible “historiographic turn” came to dominate the critical mainstream of contemporary art in the early years of the twenty-first century, and that much of the work produced in this turning’s wake adopted the language, method and optic of *archaeology*; that a dominant strand of contemporary art practice, post 9/11, sought to (re)invent itself as *archeological* in kind, spirit, and intent. I first gathered these observations concerning this timely art-world-wide enthusiasm for the archeological paradigm under the rubric “The Way of the Shovel” – the title of an essay first, and then of an exhibition (a distant) second, published in *e-flux journal #4* online in the spring of 2009 and organised at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago in the fall of 2013 respectively. Though I myself may not necessarily have thought of the “way of the shovel” as my greatest contribution to the field of contemporary art criticism, the ideas behind it have proven remarkably successful in traversing the global village of twenty-first-century art. The original essay has been reprinted (and translated) on a number of occasions, and I have long since lost count of the number of times an email inviting me to speak at a conference or exhibition opening – or inviting me to write for a catalogue or magazine – has begun with an introductory nod to the impression, made upon the inviting party, of said archaeological storyline. Indeed, the association of my person, in the public eye of contemporary art discourse (the parochial nature of which evidently requires no supplementary reminding), with this tangle of art-historical concerns is such that it is probably the only professional accolade that I can ever imagine gracing my gravestone: “Here Lieth Him of The-Way-of-the-Shovel Fame.” (Perish the thought! Though the spectre of art-as-archeology would of course

L'idea che guida le mie riflessioni sul concetto di opera d'arte è che l'archeologia è l'unica via di accesso al presente.

– Giorgio Agamben, *Creazione e Anarchia*

Solo di recente sono arrivato a comprendere, e realmente apprezzare, quello che viene ripetutamente affermato da coloro che come me lavorano nell’ambito generalmente culturale e creativo (artisti, musicisti, pensatori e scrittori o simili), il fatto cioè che nel corso della nostra vita professionale ci imatteremo in una, massimo due idee davvero fantastiche, o per meglio dire originali. A giudicare dalla sua durata inaspettatamente lunga e dalla sua apparentemente inestinguibile longevità, la mia idea originale sembra essere quella della “via della pala”, ovvero l’idea che una “svolta storiografica” chiaramente percepibile abbia dominato il dibattito ufficiale della critica d’arte contemporanea nei primi anni del Ventunesimo secolo e che molte delle opere prodotte sulla scia di questa svolta abbiano adottato il linguaggio, il metodo e la prospettiva dell’archeologia; che infine il filone dominante della pratica artistica contemporanea, dopo l’11 Settembre, abbia cercato di (re)inventarsi come *archeologico*, nel genere, nello spirito e negli intenti.

La prima volta che ho recepito con quale rapido entusiasmo tutto il mondo dell’arte ha accolto il paradigma *archeologico* è stato quando ho pubblicato “La Via della Pala”, il titolo di un saggio pubblicato online su *e-flux journal #4* nella primavera del 2009, seguito tempo dopo da una mostra organizzata al Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, nell’autunno del 2013. Nonostante il fatto che io stesso non reputassi “La Via della Pala” il mio contributo più significativo al campo della critica d’arte contemporanea, le idee che l’avevano ispirato hanno avuto un notevole successo nell’attraversare il villaggio globale dell’arte del Ventunesimo secolo. Il saggio originale è stato ristampato (e tradotto) in varie occasioni e da allora ho perso il conto del numero delle volte che ho ricevuto una e-mail che mi invitava a parlare ad una conferenza o all’apertura di una mostra – o che mi invitava a scrivere per un catalogo o una rivista – e che iniziava con un cenno introduttivo all’impressione esercitata dal suddetto tema *archeologico* sul richiedente.

In effetti, il nesso tra la mia persona, nell’ambito del dibattito pubblico sull’arte contemporanea (la natura parrocchiale del quale, quindi, non ha bisogno di essere ricordata ulteriormente) e il groviglio di ciò che interessa oggi al dibattito storico-artistico è tale, che probabilmente si tratta

Meine Betrachtungen in Bezug auf das Konzept eines Kunstwerks werden von der Vorstellung geleitet, dass die Archäologie das einzige Mittel zur Erschließung der Gegenwart darstellt.

– Giorgio Agamben, *Creation and Anarchy*

Erst in den letzten Jahren habe ich eine oft wiederholte Aussage verstanden und wirklich zu schätzen gelernt, nämlich, dass die meisten von uns Kreativ- oder Kulturschaffenden – also Künstler, Musiker, Denker, Schriftsteller etc. – in ihrer beruflichen Laufbahn nur eine oder zwei wirklich großartige, beziehungsweise *originelle* Ideen haben.

Angesichts des unerwartet langen und scheinbar unauslöschlichen Nachlebens meines Aufsatzes „The Way of the Shovel“ [Die Methode der Schaufel], scheint meine *originelle* Idee, ein Gedanke zu sein, den ich in eben diesem Aufsatz formuliert hatte. Ich stellte darin fest, dass der kritische Mainstream der zeitgenössischen Kunst in den ersten Jahren des 21. Jahrhunderts anfang von einer wahrnehmbaren „historiographischen Wende“ dominiert zu werden. Ich beobachtete, dass die im Heckwasser dieser Wende entstandene Kunst, die Sprache, Methodik und Optik von *Archäologie* annahm und, dass ein vorherrschender Strang der Gegenwartskunst nach den Terroranschlägen vom 11. September 2001 danach strebte, sich in seiner Art, in seinem Geist und in seinem Vorsatz als archäologisch (neu) zu definieren. Die Beobachtungen in Bezug auf diesen gegenwärtig weltweiten Kunst-Enthusiasmus für das archäologische Paradigma fasste ich erstmals unter der Rubrik „The Way of the Shovel“ zusammen. Dies war zunächst der Titel eines Aufsatzes, der vom *e-flux journal #4* online im Frühjahr von 2009 herausgegeben wurde und später auch der Titel einer Ausstellung, die im Herbst 2013 im Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago organisiert wurde. Obwohl ich selbst nicht erwartet hätte, dass „The Way of the Shovel“ mein größter Beitrag im Bereich der zeitgenössischen Kunstkritik werden würde, haben sich die Gedanken dahinter als erstaunlich erfolgreich dabei erwiesen, das globale Dorf der Kunstszene des 21. Jahrhunderts zu überspannen. Der original Aufsatz ist mehrfach nachgedruckt und übersetzt worden. Ich habe längst aufgehört zu zählen, wie oft ich eine Einladungsemail erhalte, an einer Konferenz oder Ausstellungseröffnung einen Vortrag zu halten, beziehungsweise einen Katalog- oder Magazinbeitrag zu schreiben, in der die oder der Einladende schon zu Beginn darauf verweist, welchen Eindruck besagte archäologische Geschichte auf sie gemacht hatte.

