***A Conversation between Alexander Kluge and Thomas Demand**, 2006*

GROTTO

You are currently working on a sculpture of a grotto; how would you describe it?

I initially had two different ideas for this piece. One was to create a 'sight', based on an actual grotto in Mallorca, that was also an image of itself. An image is often in itself a sight, something you go to a museum, for example, to view. In other words, you see a sight depicted and at the same time it *is* the sight. And it's presented in such a way that the practical realisation has a slightly utopian character because it is so absurdly complex – which is why I reverted to the idea of a model made up of different strata like those used in architecture to simulate a specific landscape. However, instead of describing the topography of a landscape or the surface of a mountain, I was concerned with the inside, with the underworld, the world within the mountain.

The other starting point for *Grotto*, 2006, was my deliberations on how the digital could be incorporated into my images, since this had become inevitable. While my colleagues often concern themselves with digital cameras and the laws of their use, I felt certain that this wasn't the path for me. For me it's what happens in front of and behind the camera that requires my attention more than the camera itself or its peripherals. So, I decided to take that representational apparatus, the digitalised world (which is only interesting to me in this context), and translate it into reality, and then photograph it in order to regain it as a two-dimensional image.

So you started with something that many people have seen, namely an image of a grotto in Mallorca?

Yes, it was a postcard. I collected postcards of grottoes in order to familiarise myself with the theme, and then at some point I came across one from Mallorca.

Did you before that think about the Rübeland Caves?

The Rübeland Caves are also grottoes, but with a far greater Romantic thrust that came to play a role during German Romanticism.

They are in the Harz mountains, not far from the Dora labour camp. For over a million years each of the caves has been gradually fusing, with the stalactites and stalagmites all the time growing closer together.

Exactly. And if I remember rightly even Goethe visited them during his first trip to the Harz one winter. They became a trope of the Romantic idea of nature, of virgin land, of solitude.

Virgil describes how Aeneas seduces Dido, and Europa is seduced by Zeus in a grotto.

The Cyclops lived in a grotto and kept Odysseus captive there. The grotto is a home for bears and the first dwelling for humans, that's all old hat. It's a trope that of course stretches back a long way, but it still fires the imagination. Just think of the film industry, of *Batman*, *Harry Potter*, Tom Hanks in *Castaway*. Wherever you look, you see images of picturesque caves. Or think of fairytales, of Mad King Ludwig, the Thannhäuser awaiting their call in the cave – it's always set in a grotto!

Bizarre holes in the ground. In the 1920s a bar for night owls was built to resemble a grotto, promising intimacy and a magical world, like a jungle under the ground. Did you actually go to the grotto in Mallorca?

No, I didn't. I didn't really want to see it.

It lives in your inner eye – what we might call the first eye.

Isn't the postcard the first eye?

It has been eyed by millions of eyes and only exists because so many people want to see something like it.

And they want to tell others about it, which is why the postcard was sent and why, at some point, I received the Mallorca one from a friend who knew I was looking for postcards of grottoes. It was immediately clear to me that this was

the right one because it was completely opaque and doesn't use obvious clichés but is vaguely reminiscent of one of Max Ernst's *frottages*.

At a very popular level, though. It wasn't made by an artist but by an entrepreneur who wanted to persuade the public to buy the postcard and send it to their acquaintances. For these people this version of the cave might be viewed as the 'sala romantica'. There are four sets of eyes involved here: your eyes, delighted by your imagination, the eyes of the entrepreneur who made the postcard, the eyes of the person who sent it, and the eyes of the critics who might say that the postcard is kitsch.

Can you talk about how the grotto will be displayed at the Serpentine Gallery?

It will kick off a show that's intended to highlight the qualities of the venue itself, a pavilion in the middle of London's Hyde Park. The building was originally a teahouse. I try to emphasise that domestic quality, rather than relying on an existing white cube. We will do our best to achieve this with wallpaper designed in four colour tones: there will be a night wallpaper, a sunny midday wallpaper, an abstract winter version and one that refers directly to the exhibits. These wallpapers will be manufactured using a decidedly old-fashioned printing technique in which eight Farbstempel colour stamps are block-printed wet in wet. I'm referring to the way in which the Arts and Crafts movement used this technique and above all to William Morris's wallpaper designs. The grotto will kick off the exhibition since it represents the beginning of all dwellings. It also references Rem Koolhaas's temporary pavilion, which will be built in front of the Gallery and acts as the antithesis to mine. That's the idea, anyway.

Another of my works, *Clearing*, 2003, is quite similar to *Grotto* in this respect. It's a kind of clearing in a forest that we recreated using several hundred thousand sheets of paper attached to garden wire and rolls of carpet. The final photograph nevertheless looked very convincing. It reminds me of the cover of the CD of Beethoven's *Eroica*, of photographic wallpaper. In part it's simply a cliché, but this is a deliberate reference.

It's never a cliché, because it has passed through several different activities of the soul and been forged by different people.

The suggestion was that the clearing could be brought back to life as a picture and thus we could get away somewhat from my internalised image. The ambivalence is also important – that it *is* almost a cliché, so almost kitsch.

So with Grotto *you're trying to construct, using card and paper, the difference between your inner image and that on the postcard. Your studio must be like a real craftsman's workshop.*

It has grown to be that. When I started making work the ideas I had were quite simple. I wanted to create things in just one or two days. I wanted to find solutions to problems with the least input imaginable.

Yet initially you worked like a poet, like Novalis or Hölderlin who, to paraphrase, says: this is an object that kindles my imagination and I want to represent it. Then you became a sculptor or a craftsman – an artist who works with material, translating something that once actually existed in reality into another medium. And then in the next stage of metamorphosis you practically recreate the original object, but differently from the way the object was originally construed.

At first I had the naïve idea of immersing myself in an object and using as a point of orientation everything that is indexically contained in the image, over and beyond the context that initially led to it.

What you are talking about is alchemy. It makes me think of the German writer E T A Hofmann, another key figure in the Romantic movement.

It's perhaps similar to an approach we are familiar with from literature. Think of Nabokov and how he writes about childhood. He describes every detail he can remember, but nothing that he can't remember. He doesn't do research or call his relatives to ask what things were like back then. He just tries to remember every detail as far as possible.

To go back to your own process, you first of all make a sculpture, in itself an artwork, which you later put through the medium of photography. Given that you are working in two media – building things up only to break them down during a process of construction and destruction – one might ask what constitutes an object for you?

