THE GRAIN OF THE VOICE
AN EXHIBITION BY 19 STUDENTS FROM THE FOLKwang HOCHSCHULE IN ESSEN, GERMANY RANGING FROM PHOTOGRAPHY AND EXPERIMENTAL MEDIA TO PERFORMANCE ART

COLIN PENNO
FELIX GIENGER
LINDA NAU
SANDER UITDEHAAG
CHRISTOPH ESSER
OHAD BEN SHIMON
SABRINA NEFF
PHILIP ULLRICH
ANNE LOCHMANN
ANNE-Lена MICHEL
DOROTHEE KLETZSCH
KATRIN REINICKE
UTE KLEIN
MAGDALENA BITNIK
VALERIE SCHMIDT
JOHANNA KOPF
CAROLIN EBBERT
STEPHANIE EBBERT
PHILIPP GALLON
PHOTOGRAPHY
AND THE GRAIN
OF THE VOICE

This exhibition by 19 students from the Folkwang Hochschule in Essen is the outcome of my annual Lectureship for the Integration of Photographic Theory and Practice from April 2008 to March 2009.

Using Roland Barthes’ 1972 essay “The Grain of the Voice” as a leitmotif, the seminar promoted an investigation into photography as performative, as an active engagement with the question of what a photographic voice can be and how it can possibly relate to ideas of authorship as making of and thinking with photographs. Knowing that Barthes himself mostly spoke from the position of an audience rather than that of a maker, it became interesting for me to invert this process of reflection, still engaging with his ideas about the “exterior text and the supposed death of the author.” Opening up rather conservative notions of photography as a recording device, the aim was to start thinking about photographic signifiers that demand an active participation of the viewer rather than the passive reception of a stable, prepackaged meaning. That meant to offer photography for doing: not just for seeing, but for looking as a form of “writing,” perhaps. To consider how the body is actively engaged and affected, not only when making photographs but also when perceiving them, brushing them, chewing them, spitting them out, breaking them up and putting them together again.

Working with the students on units for the show that slowly started manifesting itself, I got increasingly infatuated by asking questions such as:

Who is speaking in this work—and who is looking?
What kind of character is the “author” (who is also a fictional person, as we had learnt from Barthes)–or is there some element of fictional self-portraiture involved? What kind of theatre does this visual voice have? Is it obvious or obscure, open or irreversible, connotative or denotative, structured or unstructured, coded or uncoded? Does it provoke a ‘body’ reaction? How far can we exhaust it with language? Does it give a voice to a place? How is it composed? Does it create a moment of ‘madness’?

What do we imagine of frame?—Assuming that the grain of the voice would come from the language of the artist’s body, a pleasurable gene text that is often eradicated by all-too-professionalized art. The signifier is rare, a future figure, so Barthes— buộc us to approach it photographically (attempting a gesture within the picture that reaches out to the viewer)?

Consequently—working alongside a text that on its surface had nothing to say about photography, rather comparing the voices of two singers—the students worked through all sorts of experiments, including shredded photocopies, voice recordings, grain-enhancement machines, visual and actual interventions, or a habitation tower of photographs attempting to reach the (father high) colliding of the gallery space. Some embedded on acts of portraying, while others started writing photographic items, describing imagined rather than actual photographs, or reassembled found images into a new fragmented content, a new line of thought. They looked at the photographic grain itself—or its absence—looked into composites and at other forms of mapping and restaging imagery, starting to embrace the possibly life-long process of finding their own voice as artists. (And hopefully they all seem to have escaped the rather dense trap of direct illustration or mimetic recording.)

Hence: thank you very much to all of you for a year of wonderful commitment to this rather elliptical journey in search of the voice of photography!
TWO TIMES ONE

How does it feel to meet two persons who are almost identical by their outer appearance?

Being identical twins ourselves we try to answer this question as well as raising questions on identity and identification. Our work depicts pairs of twins, in which the viewer can see just one or the other at a time, (or maybe even both of them?) depending on the respective angle. This illusion is created by a composite method. The photographs are lenticular printings; by merging two photographs into one, a new image arises.

That means that the viewer isn’t able to fully compare two single persons involved. Identifiability must fall so must identity?

ABOUT CLOSNESS

In gesture, facial expression, gaze and posture I was looking for familiar moments, for closeness and privacy.

Per Roland Barth: 'Wanda Landeska's harpsichord comes from the interior of her body' - and similarly I was looking for the moment when something in the expression of the portrayed persons seems to come from the interior of the bodies. My interest lies in the space that is opening up between the photographer and the model. There is something that decomposes, something that is build up. It deals with closeness. It deals with distance. At the same time I tried to catch a glimpse of the moments when the portrayed persons became aware of themselves, when each of them remained with themselves.
I make pictures.
Of Persons.
Of Persons, who showed emotions on the surface, who were cut out of themselves.
I took pictures.
I took pictures of persons, who acted emotionally, in front of the camera.
If they did it for the picture or if it was real doesn't matter anymore, because it is a picture, eventually.