Tatsächlich ist die Assoziation meiner Person in der öffentlichen Wahrnehmung des zeitgenössischen Kunst-Diskurses (dessen beschränkte Natur keiner zusätzlichen Erinnerung bedarf), mit dieser Verknüpfung kunsthistorischer Anliegen von einem solchem Ausmaß, dass es das einzige professionelle Tribut ist, von dem ich mir je vorstellen könnte, meinen Grabstein zieren zu lassen: „Hier liegt der

befit the funerary context.) For it is my writing this essay, now more than ten years ago, that is the primary reason, unsurprisingly, for my writing this very text: a postscript to a publication chronicling this particular artist's engagement with the language, method and optic of *archeology* (Herculaneum and Pompeii, of all places!), with what is *archeological* in kind, spirit, and intent – an assignment which I accepted, in part, as an invitation to revisit my original argument: to look back and see where this way of the shovel has led us – and where it might be leading us, going forward while looking backward.

The question, ten, twenty or twenty-five years on (depending on where we locate the point of origin of this “historiographic turn” in art), remains: whence, indeed, this *ongoing* preoccupation, on the part of a fluctuating but always substantive cohort of contemporary artists, with history, the historical record and digging up the deep past? Whence this desire to excavate and unearth, or otherwise make oneself at home in the archeological imaginary? Why this *continuing* drive to imagine art – which, in its modern conception, was so long (and until very recently too) looked at for guidance towards the future and the new – operating on the glacial pace and barren plane of archeology's deep time? For the fact remains that we must at all times remind ourselves of the paradigmatic *novelty* of contemporary art's retrospective impulse – how new the idea of contemporary art's historical curiosity or enthusiasm for archival research essentially continues to be: it is hard to imagine modernist archetypes like El Lissitzky, Piet Mondrian or Kurt Schwitters (or Jackson Pollock, Barnett Newman or Donald Judd) plunging the depths of, say, nineteenth-century socio-economic or art history for either formal or thematic inspiration, and it is harder still to imagine them turning to the history books of their childhood or youth (which one would have been hard-pressed to locate in their largely book-free studios). And it may be the hardest of all to imagine their work staged inside an *archeological* museum – recall F. T. Marinetti's words in his *Futurist Manifesto* from 1909: “We want to demolish museums and libraries”, or Henry Flynt and Jack Smith's call to “Demolish Art Museums” in 1963 – or conceived in direct dialogue with the contents of a historical site many centuries removed (and governed, presumably, by a wholly other idea of art). The notion of the

dell'unico riconoscimento professionale che immagino potrà un giorno adornare la mia lapide: “Qui giace colui che fu reso famoso da La Via Della Pala” (non voglio nemmeno pensarci! Anche se naturalmente lo spettro dell'arte-come-archeologia sarebbe appropriato al contesto funebre). Perché è proprio il fatto che io abbia scritto questo saggio, non più di dieci anni fa, che in maniera prevedibile costituisce la ragione principale del fatto che io stia scrivendo questo testo: un'appendice a una pubblicazione che registra il coinvolgimento di questa artista con il linguaggio, il metodo e la prospettiva dell'*archeologia* (Ercolano e Pompei, tra tutti i luoghi!) e con ciò che è *archeologico* nella natura, nello spirito e nell'intento. Un incarico che ho accettato, in parte, come un invito a rivisitare il mio ragionamento originario: per voltarmi indietro e vedere dove questa via della pala ci abbia condotto – e dove ci potrebbe portare, avanzando mentre guardiamo indietro.

Dieci, venti o venticinque anni dopo (a seconda di dove collochiamo il punto di origine di questa ‘svolta storiografica’ nell'arte), la domanda rimane: da dove proviene, a dirla tutta, questa ininterrotta preoccupazione, da parte di una fluttuante ma sempre sostanziale schiera di artisti contemporanei, per la storia, la documentazione storica e lo scavo negli abissi del passato? Donde nasce questo desiderio di scavare e dissotterrare, o familiarizzare con un immaginario *archeologico*? Perché questo *continuo* impulso a immaginare un'arte che opera nel piano del ritmo glaciale e arido degli abissi del tempo dell'*archeologia*, quando nella sua concezione moderna è stata a lungo (e fino a non molto tempo fa) considerata la guida verso il futuro ed il nuovo?

Poiché resta comunque il fatto che dobbiamo sempre ricordare a noi stessi quanto l'impulso retrospettivo dell'arte contemporanea costituisca una *novità* paradigmatica, quanto nuovi continuino essenzialmente ad essere la curiosità per la storia o l'entusiasmo per la ricerca archivistica espressi dall'arte contemporanea. È difficile immaginare archetipi modernisti come El Lissitzky, Piet Mondrian o Kurt Schwitters (o Jackson Pollock, Barnett Newman o Donald Judd) immergersi nelle profondità, ad esempio, della storia socio-economica o della storia dell'arte del Diciannovesimo secolo per trovarvi ispirazione formale o tematica, ed è ancora più difficile immaginarli mentre consultano i libri di storia della loro infanzia o della giovinezza (libri che uno faticerebbe a localizzare nei loro atelier d'artista, in buona parte privi di libri). E più difficile ancora sarebbe immaginare che la loro opera venisse esposta all'interno di un museo *archeologico* – F. T. Marinetti nel suo *Manifesto Futurista*

Verfasser des berühmten Werkes „The Way of the Shovel“ begraben. (Gott bewahre davor! Obwohl das Spektrum von Kunst-als-Archäologie natürlich zum Grabmalkontext passen würde). Und es ist wenig überraschend, dass das Verfassen jenes Aufsatzes vor zehn Jahren der Hauptgrund dafür ist, dass ich nun diesen Text hier schreibe: ein Nachwort für eine Publikation, welche die Auseinandersetzung speziell dieser Künstlerin mit der Sprache, Methodik und Optik der *Archäologie* (ausgerechnet von Herculaneum und Pompeii!) aufzeichnet, mit dem, was in der Art, im Geiste und in der Absicht archäologisch ist. Dabei handelt es sich um eine Aufgabe, die ich zum Teil auch deshalb übernahm, weil sie Gelegenheit dazu bot, meine ursprüngliche Erörterung zu überdenken: um zu sehen wohin uns diese „Methode der Schaufel“ geführt hat – und wohin sie uns führen mag, wenn wir rückwärts blickend vorwärts gehen.

Je nachdem wann wir den Ursprungspunkt dieser „historiographischen Wende“ ansetzen, bleibt zehn, zwanzig oder fünfundzwanzig Jahre später die Frage: Woher kommt eigentlich diese fortwährende Auseinandersetzung einer zwar wechselnden, jedoch immer wesentlichen Anzahl an zeitgenössischen Künstlern mit Geschichte, historischer Aufzeichnung und dem ans Licht bringen der fernen Vergangenheit? Woher kommt diese Begierde des Ausgrabens und Freilegens, oder die Begierde sich in den archäologischen Vorstellungswelten zu Hause zu fühlen? Warum gibt es diesen *anhaltenden* Drang sich Kunst vorzustellen – welche doch in ihrer modernen Konzeption so lange (und noch bis vor sehr kurzem) als Orientierungshilfe für die Zukunft und das Neue betrachtet wurde – die sich im eiszeitlichen Tempo und auf der kargen Ebene der archäologischen Tiefenzeit bewegt? Tatsächlich sollten wir uns stets an die paradigmatische *Neuheit* dieses zurückblickenden Impulses der zeitgenössischen Kunst erinnern: Wie *neu* die Ideen der historischen Neugierde oder der Begeisterung für Archivforschung noch für die zeitgenössische Kunst sind! Es ist schwer vorstellbar, dass sich Vorreiter der Moderne wie El Lissitzky, Piet Mondrian oder Kurt Schwitters (oder auch Jackson Pollock, Barnett Newman oder Donald Judd) zur formalen oder thematischen Inspiration mit der Sozialökonomie oder der Kunstgeschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts auseinandersetzen. Noch schwieriger ist es sich vorzustellen, dass sie sich dabei auf Geschichtsbücher ihrer Kindheit und Jugend bezogen hätten (welche man ohnehin nur mit Mühe in ihren größtenteils bücherlosen Kunstateliers gefunden hätte). Am schwierigsten ist es wohl sich ihre Kunstwerke in einem *archäologischen* Museum ausgestellt oder in direktem Austausch mit dem Inhalt einer jahrhundertalten und vermutlich von einer ganz anderen Kunstauffassung bestimmten historischen Stätte vorzustellen. Man erinnere sich in diesem Sinne an F. T. Marinetti's Worte in seinem *Manifest des Futurismus* von 1909: „Wir wollen die Museen und Bibliotheken zerstören“ oder an Henry Flynt und Jack Smith's Aufruf von 1963: „Zerstört Kunstmuseen“. Anders gesagt, bleibt