First, the two media contradict each other because they are different systems of representation. Sculpture aims for permanence, for presence, while the photograph is destined to render something visible that occurred at a particular moment in front of the lens. Essentially I play these two forms off against each other, adding a few neat complications that have to do with the concept of time. You can walk around a sculpture as often as you like, and with photographs – mine are very large so that, as with the sculptures, you can also walk around them – you have a moment and my particular angle of vision. My tyrannical condition, as it were, is that I prescribe your vision.

So the product, the artwork, follows a process from the inner impression, the fired imagination, to the reconstruction as sculpture, photography, and then its presentation in the public sphere behind Plexiglas.

It's like a window. All the sculptures are life-sized – I don't think in terms of models in the sense of any reduction in size.

You could live in them.

When I walk around them I feel a strange sense of destabilisation. Once such a space is finished you are very cautious in it, because you know that you would destroy everything if you took a wrong step. Yet it's the idea of the space that you remember, even if you can't yourself experience the memory of it. That's the strange thing – you transpose yourself to a time and place in which you could never be. Yet you can of course be there in your imagination. You are standing in the midst of the thing that arose in your imagination and then it's all gone and the photo takes over.

Once in the public sphere, you can disappear.

Exactly, then I can disappear. The photo that stands life-sized before me reflects what stood life-sized before the camera.

One can hardly call these works objects; they're more like occurrences. In Grotto *there's also a subtext in the intensity of the narrative that you start with right at the beginning, namely your notion – and that of many other people – of the romantic grotto in Mallorca.*

My assumption is that the narrative continues in the highly convoluted path it takes; that what I want to represent can always be somehow recognised by others.

So you leave tracks. Much is not represented, much is realistic, imitatively, and at the same time there are key omissions which function like a vortex. Let's move on in the process of production to how you actually built Grotto*. I've seen how you make one stratum after the next, like the sediments of a mountain that form over thousands or millions of years.*

That's the starting point: translating the process back into a conventional model of strata. The object is structurally composed like a stalactite, yet it remains discernible purely as a model.

So huge mountains of card and paper arrive – you need 50 tonnes for the grotto as a whole. It comes by train, is transported to your doorstep, taken inside and cut up.

No one single stratum gets repeated. There are 900,000 strata and no two are alike.

Like Nature itself which also isn't schematic and consists of similar strata.

The method is actually used in architecture, where things have to be generalised. In other words, the strata have a natural shape but, in the final instance, no computer can describe the actual complexity involved. You have to work in parts, but you can never assemble the parts to form a whole. We

will see them for the first time when *Grotto* is finished. Partly this has to do with the fact that we used different programmes that don't understand each other. And to give the whole thing yet one more twist I used a computer technology that made things thinkable that otherwise wouldn't be possible, even if what was subsequently realised was in fact a 3-D model rather than a virtual space. in order to describe the oldest trope of architecture, the very first form of dwelling.

But, as in evolution, these computer programmes, by misunderstanding one another, by making errors, surely create something that is beyond nature?

That's what I'm able to generate with this method but I can't predict what's going to happen.

I imagine it to be an interesting experience, which you don't get when looking at, or taking, a photograph. A theorist should really do something to experience a similarly slowed-down process, something with his hands, with machines, so that theory enters his pores. The most intriguing aspect is that the computer programmes don't understand each other, there isn't a uniform programme subject to some overall control.

And surprisingly they have a limited imaginative reach. That is of course the software engineer's revenge since he can't imagine anything like it. In fact, you can only do what someone else has structurally imagined beforehand. So we had to write our own programmes.

The word 'grotesque' derives from 'grotto'. There's a sense of astonishment triggered by these complex grottoes, which Nature implants in the mountains.

They're also spaces for a break.

Yes, a break for nature. Lacunae. And these precious elements of nature, which as lacunae are special sights, are also a theme in your work. You occasionally mock the notion of sights.

On the one hand, yes. On the other, I'm at the end of an entire chain of worlds of images that present themselves to me. All my experience, everything I essentially am, is largely the upshot of things passed on to me. We all know that. I endeavour to put myself in a position in which I can actually add something to the chain. When something comes to me, as trivial as it may sound, it always has a history, a history of how it has been received. A piece of lawn seems initially to be just that. But the image of the lawn comes to me by any manner of paths, be it through ads, a film, or whatever. And sometimes I deliberately make things that are so empty that they no longer transport a truth, but offer at most sincerity or a certain faithfulness, as it were. When I make a piece of art I'm not yet at the point where I can say what its meaning should be. Initially I'm simply amazed.

As an artist, you're under no compulsion to create meaning. If you make something, then it's not ornamental, but essential, so you have to make it, even if it doesn't have meaning.

I simply want to know what I'm actually seeing, what I'm actually being shown, to see it from the inside, work it out again. The images that come to me – some are very banal, others are laden with meaning – are all things I know. So even if I've never been to the grotto in Mallorca, I essentially know it.

CONSTELLATION

In your work Constellation*, 2000, am I right in thinking that you mean these as constellations of the future?*

The idea is a bit convoluted. Originally I thought I'd like to make a photo of the future. I could have dreamt up some flying saucers or other sci-fi items, but I wanted to keep very close to the idea of future, rather than to any wild dreams of it. Technically speaking photography is always about the past – and this time I wanted to make a shot in which the reference photo could not yet have happened. The result is simply a sheet of black paper with holes and

white light behind it. The holes are apparently the product of chance, but the picture is called *Constellation*, suggesting that the holes aren't entirely a matter of chance. It's one possible future constellation. The first time the picture is displayed anywhere new I have the stellar constellation computed and then make the holes in the paper exactly the way the constellation would be in 300 years. I chose a range of 300 years because I had an idea of a manageable foreseeable outlook in mind, but one that lies well beyond the world you or I have experienced, so that while we can imagine it, we can't check whether the photo is right or not.

In the Big Dipper or Small Dipper, the stars don't move as constellations, but move partly towards or away from one another. Your picture is fascinating. You want to keep on looking at it. There's a great amount of vacuum between the stars.

What I like about *Constellation* is that it's so simple conceptually. The whole thing consists of just two sheets of card and light between them.

Would you say that your sculptures have a strange property other artworks don't have? Most sculptures are fixed, preserved, while your works embody transition and your sculptures are subsequently destroyed.

My sculptures are only imitations, dummies made up of things that carry enough symbols so as to be recognisable. I don't wish to be weighed down by objects.

By dint of your taking it, the photo in your own artistic process shows that the work was once three-dimensional. The photo possesses a certain value that precedes the entire work. If one goes back to the yearning for grottoes that arose specifically in the 19th century, people had to first form an interest which one could describe as multi-dimensional.

