Dieter Rehm

An Open Questioning of Reality [2]

The cover-picture ›Binding‹ was the first picture of Joerg Maxzin's new photography cycle that I saw. It was created in the course of his exhibition ›Screen Memories‹ at Kunstverein Bobingen - and it was quite blurred. One can see - at first glance - silhouettes of people.

›Binding‹
150 x 100 cm
Joerg Maxzin, 2005

I myself, known as an advocate of the old analogue photography, perambulate the cities with a large format camera - still commonly referred to as plate camera - in search of extraordinary constellations of cityscapes. In doing so, I go about it in exactly the same method as Henry Fox Talbot 1844 praised in his essay ›The pencil of nature‹: "An advantage which has been created by photography, is the fact that it enables us to gather a multitude of smallest details in our pictures, which help to enhance truth and realism of the picture, and which no artist would be able to copy in such lifelike manner" [3]. This view that photography delivers an accurate and precise image of reality still affects our exposure considerable to photography today - In spite of digital pictures which, in the meantime, dominate the modern perception of every day life.

The cover-picture ›Binding‹ however intrigued me more so as Joerg Maxzin told me that the pictured people are not real but little models. As tutor at the Akademie I am confronted with different photographic debates daily, regarding the tension between analogue and digital formats.

I feel the same suspense when I am thinking back to an earlier exhibition at Bobinger Kunstverein when Daniel Biskup showed his interesting black-and-white photographs of the Berlin wall fall, and his sensually colored impressions of the Loveparade. Although the pictures are documentary in a journalistic sense, they also function as panel on the wall. To my greatest surprise, Daniel Biskup took pictures at the premier with an analogue camera. Thus he is one of the ›old dinosaurs‹ to whom the material film is of great value. I am therefore saying this, because the so-called professional photography has already arrived in the digital era.

Especially in the area of photojournalism, the digital progress is rapid. Meanwhile, only seconds decide which photographs will be published. Professional digital cameras are nowadays provided with transmitters which wirelessly transfer the just gathered picture data without delay to picture agencies. Particularly in terms of resolution, the quality of pictures of today's digital cameras is so good that they compete with the traditional film material. However, the careful consideration of the right moment, which has long influenced the quality of conventional film photographs, increasingly gives way to a surge of elusively taken digital pictures. But the more extensive the picture data gets, the more difficult it becomes to filter out the ›best‹ picture.

But why do I mention all this? Simply to show quite plainly that basically, in spite of the technological progress, there has not been any new picture language developed yet in most applied areas of photography. Thus only economical and ecological advantages come to the fore - one thinks for example of the environmental pollution of developer liquids. Also the amateur, who has been equipped with digital cameras since long ago, is after the felicitous snapshot like in the olden days.

Joerg Maxzin proceeds in a completely different way. To him the examination with the new medium of the digital photographic picture is the subject. Hence he is no annalist in the sense of classical photography. The photographic figures itself are not real people as it might seem in

the first instance. In fact they are little sculptures in measuring 1:20, which are modeled with plasticine and are later arranged on a small artificial stage in the studio. The photos are directly taken and then transferred to the computer. By doing so the photographic technique is chosen in a way so that the motives come out of the camera almost in a finished state. Joerg Maxzin calls these pictures ›Screen Memories‹. In his expose to the exhibition at Bobinger Kunstverein he writes: " ›Screen Memories‹ or ›Deckerinnerungen‹ is a term that Sigmund Freud coined in context with psychoanalysis. Referred to are memories of exceptional visual clarity which serve the purpose to cover up conflict afflicted events experienced in early years and to keep them concealed in the subconscious. The motives of my new picture cycle also move within this area of conflict of inner states. Indeed the figures unfold their presence in bright room, but they remain unreachable, they become blurred as silhouettes on an imaginary horizon. Also the literal translation of ›Screen Memories‹ discloses an exciting association, because all works resulted from a digital process of work. Therefore they are first of all nativities of light on the ›Screen‹ - the computer screen. The definite pictures on photographic paper are not only a final product, but ›Memories‹ of this process of digital genesis."