Manipulated image of wooden
figure from Herculaneum
Immagine rielaborata di una
statuetta lignea da Ercolano
Manipuliertes Bild von hölzerner
Figur aus Herculaneum



new's incursion into the old, in other words, remains exactly (and paradoxically) that: *new*. That is to say, to paraphrase the immortal words of L. P. Hartley: the past *remains* a foreign country, possibly becoming more alien and foreign and remote the more enthusiastically we seek to both map and disappear *into* it – a country of never-ending newness and inexhaustible promise. (I have used the verb “remains” four times in this paragraph alone; the word itself comes armed with archeological overtones: the remains of today.)

Now then: whence and *why* this way? In the catalogue essay accompanying *The Way of the Shovel's* curatorial premiere at the MCA Chicago in 2013, I had the following to suggest: “in many ways one could view the historiographic impulse in art (i.e., the massive turning away from the present, back to a more alluring or inspiring past) as the quintessential artistic paradigm of the Bush II years, which constituted a present so bleak and grim that no one could be faulted for choosing to live in the past instead. (...) The historiographic turn in contemporary art, then, was also a turning away from a present that art, as a whole, felt utterly powerless to change— or, more prosaically, a present that art was utterly uninterested in being a part of.” And if this were to be formalised into a logical law of some kind, one might submit: the more depressing our present, and the bleaker the future it projects, the further back we might look – all the way back to Greco-Roman antiquity, for example, to *find a much more promising alternative present there*. Rereading the aforementioned lines today, at the nadir of our current geopolitical predicament – marked by the collusion of Trumpism and climate change in ways so utterly dispiriting that one is tempted to positively *yearn* for the relative sanity (!) of those once diabolical Bush II years – I cannot help but suppress a wry, pitying smile: who knew that our present could get so much worse, and the past so much more alluring – that the retrospective glance, in some way, would offer the *only* way out? That art would turn to a world of ruins and cemeteries for signs of hope and *life*?

This, then, is one of the lessons of my revisiting the ageing argument of “the archeological imaginary in art” through the prism of a project's like Catrin Huber's *Expanded Interiors*: we may have seen nothing yet, in terms of the antagonism and disconnect between the contemporary art field and the surrounding world –

del 1909 proclama: “Vogliamo demolire i musei e le biblioteche”; oppure Henry Flynt e Jack Smith invitano a “Demolire i Musei d'Arte” nel 1963 – o che venisse concepita in dialogo diretto con il contenuto di un sito storico lontano di molti secoli (e governato, presumibilmente, da un'idea di arte totalmente diversa). In altre parole, l'idea dell'incursione del nuovo nel vecchio resta esattamente (e paradossalmente) tale: un'idea nuova. Vale a dire, parafrasando le parole immortali di L. P. Hartley: il passato resta un paese straniero, che forse diventa tanto più alieno, estraneo e remoto quanto più appassionatamente cerchiamo di crearne la mappa e di sparirci *dentro* – un paese dove la novità non finisce mai e dalle promesse inesauribili (ho usato il verbo 'restare' quattro volte solo in questo paragrafo; la parola stessa è armata con toni archeologici: i resti dell'oggi.)

Dunque: da dove si origina e perché nasce questo interesse? Nel saggio del catalogo che accompagnava il vernissage curatoriale di *The Way of the Shovel* al MCA Chicago nel 2013, suggerii il seguente concetto: “l'impulso storiografico nell'arte (in altre parole l'enorme allontanamento dal presente, in direzione contraria, verso un passato più allettante o stimolante) si può considerare per molti versi come il paradigma artistico per eccellenza degli anni di Bush II, che rappresentavano un presente talmente cupo e difficile che nessuno poteva essere accusato di scegliere di vivere nel passato invece che nel presente. (...) La svolta storiografica dell'arte contemporanea, quindi, significava anche allontanarsi da un presente che l'arte, nel suo insieme, si sentiva completamente incapace di cambiare – oppure, più prosaicamente, che l'arte era assolutamente disinteressata a far parte di questo presente.” E se questo dovesse essere sancito in una qualche legge della logica, uno potrebbe sottoscrivere: più il nostro presente è sconsigliato e più cupo è il futuro che proietta, più indietro potremmo guardare – fino, per esempio, ai tempi dell'antichità Greco-Romana, per trovare *lá indietro un'alternativa molto più promettente*. Rileggendo oggi queste righe, nel punto più basso della nostra attuale crisi geopolitica – segnata dalla collusione tra trumpismo e cambiamento climatico, in un contesto così deprimente che si è tentati di *desiderare* ardentemente la saggezza relativa (!) degli anni infernali di Bush II – non riesco a nascondere un sorriso ironico e pietoso: chi l'avrebbe mai detto che il nostro presente potesse peggiorare così tanto e il passato diventare così desiderabile, che lo sguardo retrospettivo potesse in qualche modo offrire l'*unica* via di uscita? Che l'arte si voltasse indietro, verso un mondo di rovine e cimiteri, per cercare segni di speranza e di *vita*?

die Idee eines Einbruchs des Neuen ins Alte paradoxerweise genau das: *neu*. Dies will, mit den unvergesslichen Worten von L. P. Hartley ausgedrückt, sagen: die Vergangenheit *bleibt* ein fremdes Land, das möglicherweise fremder und ferner wird, je begeisterter wir versuchen, sie abzubilden und *darin* zu verschwinden – es bleibt ein Land unendlicher Neuheit und unerschöpflicher Versprechungen. (Allein in diesem Abschnitt habe ich das Verb „bleiben“ drei mal verwendet; dieses Wort hat selbst eine archäologische Konnotation: was vom heute übrigblieb).