This then gets translated into the two-dimensional – the postcard – and then unfolds into the three-dimensional then back to the two-dimensional – the photograph. I jump back and forth between the different states of an object, which of course also has implications in terms of time. I show the object in its

original state, in its own small utopia. A sheet of paper, on the one hand, is the medium for certain things, for ideas. On the other, it's also a piece of paper that has not yet been used.

Let's take a quite different case, that of Richard Wagner's Götterdammerung. *Wagner planned to stage the opera in a hut on the banks of the Rhine which would in the process be burned down and the score thrown into the flames. No photo remains to fix this moment once and for all; there's no shot which is itself fixed for good. In other words, a valuable score is unique, like a phoenix. For Wagner, who believed in rebirth, it was a Buddhist thing: he believed that somewhere in China there was a genius who would write* Götterdammerung *anew so that there is no loser in this, but instead transition, metamorphosis. For you, it's a question of: I must give up a former life, that of sculpture, to gain the new life of photography, and then go beyond the realm of the photo when it becomes public.*

That puts it too religiously – and ultimately I don't do these things for the Gods! In the end, things seen in my shots will be recognised in other photos, too, something that applies to all types of identical photos or similar objects.

I have taken that to heart: if we know your photos then we can no longer look at an image in a newspaper without immediately Demand-ing it, adapting it, above all to the omissions.

The omissions are very important to me.

The unique thing as far as I know is that in none of your pictures do we see a human being. The human being is nevertheless present, directly adjacent to the photos in that they're obviously made by a person. Your images are as suffused with the presence of a person as they are by the absence of humans. And I look for what is absent. We all know that the vacuum of outer space is the highest form of gravitation, is gravity itself. It gives rise to stars. There's no vacuum that's empty. To my mind that vortex is a key element in your images.

OFFICE

In Office, 1995, for example, we have an occurrence from the days when the Wall fell that evidently moved you, namely the storming of the East German Secret Police headquarters and the office rooms which were laid to waste in the process.

Everyone wanted to get back the files on them, the score written on their lives.

In your piece, all the sheets are blank, which they certainly weren't in reality. That is somehow the main expressive emphasis.

The focus here is less on the history of the Secret Police in the sense of the personal destinies of those on whom the files were kept; for me it's more about a newspaper photo, which was the initial prompt, and the arbitrarily destroyed context you see in the image.

You reconstructed the whole thing. There's nothing real in it?

There's nothing real in the strict sense of the term, but there are things you recognise. A bell rings in your long-term memory and the complete disorder, the complexity of disorder, the lines that go in all directions and fail to dissolve into a point, that's what I felt was important here.

You could just as well say that we see the spectres of history left behind. It looks ghostly and yet realistic. And it has that dual tension innate in everything you make: you're an antirealist and yet a realist. It's only possible to be these two things simultaneously if you are Demand.

ROOM

Could you offer an interpretation of Room*, 1994? I see something that looks like an explosion and yet the ceiling is torn open in a way that no explosion could achieve, as if there were an inner reason why this building got blown apart.*

This is the image that preceded the office image. I grew up in history class with the image of 20 July 1944, when officers of the Wehrmacht staged a coup against Hitler by detonating a bomb in the wooden hut where he was holding a meeting, and the whole structure flew apart. I think it's safe to say that I'm not the only person to be completely absorbed by that image of resistance to Hitler. It's an image of my childhood and I'm, as it were, the living proof of the validity of the educational ideals of that time. If that education was successful, it was because it triggered a response. In the image itself you can see an explosion reconstructed more or less in slow motion. Because I was initially unable to imagine the detonation from the documentation I had, I built the entire room as an intact version and then cut it up into little bits.

You thus appropriated an historical event, so to speak.

However, my attempt to imitate the event in a very slow process and then take the photo didn't work. It became too much of a…

… photo from the scene of the crime.

Exactly, it was too realistic to my mind in the sense that it was a depiction of destruction. I didn't really want to show the detonation; I wanted to show the image of destruction that had been seared in my mind. So I concentrated on the destroyed object and not on the object I had destroyed. That way the different levels of unreality crept into the image.

DRAFTING ROOM

You're working in a very old idiom, a lineage that extends to the Baroque custom of building sets of ruins. The highest form of luxury during the Enlightenment was to artificially construct ruins, ancient sights. In Thuringia, they rebuilt Rome, Pompeii, Potsdam. And yet in Drafting Room*, 1996, I see a studio that could be the Bauhaus.*

It's a remote relative of the Bauhaus. It dates back to a very small photo of Richard Vorhölzer's office from the 1940s. He became one of the predominant architects in Munich during the reconstruction period. For me, it was quite a curious story, where things become interlinked; the private suddenly becoming public, and vice versa. I found this tiny photo when I was searching for a place where ideas, as opposed to things, are produced. Moreover, I wanted an atmosphere in the image that was very morning-like: you enter an empty office, everything seems undecided, you can do anything and yet you're on your own.

Like a snowfield, untouched. Or a workshop before the ideas arrive.

That was the starting point. Then I started looking for specific architectural offices and I came across a tiny reproduction of this photo in a book. I finally managed to track down the widow of Vorhölzer's office manager to see if she had the actual photo. She'd bequeathed her husband's estate to the Römisch-Germanisches Museum in Nuremburg – unfortunately only the written documents. Aafter an endless chain of research, I never found the photograph – just this illustration the size of a postage stamp.

But it was always in your mind, so you didn't actually need the picture, only your idea of it.

Yes, you could put it like that.

And you needed the intense will to act. In your work you have to maintain the momentum for a long period of time, during which you reconstruct everything, photograph it and present it in public in the form of exhibitions. Mozart ate at noon, wrote something and forgot it. This is a different form of invention.

To return to Vorhölzer, I grew up in Upper Bavaria where in the 1920s he designed magnificent post offices; in fact he built most of the post offices in Munich. And then in the post-war period, after the traditional architecture had fallen into disrepute owing to its use by the Third Reich, people started to look for exponents of a different architectural idiom. Most were in exile or had

been persecuted and murdered, so initially there was no one who could deliver the goods. Only the 70-year-old Vorhölzer, the Rector of the Technical University in Munich before he was dismissed by the Nazis, was left. He'd spent the war building post offices in Upper Bavaria. One of them was where I bought stamps as a child. My grandfather was Municipal Buildings Officer in Munich – hence the image in my mind of these two men sitting at a table, negotiating whether something could be built in the city or not.