I play with people's emotions. I stage and arrange them for the purpose of a picture. It could have been like it, could have looked like it. It looks like it now, on the picture. In the picture. The picture tells it, eventually.

They have become pictures now. Pictures of persons. Persons, who showed emotions on their face, through their body. A facial and a body language, in it is very own versus. In single stoves.

lira
Emotions, statues. Getting lost, in between the lines. In delirium, de lira
Others will see the pictures, eventually.
They believe what they are shown, what they see, or they don't.
Pictures are real, are being visualized.

DE LIRA

MY NAME IS RANDOM
In my work I deal with the relation of women to their own body.
The natural expression of the bodies as shown in the pictures, hopefully changes and opens up the viewer's perception of what an ideal woman should look like. Women seek for the perfect look. They disguise themselves by putting on fancy clothes and make-up, in order to cover up their inconstancy, and to adapt well to society. But this works only on a superficial level.

I want the women to appear as they really are, and I like to focus on their pure and natural beauty.
Resonant Entanglements—Physical Space

There is something to be said about love in this work. It speaks from within the staked up, twisted and fused bodies. In rising and stretching and struggling. In folding, curving and suspending. The depicted couples are realized as a three-dimensional interplay of sculptural form. Characteristic traits, emotional entanglements and bodily perception influence the performative act through body language. Bodies interact and resonate under the influence of others.

The final form constructs the metaphorically seen, non-material (third) 'Body of the Couple' and may be understood as the inversion of the concealed interior viewed on the outside: expansive, intertwined or telescoped compositions represent complex emotional interconnections.

Shape the pro and centre of a couple, both and pieces, inner and exterior worlds, movement and entanglements; gegen and complicity, support and opposition, find their resonance in the picture and within the viewer.

Gown, Slipper, Shawl, Tankard, Slip, Shoulder Bag, Bell, Basket

The work discusses the modern vision of the transience process. It deals with the item of transience, which goes along with an imminent decay of every becoming.

By using still lifes, which are an analogy for the author's physicalness, the work discusses in which way decay is absolute.
GLORIA, ROSEMARY, VIRGINIA, GRACE, OLIVIA, JOSEPHINE AND LUCIA

The photographic work explores seven everyday products that rise above oneself.

Roland Barthes talks in his text about "a certain excess of visual pleasure." I made a contribution to the space of poetic, visual pleasure. An aesthetic space is opened by the audibly spoken title. Objects become envelopes and bodies simultaneously. Then they involve the observer in their performative play.

I prefer portraying objects to persons. More often than not they become representative for physical being. This is a way to explore the world - the world around me and around us. To position myself as an observer and to enter into an exchange about alienation and recognition.

THE ATTEMPT OF A TRANSFORMATION OF AN IMMEDIATE VICINITY

Starting out from real rooms and objects that always refer to the existence or former existence of something homely, I make modifications in my immediate vicinity so that new spaces are generated. These new spaces bear no relationship to anything human any more. They now become initiating and difficult to re-identify.

The things you can see in a picture are elements reduced to form and material. Their former function within a human environment is practically cancelled out. Dislocated from their original context and without their former function, they can now speak with a different, purer voice than they would do within their original context in a human environment.

The transposition runs through several phases. To begin with I start as a kind of set designer, relating to layout and form I find in the environment. Then I add materials I have found elsewhere. The final step is then the actual photograph to preserve what I have created.

Photography in this case lets me write others into this field - to show them something initially only I saw.
SPACES (COMMERCIAL)

By photographing commercial stores I concentrate on the constructed space and the idea that the consumer finds himself in an artificial and abstract place, open, not precisely defined, even timeless. The showrooms turn into 'small isolated paradises that leave the world outside'. (From Xavier Haer) By re-touching the images, the rooms lose their original purpose, and thus their meaning: non-existent rooms are created.

A number of photographs spreading across the wall portrays individuals from an alternate reality floating in an object-defined pictorial space. In their collectivity they occupy the structure of the wall like a loosely organized swarm. What the aim of their heading is, of what nature their intentions are, and what we are to make of them remain unidentified.
**Nature Morte**

My work 'nature morte' relates to a transitory moment between two states, the natural landscape on one side and the cityscape on the other. It aims to create an imaginary interface and transport it to a pictorial level.

For me it's not about making an image of the world - the reference slides into the background. It's about a new meaning that emerges from the surface of the image. Through the composite of different elements, the work creates a multiperspectival space. Confusion is caused and thereby questions are raised.

Because of the many details the viewer can wander through the pictures trying to uncover its elements that are buried in the picture.