Nun also: woher und *warum* diese Richtung? Im Aufsatz zur Ausstellungseröffnung von „The Way of the Shovel“ im MCA Chicago 2013 hatte ich Folgendes vorzuschlagen: „In vielerlei Hinsicht könnte man den historiographischen Impuls der Kunst (d.h. der massiven Abkehr von der Gegenwart zurück zu einer verlockenderen und inspirierenden Vergangenheit) als das wesentliche künstlerische Paradigma der Amtsperiode von George W. Bush Junior bezeichnen, die eine Gegenwart darstellte, die so trostlos und düster war, dass es niemandem vorgeworfen werden konnte, sich stattdessen dafür zu entscheiden in der Vergangenheit zu leben. (...) Die historiographische Wende in der zeitgenössischen Kunst war damals auch eine Abkehr von einer Gegenwart, welche Kunst im Allgemeinen sich machtlos gegenüber fühlte ändern zu können – oder um es prosaischer auszudrücken, eine Gegenwart an der die Kunst überhaupt kein Interesse hatte teilzunehmen.“ Müsste man dies in eine Art logische Schlussfolgerung formulieren, so könnte man sagen: je depressiver unsere Gegenwart ist und je trostloser die Zukunft, die sie prognostiziert, umso weiter zurück mag man blicken, zum Beispiel bis hin zur griechisch-römische Antike, *um dort eine vielversprechendere alternative Gegenwart zu finden*. Beim wiederholten Lesen der oben genannten Zeilen, ist man heute, am Tiefpunkt unserer gegenwärtigen geopolitischen Misere, die von der so entmutigenden Konspiration des Trump-Ismus in Bezug auf den Klimawandel geprägt ist, förmlich versucht sich die relative Vernunft (!) dieser einst teuflischen George W. Bush-Jahre zurückzusehen. Dabei muss ich mir ein ironisches, mitleidiges Lächeln verkneifen: Wer hätte ahnen können, dass unsere Gegenwart so viel schlimmer werden könnte, und die Vergangenheit so viel reizvoller, sodass der Rückblick in gewisser Weise den *einzigsten* Ausweg zu bieten scheint? Wer hätte voraussehen können, dass Kunst sich einer Welt von Ruinen und Friedhöfen zuwenden würde, um Zeichen der Hoffnung und des *Lebens* zu finden?

Dies ist dann also eine Erkenntnis meiner erneuten Auseinandersetzung mit dem alternden Argument der „archäologischen Vorstellungswelten in der Kunst“ durch das Prisma eines Projektes wie Catrin Hubers *Expanded Interiors*: das dies vielleicht erst der Anfang hinsichtlich des Antagonismus und der Kluft zwischen der zeitgenössischen Kunst und der sie umgebenden Welt ist. Ihr Antagonismus und ihre Kluft könnte immer tiefer werden und wichtige

their antagonism and disconnect may yet grow deeper and deeper, and major sectors of the contemporary art field may increasingly (and thankfully) start to feel as islands drifting off the coast of this doomed present, as an archipelago of cultures happily banished to reliving (or living in) the past, and the past alone. Indeed, increasingly, many of my more rewarding contemporary art experiences have come with the growing awareness of this exact temporal disjuncture; more and more contemporary art comes with an increasingly emphatic caveat that it isn't really "contemporary", or doesn't really want to engage the contemporary – and it doesn't necessarily want to *look* terribly contemporary anymore either; it does not want to *belong* to the here and now. (The *locus classicus* of this battle over temporal belonging, in my view, can be found in the analogue/digital divide: the ever-deepening finesse of digital technologies in art production is currently more often than not geared towards making us forget that we are looking at a digital product at all.) This, in any case, is the impression I have built up these last few years while visiting the world's leading contemporary art museums and biennials (and while working on an edition of Documenta about which one critic tersely observed that one could have been forgiven, while visiting Documenta 14, for thinking that the internet did not exist): art truly and quite literally has become, *pace* Hegel, "a thing of the past" – and both consciously and contentedly so. Most art nowadays *wants* to be historical; most art nowadays has art history on its mind, happily living among the remains of today.

Parenthetically: another thing I have learned about the relationship between art and archeology is how deeply the former romanticizes the latter – and the corresponding depth of the chasm that separates the *scientific* business of archeology from art's romantic fictionalization of it. Which is fine – which might in fact be good, i.e. a service rendered unto archeology by the artistic imagination. But this thought I must leave undeveloped for now.

We now know, sort of, *why* art is retreating (back) into an older, outdated version of our world: because it does not want to "belong" to the current, most up-to-date version. In this, art is clearly privy – and subject – to the perfectly human instinct to resist the relentless command to always "install updates". (I, for one, find it bad enough living in this twenty-first century – the

Questa quindi è una delle lezioni che traggo nel rivisitare la mia vecchia tesi "l'immaginario *archeologico* nell'arte" attraverso il prisma di un progetto come quello di *Expanded Interiors* di Catrin Huber: può darsi che non abbiamo ancora visto nulla in termini di antagonismo e distacco tra il campo dell'arte contemporanea e il mondo circostante – il loro antagonismo ed il distacco potrebbero diventare sempre più profondi, e importanti settori nel campo dell'arte contemporanea potrebbero sempre più (e per fortuna) iniziare a sentirsi come isole che si allontanano dalla costa di questo tormentato presente, come un arcipelago di culture felicemente esiliate nel rivivere il (o nel vivere nel) passato, e nel passato soltanto.