PODIUM

In Podium*, 2000, we read '1389 – 1989' above a very red plant inside a kind of socialist emblem, and it's a plant I really don't recognise from nature.*

My interest in the motif was as follows: if you view letters three-dimensionally – for example, a neon ad for a butcher's shop, or the H&M logo in a shop window – you're seeing both an object and part of the alphabet: i.e., letters as objects; a literal and a letter-based meaning. First of all there's the meaning of the object, which can be perceived as a communications module. Then there's the graphic dimension. Stages used for political events possess a strange quality, in that the politician who speaks from them becomes an actor depicting himself. This is pretty much what Pirandello means when he says: 'The film actor feels as if he were in exile. Exiled not only from the stage, but from his own person.' That's what interested me. My starting point was a mass meeting Milosevic staged on the Battlefield of Kosovo-Polje in 1989.

The 600th anniversary of the Battlefield of Kosovo-Polje.

Exactly. 1989 is a date we all have in our minds, but no one thinks about the moment before that when Kosovo first defined itself as an ethnic group. Before 1389 it had been a handful of provincial aristocrats who argued among themselves. Then they faced a common enemy for the first time, namely the Turks, and got thrashed.

It's a wound that unites them, like 1914, to this day.

These time frames go far beyond our everyday notions of time. The Vatican thinks in such time frames, as does Islam. I read somewhere that 9/11 was meant as revenge for the Muslim expulsion from Granada in 1492. Such time frames can't be depicted in an image, but only by symbols and figures that also have a purely symbolic value in the context of a political event. The arabesque that enters the image from the left is a stylised laurel in red. The picture only contains primary colours: red, white, yellow and gold, so here, too, we have pure symbolism. You can also see the lectern with the glass of water, and thus the imagined figure standing behind the lectern, who himself becomes a graphic cliché.

Let me give you an example. Farmers in China, from the province of Xinjiang, move to Shanghai, heading for the city to flee the immiseration of tilling fields. And in the city the clan closes ranks, as it did in the countryside, and sifts and sorts through the waste that accumulates as the city is modernised – electrical cables, switches, and so on. It's all carefully separated, as if it were chaff and wheat, and they were in search of the last grains of wheat. Here, as it were, the residues of dead labour, left behind at an earlier point by engineers and workers, become second nature. And the family lives off this and stays together. That's the price they pay in order to stay together. Shanghai, the city, is second nature.

Perhaps you are familiar with Günther Hopfinger, the 'Bleeding Rembrandt of Stadelheim'. A simple man, a money forger who as a youth landed up in Stadelheim prison for forging MOT discs or something similar. The main thing was that he could draw superbly and in prison he taught himself to forge bank notes by hand. I once saw one of the notes, an old 1,000 Deutschmark note, with the dome of Limburg Cathedral on the back, and everything drawn in ink down to the tiniest details. It really looked genuine, but of course the fact that it was drawn by hand makes the note far more valuable that its nominal value of 1,000 Deutschmarks. After his release from jail he earned his keep with such forged notes – with the labour of his hands, as it were – until one of his notes fell into the hands of a savings bank employee in Lower Franconia, who examined it carefully and noticed it was a fake.

So the forged note was used in payment?

Exactly, and that's how he got caught. So he went back to jail. The savings bank employee, perhaps it was in Regensburg, was later asked by the judge how he recognised it as a fake. And he replied that next to the cathedral, on the house adjacent to it, there is only one window and in the original banknote there are two.

A confrontation between two exceptionally skilled men, the first so skilled he could draw the note, the second so skilled he could see the difference. The story is so marvellous because only in second nature can an object be more valuable, and thus no damage has been done. The man's lawyer should have said that.

When the judge asked Hopfinger why he'd changed the number of windows, although he knew full well what the original looked like, he said he simply wanted to add a personal touch. That's the most heart-wrenching aspect of the story. He didn't want to forge any longer, and if you think of the time he invested in the note it was really more than that: it became a matter of self-expression. Just think of imitating the dyes, all those tiny lines, and transposing all of that back into manual labour, into a unique process that is far more intense, and also far more human.

I believe that forms part of the core of your entire oeuvre: the way people oscillate between first, second and third nature, and if a fourth arises, then in the fourth, too. And if we fly to a planet, to Mars, say, then we'll have to take that along with us. That is the oscillation of the soul. We can never be objective, and owing to our backbone can never just stand rigid and tall, but we will always rotate around a centre. Everything is subjective and inexact, and for good reason.

It's the only discrepancy, and it enables us to distinguish one thing from another. Even if my objects look very true to reality, it's only the discrepancies that make them really interesting.

TUNNEL

Now tell me what you mean by reality, as applied to the individual stages of your work. Initially you have a postcard or a piece of news, an idea. As with the postcard of the grotto, it's something that's characterised by the interest of others in it, an interest that precedes its coming into being.

To my mind, depicting reality is just as much a reality as that which is depicted. And then I attempt to a certain extent to privatise reality.

What happens in the first phase, when you see an object? Take, for example, the tunnel in which Princess Diana died, and which no photographer was allowed into. Why did that fascinate you?

What interested me was that suddenly we all knew the tunnel although no one had previously noticed it.

No one was able to do more than imagine it. We all knew the entrance and the exit to the tunnel, but no one knew what lay in-between.

What connected the two ends is what we imagined, and unlike the still images made by the reporters standing outside, the imagination pans through the tunnel, which is why I hit upon the idea of the film (*Tunnel*, 1999).

But millions of people have endeavoured to imagine what happened there.

And not just that – they construe it as part of their own biography: I was alive when Princess Diana died in the tunnel. What interests me first is the ways and means, the inventions, by which people turn this event into their own story.

This shows that only those people survive in evolution who have the self-awareness to say: I was there. It moved me. Just as in medieval times people said: I stood next to the Cross. Luther said we must go to Jerusalem for Christmas. The man is long since dead, but we will take him down from the Cross. Now that kind of self-confidence is the most valuable thing people have learned. Would we agree?

Absolutely. There is no better way of putting it.

A primeval confidence.

On the other hand there's also the chance to convey this awareness to others or, rather, in the process of communicating it to attain it.

Realistic that is certainly not. Take Napoleon who exploited this self-confidence among the French farmers turned grenadiers when he said during the winter campaign outside Moscow: And now we will conquer India. In other words, this self-confidence can be the source of great mistakes. But it's nevertheless sincere because people simply cannot act differently.

Yes, but it's imperative that people communicate, as this creates a sense of shared experiences. But this also leads to different versions of the same story. With Princess Diana there are different variations on how the accident happened. During the first four or five days after the crash when our memories were forming, one version was, for example, that a white Fiat Uno came from the left, cut up the driver, believed he caused the accident and therefore notified the police. For a full two days that was the main news item, and all the other versions of what happened got rewritten. The Mercedes in our imagination took a completely different course, until it emerged that there is no side entry from the left into the tunnel at that point. The entry is in the next tunnel; so that was probably where the white Uno entered the story. The film I distilled from all this information consists of 52 camera pans through the tunnel, and they change. In other words, they repeat the process of memory, always in the same rhythm.