To me, Joerg Maxzin asks the following question in his pictures: Is simulated reality not also actual reality? What are the differences between the two? Do not his pictures say: Such a differentiation is no longer possible? There is only a narrow path between the reproduced world and the simulated world, and the borderline is not definitely visible anymore. It is only a little step to the other side, and we don't know whether we have made it already or if it is still to come.

This artistic concept is absolutely up-to-date, it originates from the current photographic discourse, in consequence of potential possibilities of manipulation of the dematerialized picture - namely the digital picture. A related but diametrically opposed approach has been performed by the successful artist Thomas Demand for some years with his pictures referring to the world of objects. He creates big paper architecture in his studio, which lack of human presence but are replicas of photographic magazine and newspaper icons like, for example, the studio of the famous architect Vorhoelzer or the burrow with kitchenware, in which Saddam Hussein stayed. But as mentioned earlier, here the human is omitted: "even there, where the emptiness still hold traces of human act. But the clues of meaning providing action is faded in such a way that these rooms become diagrams of memories and projections" [4], like Neville Wakefield writes. These, some of them huge paper architectures are actual works of art - perfectly arranged with an analogue large format camera, and so transferred into the medium photography What is left as original is, as with Joerg Maxzin, only the photographic panel - the paper architecture gets destroyed.

Joerg Maxzin's subject however is the human being in his, how he puts it: "different gaseous states." Very well documented is this in his video work ›Screen Memories‹, a 13min video loop. For the first time, a new picture cycle of Joerg Maxzin also contains moving images. Thereby the initial material for the video sequence is the same as for the photographic pictures. This video work is the logical consequence of the theoretical basic concept of playing with forms of human existence. The sequence of figurines which very slowly reveal themselves and disappear again. All of that happens in ›Super Slow Motion‹ and becomes visible only over a period of time. The figurines were modeled and photographed in different states using ›Stop Motion‹ animation technique. Out of these photographs morphs were developed in post-production, which were finally assembled to the loop. Thus the photographic pictures were lead into the fourth dimension, the dimension time.

A significant sign of Joerg Maxzin's work is blurring, driven by him to an almost picturesque beauty. In spite of my own affection of sharpness Joerg Maxzin's pictures remind me of a question put by Ludwig Wittgenstein: "Is not the blurred picture exactly what we need?" [5]

Wolfgang Ullrich starts his book ›The history of blurring‹ with the most famous blurred pictures of the latest years: "Lady Diana in the revolving door of the Ritz in Paris or Mohammed Atta at the check-in in Portland. In both cases the actors pass the last CCTV camera just before their death, wherefore the blurring acts as an omen of disappearance and appears as a stylistic device of the iconography of a catastrophe. But above all it turns every observer into a detective who dreams of finding the crucial evidence which gives information about the unimaginable event set to happen shortly." [6]

The blurring in Joerg Maxzin's pictures is relevant in a different way. It also evokes fascination, however more in the sense of questioning reality and its perception, indeed the appearance of human existence. Especially the impressive illustration creates more possibilities of association than the lifelike photography of humans. Therefore Joerg Maxzin's work sums up the tradition of painting, and with it less of the tradition of naturalism, which displays the world as it is, but rather the painting of realism, which questions the world.

1   published in: Official Catalogue ›Joerg Maxzin - Screen Memories‹
    on the occasion of the exhibition ›Timeline‹, Haus für Kunst und Kultur, Kloster Roggenburg, 2005

2   Dieter Rehm: speech at the opening of the exhibition
    ›Joerg Maxzin - Screen Memories‹, Kunstverein Bobingen, July 1st 2005

3   Henry Fox Talbot: ›The Pencil of Nature‹ (1844)
    in: Wolfgang Kemp: Theorie der Fotografie I. 1839-1912,
    Munich 1980, p. 62

4   Neville Wakefield: Official Catalogue ›Thomas Demand im Lehnbachhaus‹,
    26.10. 2002 - 19.01.2003, Schirmer/Mosel, Munich 2002, p. 112

5   Ludwig Wittgenstein: ›Philosophische Untersuchungen‹
    Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main 1980, p. 60

6   Wolfgang Ullrich: ›Die Geschichte der Unschärfe‹
    Klaus Wagenbach Verlag, Berlin 2002, p. 7