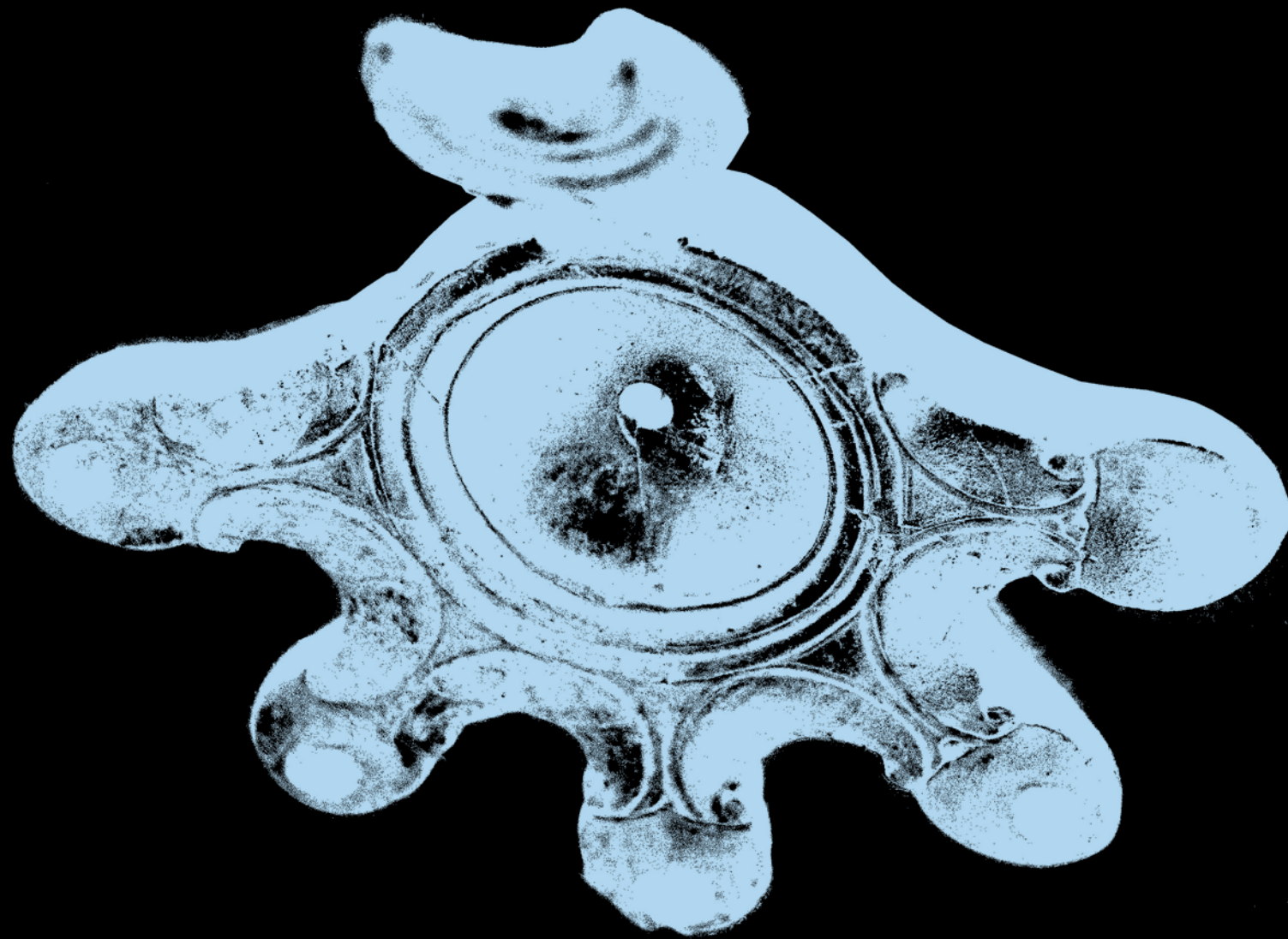
Sempre di più infatti sono le esperienze di arte contemporanea per me più appaganti che provengono dalla crescente consapevolezza di questa precisa disgiunzione temporale; sempre di più la produzione artistica contemporanea si presenta con un'enfasi sempre maggiore sul non essere realmente "contemporanea", o sul non volersi veramente occupare della contemporaneità – e non vuole nemmeno più veramente *apparire* estremamente contemporanea; non vuole *appartenere* al qui e all'ora. (Io credo che il *locus classicus* di questa battaglia per l'appartenenza temporale possa essere trovato nel divario analogico/digitale: la sempre più profonda raffinatezza delle tecnologie digitali nella produzione artistica è attualmente, più spesso che non, finalizzata a farci dimenticare che stiamo guardando un prodotto digitale). Ciò, in ogni caso, è l'impressione che mi sono fatto in questi ultimi anni mentre visitavo i musei e le biennali più importanti del mondo (e lavorando ad una edizione di Documenta, riguardo alla quale un critico osservò laconico che uno avrebbe potuto essere perdonato, mentre visitava Documenta 14, per aver pensato che Internet non esistesse): l'arte è davvero diventata, abbastanza letteralmente, con buona pace di Hegel, "una cosa del passato" – consciamente, e felicemente. La maggior parte dell'arte oggi *vuole* essere storica; la maggior parte dell'arte al giorno d'oggi ha in mente la storia dell'arte, vivendo felicemente in mezzo a ciò che resta dell'oggi.

Per inciso: un'altra cosa che ho imparato riguardo alla relazione tra arte e archeologia è quanto profondamente la prima idealizzi la seconda – e la corrispondente profondità del divario che separa l'attività *scientifica* dell'*archeologia* dalla versione romanzesca che ne fa l'arte. E va bene così – infatti può anche essere un bene, in altre parole un servizio reso all'*archeologia* da parte dell'immaginazione

Bereiche der zeitgenössischen Kunst könnten zunehmend (und zum Glück) anfangen, sich wie Inseln anzufühlen, die von der Küste dieser verlorenen Gegenwart abtreiben, wie ein Archipel von Kulturen, die glücklicherweise dazu verbannt sind, die Vergangenheit (und zwar ausschließlich die Vergangenheit) wieder zu erleben oder darin zu leben. Tatsächlich haben sich viele meiner lohnenswerteren Kunsterfahrungen zunehmend durch das wachsende Bewusstsein für genau diese zeitliche Diskrepanz ergeben; immer mehr zeitgenössische Kunst geht mit einer ausdrücklicheren Warnung einher, dass sie nicht wirklich „zeitgenössisch“ ist, oder sich nicht wirklich mit dem Zeitgenössischen befassen will – und sie will auch nicht unbedingt schrecklich zeitgenössisch *aussehen*; sie will dem hier und jetzt nicht *angehören*. (Der *locus classicus* dieses Kampfes über zeitliche Zugehörigkeit findet sich, meiner Ansicht nach, in der analogen versus digitalen Kluft: die immer weiter zunehmende Finesse digitaler Technologien in der Kunstproduktion zielt derzeit meistens darauf ab, uns vergessen zu lassen, dass wir überhaupt ein digitales Produkt betrachten). Dies ist jedenfalls der Eindruck, den ich in den letzten Jahren beim Besuch weltweit führender zeitgenössischer Kunstmuseen und Biennalen bekommen habe (und bei der Arbeit an einer Edition der documenta über die ein Kritiker knapp bemerkte, dass einem vergeben werden könnte, während des Besuchs der documenta 14 zu denken, dass das Internet nicht existiere): Kunst ist wahrhaftig und wörtlich im Sinne Hegels ein Ding der Vergangenheit geworden. Sie ist sich dessen bewusst und auch damit zufrieden. Ein Großteil der Kunst heutzutage will historisch sein, beschäftigt sich mit Kunstgeschichte und lebt glücklich mit dem was vom Heute übrigblieb.

Was ich beiläufig noch über die Beziehung zwischen Kunst und Archäologie gelernt habe, ist wie sehr die erstere die letztere romantisiert – und die damit einhergehende Tiefe der Kluft, welche die Wissenschaft der Archäologie von ihrer romantischen Fiktionalisierung durch die Kunst trennt. Wobei das völlig in Ordnung ist – es könnte sogar *gut* sein, sprich ein Dienst der von der künstlerischen Vorstellungskraft an der Archäologie geleistet wird. Diesen Gedanken muss ich jedoch vorerst unentwickelt lassen.

Wir verstehen jetzt, mehr oder weniger, *warum* Kunst sich in eine ältere, überholte Version unserer Welt zurückzieht: Sie will der gegenwärtigen, aktuellsten Version nicht „angehörig“ sein. Hierin ist die Kunst eindeutig mit dem völlig menschlichen Instinkt vertraut und ihm unterlegen, sich dem unaufhörlichen Zwang zu widersetzen immer „Updates zu installieren“. (Ich jedenfalls finde es schlimm genug, im 21. Jahrhundert zu leben – das Letzte was ich wollen würde, wäre immer *up-to-date* zu sein. Oder schlimmer noch: *up-to-speed*). Meine letzte Erkenntnis in diesem Zusammenhang hat damit zu tun, wie sich die Kunst buchstäblich in der Vergangenheit *eingelebt* hat, in einer Art und Weise, die über die disziplinären Impulse früher Befragungen historischer Aufzeichnungen hinaus-



Manipulated image of oil
lamp from Herculaneum
Immagine rielaborata di una
lucerna da Ercolano
Manipuliertes Bild von
Öllampe aus Herculaneum

last thing I would want is to always be *up-to-date*. Or worse still: up to *speed*.) My final, related insight has to do with how art has quite literally made itself at home in this past, in ways that transcend the disciplinarian impulses of earlier interrogations of the historical record – a notion I find beautifully embodied in Huber’s fittingly titled *Expanded Interiors*. (In this work, we are ancient history’s *insiders*.) There is something of a parallel here, in my view, with the vagaries of Institutional Critique, the history of which has had a defining influence on the emergence of the historiographic paradigm: where Institutional Critique in its “classic” guise started out as an uncompromising assault on the museum system, it has over time evolved into a much more ambiguous affair, in which the complications of *desire*, by and large, have supplanted the erstwhile clarity of critique. The museum (or the archeological site, as well as the archive and library) has become a site of longing and object of desire, as well as the focus of *aesthetic* reinvestment. We cast a backward glance for many reasons – one of them now also, indisputably, being *beauty*.

artistica. Ma per ora non posso sviluppare questo pensiero ulteriormente.