And precisely by virtue of the fact that the accident couldn't be seen, that neither a car, nor a person was to be seen, a correspondence arises between our inner images and an actual image of the accident taking place which never emerged.

That's exactly what it's all about. I wasn't interested in the accident or in describing how it actually happened…

… since no one had seen it happen.

What it's about is the place that has been seared in our memories via a sense of reality that has nothing to do with real experience, but only consists of stories we have heard.

Out of empathy.

Exactly, and as a consequence the tunnel changes as you drive through it, and the camera position changes, too. One pan through the tunnel is filmed from the passenger seat, for example, meaning the camera is slightly further to the right. And the camera almost stops at one point, at roughly the place where the accident evidently happened, and then picks up the thread of what it was doing again. All the traces of processes, which we still remember and once played a role, are reflected in the camera pan, but only indirectly, never in terms of the depiction.

In this way you've created a free space, a surface for each viewer of your images. And what you've left out thus gets filled in. And that allows an element of freedom, freedom for association. In a Rohrschach test no free association is allowed; you are forced to associate what's in your mind, whereas here there's an openness, a surface, vessels that you construct. And a public sphere where the perception of many people comes together requires vessels and containers – just as you can't carry water in your hands on foot.

******

You were born in 1964, which means you were 13 in 1977, during the so-called 'German Autumn', when terrorism and counter-terrorism reached new heights. What was your experience of it?

As oppressive. The small place in which I grew up was not far from Pullach, home to Germany's BND secret service, and some of the parents of school friends worked for it. Other parents were bankers who were protected by the secret service while their kids were inside playing Monopoly. Suddenly in this small village in Upper Bavaria there were police checks left, right and centre. Yet somehow I took this to be completely normal. We closed ranks; the threat was from the outside. I remember seeing the red 'Wanted' posters in every public building.

And in 1968 you were just four years old – do you have any recollection of that momentous year?

The first thing I can remember is the moon landing, although that can't actually be the case. But I'm sure I remember the Palestinian terrorist attack on the Israeli team during the Munich Olympics in 1972.

Kennedy was shot a year before you were born. Is that actually a reality?

It is a reality, but as a story, not as history.

In 1984, Germany was 16 years down the road from the student revolts, and had another 16 to go to the new millennium, which lay ahead like a future caesura. You were 20. Could you describe your perception of things as a 20-year-old?

I was still living in Munich, still a student at the fine arts academy, and I had no idea what I wanted to do with my work. We went on a few demonstrations against the nuclear waste storage facility near Gorleben.

If you think back to a period a long time before your birth – say, New Year's Eve, 1799, with 1800 about to happen – how do you feel? A time when the century of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution were carried to the grave – an upheaval but 100 new years lying ahead.

100 years of mechanisation.

The Industrial Revolution. In Egypt, for example, 600 French scholars gathered together with the French army, plotting to renew the entire French Revolution in Africa. It was a very strange world where people had quite different uncertainties from those we know. Do you think you can put yourself in their shoes?

I'm interested in how an artist goes out one day with his easel and *draws* a tree. Instead of painting the tree with little nymphs sitting under it, he goes out, looks carefully at the tree, and draws it leaf by individual leaf.

A discovery of the world, like Alexander von Humboldt setting out on a voyage of discovery. The mountain summit became something that could be climbed. For a short time there was the possibility to build society as if it were a garden. To turn everything that was agrarian nature, as it were – i.e., raw nature, as in Goethe's Elective Affinities *– into something that suits man. In other words, to reconcile the subjective and objective sides of the equation. And that's been completely lost and is quite impossible today. It's the subjective side that remains in the immense mass of the objective, which at some point of course includes other people. If I no longer have any direct contact with them, if the public sphere, the arts, the relationship to people no longer grows with the complexity of society as a whole, then third nature arises.*

And this simplification…

… doesn't occur in reality.

Abstraction doesn't happen in reality, but essentially organises it. What I was trying to get at was that my approach translates what you call second nature back into first nature, and then into second nature again.

You retrieve it with all the effort that a Nuremberg craftsman, a Meistersinger like Hans Sachs, brought to bear on things.

And that's necessary because otherwise it would be irrelevant. Things must be slowed down, and for me that involves making something with my hands.

21

So when producing your work, you can study everything in the world in terms of its substance and its relationship to reality. And there's no point of orientation as to what really is or isn't after the production, once it's finished, once it's in circulation.

Yet, we only grasp these complicated relationships by means of what you term 'third nature'. What you recognise and read in images is something you can only discern because beforehand…

…when you saw the picture or the postcard.

Exactly, or because you know that it exists.

KLAUSE/TAVERN

I've been working for months on five pieces, called *Klause/Tavern*, 2006, that relate indirectly to the Apocalypse, focusing on child abuse, and I asked myself whether, having had the topic conveyed to me as news, I could, as an artist, express anything at all on this subject.

Are you referring to an image from the news that already exists?

Yes. There was an incident at a small bar opposite the railway station in Burbach, a district of Saarbrücken, where a little boy the press named Pascal, to preserve his anonymity, was suffocated with a cushion and then disposed of in a bin-liner. His step-sister was the culprit. Initially, the story left me with a very strong sense of diffusion in my mind, a lack of clarity. And I wondered whether this is in fact what happens when we absorb the news in both words and images. After all, things don't just lie around ready and waiting to be covered or featured. Take paedophilia: what exactly happened at the place shown by the newspaper photos is something only very few people know from having witnessed it themselves. Even the judges and public prosecutors have to rely on distilling a credible version of the story from a cluster of contradictory statements and vague pieces of evidence. And I don't mean that this contradictoriness is necessarily the product of lies,

but may simply have to do with different perceptions and interpretations of shared events. The journalists, who prepare a picture of what happened for the general public, can only dream of being so close to the events, and yet they're in a more privileged situation than readers or viewers, who have to rely on the material prepared with some blueprint or formula in mind. Not that I am rebuking journalists, for media-based communication depends on stereotypes and blueprints. The media has to reduce the complexity of reality, otherwise no one will listen or watch. So the process is from the outset geared to a loss of information and a lack of clarity as regards the actual event. To this extent, there's no easy answer to the question as to whether my decision to approach these events via detours does them justice. In the end, it's not the events or the moral judgement of readers that I'm concerned with, but the diffuse shadow realm such events inhabit in our collective memory.

You mentioned the Apocalypse, which makes me think of Beckmann. Is there a link here?

