

**OLIVER ZYBOK****Blickdicht**

In principle, it is as well to take photography's promise of reality with a pinch of salt. There is nothing new about this observation, but it comes to the fore time and again at regular intervals. The claim to authenticity has been shown to be misleading, whereas the promise to reproduce empirical contents has been shown to be one of photography's expressive possibilities. Concept art prefers photographic documentation, in order to tie itself to empirical facts as a guiding principle of artistic production, and in order to lend artworks a more general validity. The installation *One and Three Chairs* (1965) by Joseph Kosuth or the 42 photographs of run-down tenement blocks by Hans Haacke – *Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, a Real Time Social System as of May* (1971) – have been used as pictures whose deliberately documentary character attempted, in combination with bureaucratic typography and bland presentation, to effect a shift from medium to message.

In her photographs, which have the urban space as their theme, Ute Lindner juxtaposes medium and message as equals. The documentary aspect is, with regard to the choice of locations, the starting point, but with respect to the further artistic process plays no further major role. Her interest is in sites bound up with strong emotions, such as Ground Zero in New York and the town of Mostar in Bosnia, laid waste by the civil war. But the view of history in the works in this series is neutralized by a clever artistic alteration to the surface, designed not to palliate, but rather to avoid defining these locations by one single event. A thinly applied wax coating blurs the detail and directs the beholder's gaze to what is going on, in order thus to force a holistic impression. For Lindner, then, it is not a matter of research, or of the exact topographies and architectural realities. What is depicted is based on subjective empirical observations, which are photographed and later partly processed on the computer. The exposure times vary. Elements are mirrored or duplicated, fragments of other photographs of the same place are included, so that for example two people in the street in New York are seen both from in front and from behind. This shows that Lindner's manipulations, which could also be termed digital collages, cannot be directly detected by the beholder. In numerous works, the changes create a panorama-like character, which already suggests to the beholder that there is something not quite right about the picture, that it cannot document an everyday action in the urban space.

Lindner expands her photographic impressions with video and audio recordings that emphasize the cultural differences of the respective urban space. Thus for example in the exhibition *There's no reason to define the outside environment as alien* (2008) at the Galerie der Stadt Remscheid visitors looking at pictures of industrial complexes in Kobe were exposed additionally to the sounds of a glockenspiel played by Japanese buskers – a confrontation of progress with tradition. The photographic architectural silhouettes of Los Angeles by night are accompanied by the voice of a woman preacher who was talking about ways of seeing. Although Lindner had filtered out the religious bombast, this woman's words came across in the context of the modernistic architecture as totally divorced from reality. The New York pictures taken at Ground Zero were contrasted with voices from an anti-Iraq-War demonstration by the group *Veterans for Peace*. Lindner's audiovisual confrontations reinforce a certain disquiet, an ambivalence that inheres in the places that she has photographed.

It is only with some qualification that we can say that this approach shifts the artist into something like photographic realism, whose exponents, mostly concept artists, appear as conveyors of empirical truths. Their approach points to a political function of photography, in particular in documents which create a fixed reality and the perception, largely influenced by power and its subversion, a truth content. Painting and music for example create the confirmation or critique of power only in an artistic presentation. Documentation in such artworks is in large measure indirect, while photography creates for itself the appearance of direct documentation, extracted from the context by the camera and presented to the beholder as allegedly objective. In her artistic approach, Lindner does not adhere to these forms of documentation, in that she expands the perception content through pictorial interventions. The event remains, but its radius is extended. Lindner supplements the original dimension of the photograph, which her own perception celebrated at first as a direct image and not as a commentary. She *exposes* – a word used since the mid-19th century with reference to the material character of the photograph – for example political intrigues and sets herself apart from painting to the extent that she makes direct reference to narrative structures, instead of seeking to convey them by formal aesthetic means. In reaction to the emphatic subjectivism and to what it sees as the lack of political commitment on the part of contemporary painting, Concept Art deployed photography as the basic descriptive means of testing and documenting social, political or compositional hypotheses. Concept artists took academic procedures of documentation, review and presentation of events and undermined them. This resistance to subjectivism led however to a loss of political distinctiveness and radicalism. Today the reference point in Concept Art is increasingly the media and hardly ever economic and political realities. The subject is here basically reduced to a beholder standpoint. Its critical object-character as physiological mechanism is pushed almost entirely into the background. The recognition process is no longer seen as anything but external perception, unlike the organization of sensory impressions with no direct reference to the perceiving subject and its ontological dimension. In her photographs, Lindner unites aspects of the painterly and of Concept Art, and thus avoids disputes as to medium. The thin coat of wax gives the pictures a painterly haptic quality, which, while emphasizing artistic subjectivism, immediately thwarts it through the concept of manipulation. The places photographed are thus disburdened of the ready-made historical and political pigeonholing assigned them by the mass media. The beholder is freed from ideological constraints and has the possibility of a relativized view. Even though physiologically he or she is not directly integrated into an artistic process, Lindner's attempts to relativize external perceptual dictates and strengthen internal perceptual processes are very much in line with the concerns of many Conceptual artists. Yet at the same time she moves away from documentation as the means and purpose of putting a message across.

As the real in a meaningful structure is not simply a given, Lindner is concerned first and foremost to define a point of view: literally, as the choice of where to set up her camera, and figuratively as a mental attitude that allows the expression of a capacity to discriminate. From the uninterrupted continuum of pictures, the countless possibilities of the view, she must, to a very special degree, use the viewfinder of her camera to define a field of view which transforms the visible, making it transparent for the deep structure of otherwise hidden aspects: an art of omission and emphasis. The picture has a limiting frame, the world does not. Where do I stand, which excerpt of the visible do I define, upon what do I focus the lens? By the choice of her fields of view, Ute Lindner specifies a particular internal picture of the complexity of reality and the ability to make this visible as an iconic structure. The thing and her picture become impossible to tell apart.