Ora sappiamo, più o meno, *perché* l’arte si stia ritraendo (indietro) in una versione più vecchia, datata del nostro mondo: perché non vuole “appartenere” alla versione corrente e più aggiornata. In questo l’arte è chiaramente a conoscenza della – e soggetta alla – tendenza perfettamente umana di resistere al comando implacabile ed incessante di “installare aggiornamenti” (io, da parte mia, trovo già abbastanza brutto vivere nel Ventunesimo secolo – l’ultima cosa che vorrei sarebbe di essere sempre aggiornato. O anche peggio: al passo).

La mia osservazione finale riguarda il modo in cui l’arte sia adesso perfettamente a suo agio in questo passato, in un modo che trascende gli impulsi disciplinari del modo in cui il dato storico veniva interrogato in precedenza – un concetto che trovo magnificamente incarnato nel progetto debitamente titolato della Huber, *Expanded Interiors* (in questa opera, siamo *infiltrati* nella storia antica). Credo che vi sia un qualche parallelo in questo, con le stravaganze della Critica Istituzionale, la storia della quale ha avuto un’influenza decisiva sulla comparsa del paradigma storiografico: se la Critica Istituzionale, nella sua forma “classica”, consisteva all’inizio in un assalto inflessibile al sistema dei musei, nel corso del tempo essa si è evoluta in un qualcosa di molto più ambiguo, nel quale, nel complesso, le difficoltà del *desiderio* hanno soppiantato la precedente chiarezza della critica. Il museo (o il sito *archeologico*, così come l’archivio e la biblioteca) è diventato un luogo ed un oggetto del desiderio, oltre che il fulcro di un reinvestimento estetico. Gettiamo uno sguardo all’indietro per molte ragioni – una di esse è ora, anche e senza dubbio, la *bellezza*.

geht – eine Idee, die ich in Hubers treffend betitelten Installationen *Expanded Interiors* wunderschön verwirklicht sehe. (In dieser Arbeit sind wir die *Insider* der Antiken Geschichte). Meiner Meinung nach gibt es hier eine Parallele zu den Eigenarten der Institutionskritik, deren Geschichte einen wesentlichen Einfluss auf die Entstehung des historiographischen Paradigmas hatte: Dort wo einst die „klassische“ Institutionskritik als ein kompromissloser Angriff auf das Museums-wesen ansetzte, hat sich über die Zeit hinweg eine mehrdeutigere Beziehung entwickelt, in der die Komplikationen von *Begierde* weitgehend die einstige Klarheit der Kritik ersetzt haben. Das Museum (oder die archäologische Ausgrabungstätte, genauso wie das Archiv und die Bibliothek) ist ein Ort der Sehnsucht und ein Objekt der Begierde geworden, genauso wie ein Fokus der *ästhetischen* Wiederbelebung. Wir werfen aus vielen Gründen einen Blick zurück – und ein Grund davon ist nun, unbestreitbar, auch die *Schönheit*.

ART ARCHITECTURE AND LIFE – A FICTIONAL PANEL DISCUSSION

Catrin Huber

As chair of this imagined conversation, I bring to this panel three distinctive historical artists. I am very pleased to welcome a woman Roman wall painter from antiquity whose name, sadly, we do not know, the Russian artist El Lissitzky, and the German artist Kurt Schwitters.

Let me begin by introducing the panel in more detail:

Our Roman wall painter is head of a workshop practicing in Pompeii and Herculaneum circa 50BC. She served her apprenticeship in her father's workshop, and he himself was a painter of Greek descent who later settled in Pompeii. His daughter, our panelist, is known for exquisite compositions and paintings of architectural structures within Roman houses, and she has been responsible for the supervision of some major painting projects at a number of villas in Pompeii and Herculaneum. Her involvement at the famous Villa di Poppea at Torre Annunziata and the Casa del Criptoportico at Pompeii are two of the most prestigious examples. Her artistic practice coincides with the development and peak (to which she significantly contributed) of the so-called architectural, second style of Roman wall painting. This style depicted architectural forms or buildings.

El Lissitzky, the influential Russian avant-garde artist, trained at the Technische Hochschule in Darmstadt and at the Riga Polytechnical Institute. He studied engineering and architecture. He is known, among other things, for a painting practice that was radical at the time (his *Proun* paintings), his ground-breaking periodical and exhibition designs – these included the *Proun*

room (1923); the *Kabinett der Abstrakten* (1927/1928); and the Soviet section at the *Film and Photography exhibition* (Stuttgart, 1929) – and his architectural projects. He operated at an international level, spending much time in continental Europe (and Germany in particular) outside of his native Russia.

And lastly we have Kurt Schwitters, the *Merz* artist, originally based in Hanover (Germany) who is best known as the inventor of collage. He is, of course, also known for his writings and for his work as a performer. Later on in his life Schwitters became more and more appreciated – or more accurately celebrated – for his *Merzbauten* and *Merzbarn*, and for his artistic interventions, transformations and re-interpretations of architectural spaces. He studied art at the Kunstgewerbeschule in Hanover and painting at the Königliche Sächsische Akademie der Künste in Dresden, and for a short while architecture at the Königliche Technische Hochschule in Hanover. He started his first collages in 1918, and his first *Merz Columns* in 1920. These would later turn into his *Merzbau* in Hanover, on which he worked until 1937, when it occupied at least six rooms in the house. He emigrated to Norway in 1937, and then to Britain in 1940 where he started his final *Merzbarn* in 1947.

Today, our panel members will discuss their respective historical practices and what these approaches might offer to contemporary site-specific practice, and to the interrelationship of art, architecture and life.

EL: In Russia, both during and after the revolution, we aimed to transform art into a driving force for the new socialist society. We hoped that this new understanding of art, like socialism, would develop into an international movement; a force that would transform consciousness and society; a force that would also help re-shape the built environment, and hence the ways in which people engaged with their surroundings and community. Consequently, art and architecture were crucial agents for societal change. They were part of life, and could not be separated from it. Through art, exhibition design, and architecture, I wanted to create a new experience. I wanted to create the 'viewer' of the future.

Now, it seems to me that Roman wall painting, by contrast, seems very much an expression of a society obsessed with class and hierarchies. Its nature seems to be prescribed and static?

It seems to re-enforce the status quo, no?