My five images are intended as a response to, or dialogue with, Beckmann's *Apocalypse* prints which he made in 1941-2, when he was already in exile in Amsterdam. One might have imagined that he would use the theme of the Apocalypse as a metaphor for his own desperate situation. Instead, he decided in favour of literally illustrating the Biblical text. Whereas he usually opted for a kind of free-floating Surrealism, here he forced himself to focus on the specifics of the text. In other words, he accepted a reference point outside his own artistic work and his own imagination. I tried to find something that corresponded to this and, bar some minor formal aspects, this is the only element of his work that I focused on in mine. In the group of images *Klause/Tavern* I, like Beckmann, refer to an external context, a building at different points in time. I chose the building because to my mind it reflects the central motif of the Apocalypse: it's the place where events came to a standstill.

The revelation, the end of Christ. The temple's curtain tears: that is essentially the image.

The standstill of time that interested me derived from my hesitating somewhat in accepting the religious aspects. So I tended instead to stick with the 'thisworldly' aspect of the text, and there you can find the motif I took as my starting point: the place where it all took place, as it were – the End of Time. Which doesn't mean the end of the day – as in, you get up, go to work, go home again – but of historical process. I looked for such states and, alongside others such as pain, immersion in work, the most obvious seemed to be childhood, which was the trigger for the story relating to the Tosa Tavern.

One image is of a dried-up pot plant at a window. Could you describe it?

I resolved to describe the building at five different times. The first image shows a wall and two windows covered with ivy – very Hansel and Gretel-like. The second shows a boarded-up entrance. And the third is of a backlit plant. You can't see out of the window as light enters the room only through the glass building blocks above a window sill in one corner. You see the neglected plant – in fact all you see is neglect, a state where everything is forgotten, despite the little marker in the pot giving instructions on how to tend the plant. Incidentally, the plant belongs to the pizzeria that took over the bar where the crime was committed.

Standstill. After such a crime no one can keep such a bar going.

And no one wanted to. It was a murder quite out of this world, quite beyond the pale. The venue can't be held responsible; neither can the plant. But there is also no longer any reason for the plant.

The end.

The end of the direct coverage. But the entire incident then shifts into the fictional. It comes before the court, 13 people were accused, five of whom who confessed. And the bar itself was far too swiftly converted into a pizzeria, which itself closed down after two months as no one wanted to eat there. The police had to reconstruct it in order to be able to compare the confessions. So there was already one rebuilt bar…

… before you rebuilt it?

Yes. At the same time, the place with which we became familiar from the press coverage wasn't actually the place originally involved. The back room the press showed was in fact the hastily converted pantry of the pizzeria.

It sounds like Pompeii and Herculaneum, covered by Vesuvius's ashes, with people then building their houses on top.

For me, what are decisive are the blurred traces left in the media by these incidents.

Is society more important than reality? Surely it's like a shared cocoon we use to defend ourselves against the lack of expression, against the inexpressible by together withdrawing into an archive of expressive abilities.

Or by sharing a common story.

In the past it was around the fire, today around a medium.

That's exactly what I meant earlier when I said that I gain a large part of my experience exclusively through this media-based narrative on the world and not, as I would have done one or two generations ago, on who knew that if it rained on 1 April then the summer would be bad – that type of primary experience which you mentioned earlier.

First nature, which has largely been replaced by a second or third nature. If we fall ill, things are different. Catch a cough and you're back in first nature. When a child is born, it can only be born in first nature; it can't imagine the event. You cannot say: in the interests of the defence industry and final victory, pregnancies shall henceforth be rationalised and limited to three months. That's impossible.

PAPER

What you can grasp with your hands in your workshop has a reality of its own, is an imitation of first nature. How did you come to be so attracted to cardboard and paper?

Not least because they are the material of ideas.

In the past, people printed on it or wrote on it.

Or used it to build things in geometry class. Or you can eat from it. These are materials largely destined for temporary use. The good thing about paper is that everyone is familiar with it, everyone has had their own experiences using it, everyone holds it in their hands every day of the week, there's no mystery about how it is made. This sense of familiarity is perhaps what I mean when I say that you essentially know an image before you see it. What I'm actually interested in is the fact that paper is common merchandise, which absolutely everyone has experience of using.

Experience is possibly one of the key concepts underlying your work. There's experience in self-awareness, interacting with other people; there's experience that is purely intimate. Is that perhaps the terrain in which you move?

I believe my work is a matter of oscillation between the two: applying my private, intimate experience to the public, and seeing whether there's a place for me there, whether I can kindle something within the public sphere or simply use it as a foil against which I work. Of course, as an artist I want to attain a position where I'm not just consuming my surroundings, but am somehow actively helping to shape them.

IMAGE

It has been said that an image moves from a point outside the image. Is that the point which is crucial? An image is also, however, rendered important by the fact that that very point is noticed in all the details of the image. And yet it remains invisible. The centre of the subtext of your images remains invisible.

And has to remain that way. If that wasn't the case, I don't even know whether the image would be meaningful.

Certainly, because then it would be a depiction. It would be depictive realism and no different from all the great pictures of the past which take their key stimulus from the outside.

The operation you describe nevertheless depends on the viewer recognising this point of reference. I don't really think about who looks at my pictures, but I'm very aware that the entire process would be meaningless without the act of looking. The sacrifice of *Götterdammerung* that you mentioned earlier inevitably also includes the audience.

And everyone is meant to hear the news that something quite irrecoverable, a monumental work, was once burnt to ashes like a phoenix attempting to bribe the gods.

The question of course is to what extent I need signposts in my work and to what extent can I simply rely on the context in which the pictures are seen. After all, the titles of my pictures always deliberately leave things open and undermine any anecdotal reading of them.

The category of context is one thing; the ability to discern another, namely the subjective side. You take the subjective side of your ability to discern and tackle the initial context, the basic flow of interest that's prefigured in the material you take as your starting point. For example, with Princess Diana's death or the assassination of John F Kennedy you don't say, 'I came and created everything anew and destroyed the old.' That would be some fantasy of omnipotence, which modernism definitely shed – 'Le Corbusier's deadly gaze', as you once said, that dangerous Medusa's head.

My efforts are an echo of that flow.

The artist captures that echo the way a bat does. The artist is essentially someone who sees with his ears and renders the invisible visible. You said

somewhere, paraphrasing Socrates: Then nothing will be visible there. There are always gaps. The vacuum technique you use has two sides: on the one hand, the 'I don't know' and, on the other, the 'I won't name the most important thing in the image.' And that resurfaces in the viewer and serves as a vortex sucking things in. The vacuum creates substance.

But I must pay exceptionally careful attention to all the things that the image requires. Magritte once said that an image doesn't show thoughts, it shows all the things necessary for thoughts.