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**Study for the Tower of Babylon**

I'm terribly sorry.
I just don't know anything anymore.
Some Scenes

A choice of several scenes which I took from a quantity of never-ending possibilities. Thoughts on things that exist, do not exist, have existed or have never existed; things that will exist or won't - as well as the imagination of things. The imagination of all things and the imagination of everything seems to be more significant — and important to me — than issues about what kind of picture, with what kind of actors, with what type of objects in which arrangement and distribution, from which perspective, in what place and in front of what kind of background in a certain colour, through which other technical demands a picture should be taken to represent something which finally also is a part from this infinite contingent called 'Everything'.

IS THIS STILL PART OF THE RUHR AREA, OR IS IT JUST OUTSIDE?

"Excuse me, madam — do you live in the Ruhr Area?"

"Madam, what do you mean? Can you tell me whether you are living in the Ruhr Area?"

"Wolfgang Sze: What do you mean?"

"Do you live here in this town?"

"Yes."

"And is this still part of the Ruhr Area, or is it just outside?"

"I'm sorry but I don't know what you're... why I..."

"It's a simple question, madam, that I'm asking you: are we at this very moment in the Ruhr Area, or are we not?"

"Nah... this... what are you looking for?"
The installation ER/NE (S/HE) deals with the relation between voice and body, language and movement, command and execution.

On screen a man and a woman - sitting next to each other, facing the viewer - are acting spoken motion instructions. The precise verbal instructions are based on single motion-components drawn by lot. These commands generate a choreography of chance through accidental sequences. The competing powers of word and action are constantly being renegotiated, triggering a continuous friction between the expectations of the viewer and the acting bodies on screen.

This here is all about the person running from left to right and then from right to left and so on, respectively the person running from right to left and then from left to right and so on.

It is not about reaching any destination. It is about not having any standard. It is about an action taking place; it is about an action taking place again. It is about this circumstance being of great importance. It is about an action taking place again. It is about an action taking place; it is about not having any standard. It is not about reaching any destination.

This here is all about the person running from left to left and then from left to right and so on, respectively the person running from left to right and then from right to left and so on.
THE LOSS OF CLARITY

The loss of clarity.

Context of the visual information, context of the acoustic information, context of the textual information; the blurred immediacy of organized moments; the moment's interval; the remarkable achievement is to dissolve into dust; the loss of clarity.

The isolated portraits of news and talkshow protagonists, fragmented through the fault of media transmission.

The texts, generated by my subjective reflection of the momentum between the pictures and the context of the transmitted information.

The aesthetic transformation of decontextualized information.

The open dialogue of an actual monocausal function of the information and myself within the process of the work and ultimately with the observer.

The work's course between enlightenment and confusion, between derivation and classification, between direct metamorphosis and the camouflage of information or to multicontextualize them.
Repeated section (left right right left right left right) 2009
100 laserprint on paper, cardboard
twelve panels, 120 cm x 160 cm

LIMA MAI | DE 5/6
In this still part of the Ruhr Area or is it just outside? / 2009
multimedia installations: text, photography, drawing, speeds, sculptures, x-rays, molecules.
C-print, 60 cm x 70 cm
Short story it will be about the solar system / 2020
12 C-prints
Different sizes

Space (commercial) / 2008/09
2 C-prints on Ahabboard
65 cm x 80 cm
Shirts, from the series "The Attempt of a Transformation of an Immediate Victory" / 2000
3 C Print on Aludibond
50 cm x 60 cm

Pipes, from the series "Gloria, Rosemary, Virginia, Grace, Oliva, Josephine and Lucia" / 2000
5 digital C Print
90 cm x 60 cm
Gown, from the series 'Gown', shoes, shoes, sandals, slip, double bag, belt, bracelet / 2009

Diseño, from the series 'Diseño'. Earrings: bodyguard / 2009

80 cm x 80 cm - 80 cm x 100 cm

85 cm x 80 cm - 80 cm x 100 cm
My name is Roxana/ 2005 - 09
3 digital C prints, framed
34 cm x 21 cm

De loc (work in progress)/ 2006 - 09
9 C prints, framed
56 cm x 50 cm & 24 cm x 30 cm
ASSUMING A POSE  
COULD REVEAL AN EXPRESSION OF FAILURE, WHEN IT IS A NEUTRAL ONE

Assuming a pose could reveal an expression of failure, when it is a neutral one / 2008
C-print & sketch, framed
36 cm x 42 cm

(In my original project I wanted to build a grants-
enhancement machina, as to be seen in the sketch.  
Actually it turned out to be completely pointless)

On top of that,

'Ok, still not working.  
Not at all, it doesn't have a single thing to do with me.  It makes no sense, you know.  Yet, still have this, 
'sitting around for a week.'  The grants process,  
this is still going to be a reasonable phase of spending,
presumably.

I could just as well take a picture of myself sitting on a 
chair doing nothing.

Maybe I will, anyway I said it.'