RW: Well, to give a historical context, the second style prevailed in the time of the late Roman republic. It has indeed been argued that the role of Roman wall painting was to affirm the order of society. The exclusiveness and expensiveness of the materials, together with the exquisite nature of the paintings themselves, reflected the wealth at the head of the household. Further – and in my opinion more importantly – the wall paintings functioned as a conspicuous demonstration that the inhabitant was Roman. This applied to the rich and the less well-off alike, to those living in the capital, and to those living in the provinces.

1. See: Hales, S. 2003. *The Roman House and Social Identity*. Cambridge

Interestingly, the most refined painted architectural vistas were often situated in rear private rooms, and were thus only visible to the household and specially invited guests. The everyday visitor, who might come to conduct business, would

normally only see paintings depicting closed walls. It was almost as though uninvited guests had to suffice with the reality of physical surroundings, while the fantastical and the imaginary – in short, all other worlds – were secreted away for less public occasions and chosen audiences.

EL: I'd say there is a link here to Kurt's *Merzbauten*. Were they not created hidden-away from the public, and in remote, forgotten places?

KS: Well, we are talking about a very different political context, after World War One, Weimarer Republik years, and then fascist Germany. Like you, El, I traveled a lot across Europe in the 1920s, met fellow artists, gave many performances, and worked together with and alongside international artists on many projects. And these included yourself, let's not forget – you featured greatly in my *Merz* magazine 8/9 *Nasci* in 1924. The political context changed, of course. Nationalism was on the rise. In the end I had no choice but to emigrate to Norway, and then later to Britain.

I have to say, though, I was not interested in the big rhetorics, the big promises!

I built the *Cathedral of Erotic Misery*, also known as the *Merzbau*, in the apartment of my parents. It existed of columns, grottos, caves. It grew inwards; there was no way to go outwards. It was complicated and complex and it evolved and transformed continuously. It was a way of living. It helped me to think things through; to experiment with ideas. It existed – it didn't need to propagate change. It was play, play, play – the only sensible state of being. (*Kurt laughs*) And of course it was a form of resistance. And it slowly took over my parents' apartment, so there might have been a sub-conscious intergenerational conflict going on, too (*he laughs again*).

EL: But Kurt, weren't your *Merzbauten* rather bourgeois, inward-looking, and self-centred? Didn't you think of the bigger picture? Didn't you want to be someone who transforms society?

KS: How do you transform society? El, I believe you set out with good intentions. But wasn't a lot of your work propaganda? (I trust for a case in which you believed). And didn't the regime get hold of you in the end? Didn't they utilise you and your work for their ends, not yours?

Bourgeois and inward-looking some of my work may be, but it is my work. It doesn't play-up to anyone else or serve anyone else. It defines its own paradigms.

RW: Gentlemen, let's not get lost in rhetoric and petty argument here, please. Isn't it more interesting to talk about specific things, and to draw from them for use in a contemporary context? Isn't that why we are here?

With Roman wall painting, for example, some specialists have highlighted the way in which wall paintings transformed houses into sanctuaries and places of worship that connected we, the living, with our venerable ancestors and gods. A reoccurring motif, such as that of closed doors, could be read as the threshold

between this world and the next: the tomb, a sacred place.

Thus the real – the here and now – was connected to metaphysical worlds evoking past, present, future, and the eternal. Roman wall painting set up a powerful balance between physical architecture and imagined, painted architectural space. This balance enabled the paintings to bridge reality and the imagination. Sometimes, compositions cleverly extended physical surroundings by reflecting architectural idiosyncrasies specific to the house, and by referring to scale; playing with it, as it were, and sometimes exaggerating it.

This impacts on You, the viewer, physically. Imagine being immersed in these paintings. We realised them in such a way that the viewing inhabitants animated an imagined environment, they themselves constituting a missing link in the chain. Representation became a concrete physical experience, yet it also enabled you to become part of the dream!

EL: Well, this is interesting. In my *Proun* and *Demonstration Rooms* I, too, activated the viewer. However, it wasn't just the viewer – the whole room was activated; animated by the movement of the perceiver. In the *Kabinett der Abstrakten* (1927/1928), walls were covered with thin steel bands from floor to ceiling, these painted white on one side and black on the other. Within this structure I left space for work created by fellow artists of the era. What happened, to be specific, was that, as the viewer moved, the walls changed from white, to grey, to black. This created a sense of disorientation and a slight dizziness in the viewer. People were made aware of the nature of looking, the act of doing so and their own attentiveness.

My system could be used anywhere and everywhere. It was a standardised method that could activate any room, always accentuating the independence of the individual artworks within. I believed this was economical and revolutionary with regard to exhibition design and concept, and also rather elegant. It was not based on fantasy and illusion, but rather on the concrete reality of materials and the present. It wasn't meant to lure you into a world of dreams – it was meant to highlight the need for active participation in this world.

3. See: Gough, M. *Constructivism Disoriented: El Lissitzky's Dresden and Hannover Demonstrationsräume* in Perloff, N. and Reed, B. (editors) 2003. *Situating El Lissitzky: Vitebsk, Berlin, Moscow*. Los Angeles

RW: Well, I believe we ingeniously combined imagination and reality. The magical power of representation stimulated the imagination, but we also highlighted the act of viewing and created an awareness of the physical nature of painting. Further, our wall paintings aimed to nourish the viewer's intellect. These painted architectures were as much mathematical riddles and challenges as they were temples and palaces. Mr Lissitzky, please don't underestimate we Roman painters. We were highly ambitious and constantly engaged in a dialogue about our craft.

We wanted to engage the perceptive viewer in a game of hide and seek.

KS: Now let me add something here: activation of the viewer, you say El! The

viewer a missing link in the chain, you say Roman wall paintress! But what about the rest of the world? What about the environment? What about our fellow living creatures who are not human beings? Have you thought about them? I invited a family of hamsters into my *Merzbau*, and let them inhabit it. They loved the grottos and interlocking cubes, used the rib features to slide down, nested and reproduced elsewhere. I studied them, what they liked, where they could nest, and what they might miss, and temporarily adjusted designs accordingly. Was it an environment they inhabited as happily as I did? Perhaps, or maybe not quite, but how could I really know? In the end, I released them into fraud freedom, giving them to our neighbour's children. My point is this: whom should one think of when intervening or making architecture? Why focus on us humans? And to come back to what you said earlier EL: this is the bigger picture! (*Kurt giggles and barks*).

EL and the RW laugh.

EL: Ok! Kurt builds for hamsters. But you, madam – were you not just painting walls as if painting a wooden board? The scale was different, I'll grant you that, but what, exactly, constituted your intervention into architecture?

RW: ...As I said, the magic lay in the balance between imagined and physical architecture; in the way in which wall paintings immersed the viewer in her or his surroundings.

Nor should you think in terms of an individual room. Our wall painting reflected the role and function – or the differing roles and functions – of the various rooms in which they appeared. They formed a system that shaped and articulated the Roman House. Our wall paintings structured the house, making it navigable and understandable for visitors. Our works were much, much more than panel paintings.

EL: I must say that you have a point there, madam. But is there anything of value for 21st century painting that can be gleaned from your work? a fresh approach, perhaps? Or dare I say it... some revolutionary zest?

RW: (Laughs) Mr Lissitzky, you know very well that the use and value we give to buildings helps shape society. The influence of architecture can prompt changes in behavior and values that grow to have a huge impact on society. Buildings also articulate power relations.