Thought runs between the images, with the ability to differentiate historically, such that an image gets your particular view. For all your Romantic sensibility, it's not as though you say, 'We've burned the ships behind us on the beach.' You bring something new to the equation: the autonomy of the object that you address and the long-established currents of collective consciousness. And that's the production of a public sphere – respect, respecting difference. Anticipating difference, which is arbitrary in the way an artistic subject is. And that leaves you at odds with yourself.

I would like to term it not respect but participation.

Because any of us would be an illusion were we not infused with difference. We would simply cease to exist as identities. Take the secretary of the Charity Association, an architect of the French Revolution and important political aide. He designed a lighthouse intended to tell wanderers in the desert if they'd gone astray and to show them the way. It was developed in Paris but remained on the drawing board and was never produced or positioned in the Sahara.

The tower was never erected?

No, never. There's only a drawing of it. I'm simply proposing an image of utopia.

What has always interested me about the architecture of the French Revolution was the fact that when it was put into practice there was never

any discernible difference between it and ordinary architecture, only structural differences.

You have the Bastille, albeit built by Boullée, but there are a few very daring ideas there.

Only as unbuilt projects does the audacity prevail. The idea of the desert is that it has no centre, and that's precisely the problem. The architect of the tower feels the desert is the mother of opaqueness.

You could say that the Earth is at present a desert in terms of opaqueness.

MODELS

In the 18th century an encyclopedia was compiled in order to transfer knowledge that others didn't possess, which isn't moving in itself, but what is are models in which experience can in some way be preserved, models that are capable of criticising constructed images. It's a bit like making artificial viruses or bacteria that other people would have to combat. I assume that you think the idea of the bacillus is pretty strange. You would probably say we shouldn't have images of a different kind of biology as our enemy but should instead transform ourselves within ourselves. These transformations are only possible by virtue of mass focusing, by experience. And by adding a drop of aqua fortis to gold and dirt and watching something develop through alchemy. To give an example, and to prevent any confusion or misunderstanding, the whole thing gradually develops from images and sounds, from music, from a presentation with no compulsion to create meaning – a vessel capable of housing other experiences, versions of experience. It's a moot point whether we need to call this art or not. It's not functional, for these are strange, enigmatic counter-structures, and there's definitely a reason for us to create them.

Have you an idea of what could be included in such an encyclopedia instead of knowledge?

A blueprint or model of the ability to discern – to which I hold up an image that bears a relation to a real event in the mind of the viewer. This is a network that can't in any way be created by the Web or by a computer; it can only be created on the subjective side. In that way you arm the subjective side of man, namely our ability to differentiate. And this ability means that I'm emotionally an anti-realist since I declare what I suffer from to not be real, and I declare as real what I need – for example, the need to express myself. And this is refracted through everyone else and all else. Without that refraction through people I respect, through things and of course through animals, it would be a dictatorial angle, the one taken by Stalin, for instance. Something would arise that's not just some cog and yet keeps up with the evolution of things – with the Industrial Revolution, with the computer revolution, the information revolution – and which tends to establish an evolution that bypasses the human race. We can't attempt to overtake this. It's like the hare and the tortoise. But we can attempt to see the subjective side, which is essentially innate to all serious questions humans ponder when they fall ill, fall in love or as they approach death. The crux is to equip this immense power, not with prosthetics – that would be the wrong term – but with vessels, auxiliaries. If I require something to navigate the ship of my life, be it lighthouses or havens, as I can't survive alone in the Atlantic, I need something like a raft. The image in my mind is not a horrible one, such as the raft of Medusa, which so fascinated the 19th century with its love of misfortune, but a happy raft, the raft of Ulysses. Each image needs a counter-image. The main object must never be visible in it, otherwise there would be no desire in it. If I'd depicted desire it would take on an independent life of its own and I would be able to go home satisfied. The image arises in the mind of the beholder.

These are some of the concerns of film theory, which one could apply to Godard or Dreyer, or even D W Griffiths. But to return to the problem of reality, that we both only apply to experience, experience is consistent or it's not, and whether it's true or false can't be the decisive point. Then there's always the conditional side to history, the modal form, and that modal form can be rich or poor.

To summarise what I mean: in all of your works the image gravitates. From within the image there's a gravity that also, incidentally, regulates the objects within the image. That's the gravitational relation of experience. Put

differently, in our imagination an edifice of small creatures would slowly grow upwards, like a coral reef but not one built by an architect or an army. This is how it differs from modernism or engineering, from the era of engineers in the first half of the 20th century to the second half, which was that of the insurance salesmen. We would dare to do something, we would try to achieve that at the micro-level, in the subcutaneous structure, as Adorno puts it, beneath the skin.

Where do you see the tinkering in all that?

We are busy re-energising the art of tinkering. Tinkering is definitely a term for what you do in your workshop.

Organised tinkering. Tinkering in the sense of making use of the things we already have instead of creating them ourselves.

For example, with the 37 degrees that we carry around inside us, we repeat the Tethys Ocean, the primordial soup that once covered China. In the way in which we start tinkering again, we regenerate something that may have been invented at an earlier stage in time but now fits perfectly into the gap that has left us unable to act. And to this extent there's no difference between history and the radical present, the avant-garde. Art is distinguished by the ability to differentiate. That of course also includes the art of medicine, politics and all the other arts that obey the same criteria, although you can't see the criteria because you wouldn't exhibit them.

Which would mean the concepts of art and mastery would blend?

Mastery would include the ability to reach a consensus, to disseminate. This is derived from a flowing current of people, an interest that's predefined, taken from people and then returned to those who can handle it. This use value is also part of art. And what we're talking about is not at all esoteric. Can you perhaps interpret a few images from classical photography, such as this anonymous picture, 'The Jupiter solar camera'? What do you see?

I see an image very similar to the recordings of the first large ears listening to space. There were similar structures at the Bell Laboratories when I visited them years ago.

Alien galaxies…

… that show themselves as a hiss of radio waves…

… gravitational waves.

Because people hoped to hear something more in those radio waves, some cosmic hiss. The initial idea was to filter out the interruptions because they got in the way of radio transmission. But a certain Doc Ewen devised a telescope that used these acoustic signals. And to that end huge ears were initially constructed, which really look as if they're growing out of buildings.

Like something out of the early days of film.