There is, however, another aspect of our practice that may be relevant to your question. For us, painting several rooms often involved several painters and drawers working together. My specialism, as I said, was architectural composition and detail, but others excelled in the rendering of gardens or still life works. While it's true that this was not new and we were certainly not the last workshops to collaborate in such a way, I always thought the successful synchronisation of our very specific talents a beautiful characteristic of our practice. Could such an approach benefit contemporary art?

EL: Perhaps, but weren't decisions about composition and iconography down to the head of the household, i.e. the commissioner of the work, rather than the artists' collective?

RW: You have to remember that each head of the household wanted the most beautiful wall paintings they could afford, but they were dependent on the advice and expertise of the artists. This allowed the principal painter to make suggestions while orchestrating the talents of all the other artists involved. The aim was to create a wall painting that was as engaging as possible.

Mr Lissitzky, you have highlighted the conventions and restrictions that were part of my practice, but what of your situation? You worked in revolutionary, then socialist Russia. What restraints and pressures were you subjected to? Kurt referred to some of these earlier. Others have alleged that you were involved with the Cheka, the Russian secret police in some way, and if true, that must have had its consequences?

4. See: Lodder, C. *El Lissitzky and the Export of Constructivism* in Perloff, N. and Reed, B. (editors) 2003. *Situating El Lissitzky: Vitebsk, Berlin, Moscow*. Los Angeles

EL: Those are rumours that I don't want to confirm or deny. I believed in the socialist movement in the USSR – or I did in the beginning, at least. I wanted to shape society and pioneer alternative ways for art to merge with life, to infiltrate life. I believe that the artists of the 21st Century need to get together more internationally, and develop a bigger, alternative vision and visual language!

KS: An alternative approach, yes, but I don't see why bigger and louder is better than small and un-predicted. I believe that today, it is more about finding ways of working that resist being appropriated by the mainstream – especially if it is about artists' interventions into architecture. It is about creating spaces that resist being re-possessed by either good or bad causes – and maybe these spaces should remain hidden, secret, and covert like those back chambers our Roman wall paintress talked about earlier. I welcome ambiguity!

RW: I think that what our Roman practice brings to this discussion is firstly complexity; that is how our art articulated a whole building in a layered, yet coherent way, and secondly a trust and belief in the visual and intellectual capacities of the audience – and a recognition that challenging them is good. To finish with a motto like my male colleagues: 'Complexity, difficulty, and multi-layered-ness is the key to the future!'

On that note, I would like to thank our panelists RW, EL, and KS, and will now finish with a brief summary:

El Lissitzky radically changed the paradigms for making work, and for working with or across different disciplines, with the aim to merge art and life, albeit under a certain political premise. He introduced – together with other Russian avant-garde artists – a new visual language; one which we still

draw on today. Aesthetically speaking, this is certainly the case, and I believe their conceptual side will become more prominent.

More importantly, I think, El Lissitzky's work stressed the significance of thinking, making, and operating internationally, and of finding other like-minded artists working on the same issues, but in different contexts.

Kurt also worked across countries, though later on not entirely voluntarily. His site-specific work highlighted the capacity artistic interventions have to open-up functions/notions of rooms, re-interpreting spaces; and helping give them multiple, shifting, sometimes-conflicting functions and meanings. He carved-out spaces of resistance in everyday settings: a flat, an apartment, a shed. Just as, in his collages, he used everyday materials, and recycled materials from his environment (e.g.

the city or an urban landscape like the lake district). He prominently introduced time and the notion of the un-fixed into his Merzbauten, offering a bigger framework for working on something for life, and

thus opposing fast, result-driven tendencies. He lived his Merzbauten, and they were entangled with his biography, as well as with wider historical contexts.

The Roman wall painter's work has also influenced centuries of art and architecture. She has outlined the complexities of the Roman wall painters work, how these works articulated and negotiated houses / spaces, and how they were carefully coded for different audiences to decipher. These works didn't patronise the viewer or the inhabitants of the houses; rather they teased-out their critical engagement with the work and aimed to stimulate an active physical and intellectual engagement. As El highlighted earlier, there is a link to his notion of the active viewer of the future. Nor should we be surprised if we find an article on the Roman wall painter in one of El's periodicals soon!

Thank you!

5. Adrian Notz and Hans-Ulrich Obrist, *Merz world: processing the complicated order* (Zurich: JRP Ringier, 2007).
Chambers, E., Orchard, K (editors) 2013. *Schwitters in Britain*. London

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In 2008, while an Abbey Fellow at the British School at Rome (BSR), I visited the magnificent archaeological sites of Pompeii and Herculaneum, and was immediately struck by the freshness of Roman wall paintings, and by their likely relevance for critical spatial practice. After a series of related fictional conversations with historical artists, and of site-responsive exhibitions, the logical next step was to initiate an interdisciplinary research project. This was *Expanded Interiors*, a project that explored Roman houses at Pompeii and Herculaneum between May 2017 and September 2019.

I was privileged to work on *Expanded Interiors* with a fantastic team from Newcastle University. I am deeply

RINGRAZIAMENTI

Nel 2008, mentre ero Abbey Fellow alla British School at Rome (BSR), ho avuto l'occasione di visitare i magnifici siti archeologici di Pompei ed Ercolano e sono stata immediatamente colpita dalla freschezza della pittura murale romana e dalla rilevanza degli affreschi per la critical spatial practice. Dopo la creazione di una serie di conversazioni immaginarie sul tema tra artisti del passato, e facendo seguito allo sviluppo di mostre site-responsive, il passaggio logico successivo è stato quello di sviluppare un progetto interdisciplinare che si è concretizzato in *Expanded Interiors*, un progetto che ha voluto esplorare le case romane di Pompei ed Herculaneum e che si è sviluppato tra Maggio 2017 e Settembre 2019. Ho avuto il

DANKSAGUNGEN

Als ich 2008 Abbey Fellow an der British School at Rome (BSR) war, besichtigte ich die großartigen Ausgrabungstätten Pompeji und Herculaneum und mir fiel sofort die Frische der römischen Wandmalereien und deren mögliche Bedeutung für die zeitgenössische Kunst ins Auge. Nach einer Reihe fiktiver Unterhaltungen mit historisch wichtigen Künstlern in diesem Zusammenhang und einer Reihe ortsbezogener Ausstellungen, war der nächste logische Schritt ein interdisziplinäres Forschungsprojekt ins Leben zu rufen. Dies war *Expanded Interiors*, ein Projekt, das zwischen Mai 2017 und September 2019 römische Häuser in Pompeji und Herculaneum erforschte. Ich hatte das Glück, mit einem fantastischen Team der Newcastle University an diesem Projekt arbeiten zu können. Mein großer Dank gilt:

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Expanded Interiors allowed me to develop two site-responsive exhibitions at the Casa del Criptoportico in Pompeii, and at the Casa del Bel Cortile in Herculaneum. Special thanks are due to our partners Parco Archeologico di Pompei and Parco

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Expanded Interiors: Bringing contemporary site-specific fine-art practice to Roman houses at Herculaneum and Pompeii.

Expanded Interiors at Herculaneum and Pompeii, Casa del Bel Cortile, Herculaneum (16th May 2018 – 15th January 2019) and Casa del Criptoportico, Pompeii (13th July 2018 – 20th January 2019).

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POMPEII

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