SPACE SIMULATOR

Can you describe your picture called Space Simulator, *2003, for me?*

Space Simulator shows the exterior of an apparatus that simulates the experience of being in space, but it doesn't show the simulations themselves. What first struck me was that the simulation to which an astronaut exposes himself in this apparatus actually precedes experience proper. This interested me because such a concept of simulation has far more levels to it than simulation in a game, which merely apes what we've already experienced. This large model is more architecture than an object or sculpture. Just think of Frank Gehry, Cubist sculpture, etc. Even if you don't understand what it is, the thing at least preserves a sense of rationality through familiar details such as the spiral staircase. The whole thing is then embedded in a reproduction of my studio, which is also a reconstruction. I wanted, as it were, to pull up the curtain and show the backstage mechanisms behind the scenes. They too are fakes, sets, so that the reality that purports to enable the simulation is itself a simulation.

You called one of your books Phototrophy. *What does this mean?*

Initially, I thought it looked just like 'photography' with a typo in it. It looks like a spelling mistake, an irritation not unlike my pictures, which often have edges that don't belong, or you notice a slight disturbance in the image, so it seemed fitting. That was the first impression I wished to convey. But 'phototrophy' is actually a real term, at home in the community of Canadian bear hunters.

As trophies?

Exactly. At some point quotas were introduced for hunting bears so hunters took pictures instead. 'Phototrophy' is the bear that would have been shot, if the Canon had been a cannon. The concept was given a new meaning when the photos of Abu Ghraib and similar occurrences reached the public. Of course war crimes happen elsewhere as well, but these particular scenes were staged solely for the photo.

The topic you're onto here is a very old one: the bear that was ostensibly shot by President Roosevelt and turned into a teddy bear by a London tailor, which then goes global and is just as at home in Japan as it is in London and the United States. It's the same trophy story.

But for photography as a medium it's quite striking how 'phototrophy' in part undermines the view photography has of itself. What first looked like a typo refers in fact to the role of sincerity in photography. If you compare photos taken on mobile phones inside the London tube after the bombings in July 2005 with those taken by professional photographers, the decisive image that lodges in your mind is of course the one taken by the person involved in the experience. Even a photograph from a CCTV camera seems more impressive, possibly more authentic. If you compare photographs of the smoking ruins taken after 9/11 they are of course very telling at a metaphorical level, but in the end they're less shocking than the photos taken by those directly involved. And then you have the whole discussion that defined the terrain five or ten years ago – whether or not they describe truth.

This aspect has been completely pushed into the background in favour of attention to who is the author of the photograph – who has an interest in showing me this image and to what extent does the context of the shot stage the image itself.

Let's take Demand's eye. Where exactly does the ability to differentiate reside? Surely not just in the eye, but also in the sense of balance, in the diaphragm, in the head, in the entire body.

The eye is the organ through which it enters the body, but ultimately it's a matter of intuition.

A question of feeling. Subjectivity, where the lamp of the soul awaits.

It's therefore not particularly rational. The deciding agency is not just one of the senses, and certainly not all five of them. It could just be contact via the skin.

And what is the eye at the moment of completion of a work?

The eye then attempts to rediscover in the photo as many of the significant features to which I attached importance when making the sculpture. In that regard you resemble a collector. You're like a representative of the future exhibition. In other words, I'm not only behind the camera, but act on both sides of it.

POLL /LABORATORY

What triggered my piece *Poll*, 2001, was the desire to make a photograph that didn't justify itself solely through the story as the filter of perception, but in which the underlying event developed almost in line with the work of reconstruction.

The events surrounding Bush's election?

Yes, the first election with the eight weeks of recounting in Florida. At first I simply found it strange that adults were searching for holes punched in paper. I'd been on the look-out for photos of behaviourist experiments for years: the pigeon that finds its path despite being placed in a labyrinth, the rat that learns very fast to always turn left and not right to avoid electric shocks it would otherwise suffer, and the researcher who monitors how swiftly the rat adapts. This experimental methodology has been in use since the 1930s and was later to become the subject of a cartoon. It was also the starting point for Claude Shannon's theory of cybernetics. I was hunting for a picture in which one of these labyrinths stood in the centre of a laboratory, as a self-reflective indicator, suggesting, as it were, that models serve to foster insights and not only to make the world seem nicer. I assumed that there were countless such photographs but since the focus in this area of research is on statistics and diagrams no one had gone to the trouble of documenting this photographically. At the same time I started seeing all the pictures of the voting cards and torches used to shine through punched-out holes. Then there was the additional fact that the recounting of the votes took place in a so-called Emergency Center in Florida, designed like an amphitheatre. Seen from above, it looked like a circular labyrinth with tables, piled high with stacks of yellow cards, forming corridors; in fact, the whole thing had a very specific shape. It was then that I recognised I was witnessing one huge behavioural experiment. A behaviourist experiment consists of unnaturally reducing the options open to an animal to three corridors – the central, the left and the right corridors. The election resembled a similar pattern, with each voter having to choose from a small selection of candidates. I did my utmost to make certain my photo was ready so that a New Yorker seeing a picture of the recount in the morning paper could go into a gallery that same evening and perceive the gallery as a place full of objects that he or she had previously seen in the news.

Is that what this picture expresses?

That's the thrust of the picture; the expression is something different. This is the process by which I came to make the picture – i.e., the things that were necessary for this idea.

WINDOW

Could you describe your piece called Window, *1998?*

Window shows only the blinds in a doctor's surgery, the blinds they always keep closed. These are the silent obscured windows of abandoned travel agents, a late successor to Jacques Tati's *Playtime*. It refers to the role of the picture on the wall and also to the role of glass in architecture.

A window through which one sees nothing.

It has something vaguely Platonic about it. You only see the shadowy outlines of what would be visible behind the blind if you had the opportunity to get behind the glass. The glass is still the surface of the picture, and to this extent…

… you can't go through it.

But you know that in the end nothing awaits you behind it. It's only the picture and nothing more than the picture.

A possible window.

If there were a window then this is what it would look like. The composition is not completely without interest because, as with *Constellation*, the light is behind the object. You're actually looking into the light, but the object that constitutes the image blocks your view.

I think it's one of the most impressive images. It reminds me of what is often termed Beckett's window, the window through which one sees a light but doesn't know what it is and can only use the window as a window.

At the same time you know that you are seeing a light, but one that promises nothing. If you could brush the blind to one side you would know more as the situation would dissolve, but that's not possible. All you know is that the occasion for this picture is the light behind the blind.

Each and every moment can contain a large amount of subjective current. These are rooms and times in which one can linger.

It's also the recognition of the moment, like a film loop: the same situation shown repeatedly, but always showing something different. The window likewise presents a foreseeable situation, one that takes you out of your past. No novelty is being presented.

What connects you with other artists who also endeavour to preserve this enormous nervous ability to differentiate, this precision between the subjective and the objective? What would one call that?

There isn't a term for it. I don't think you can find a general pigeonhole for it. But we're at the stage now where we've understood that the point is no longer a critique of the media, which would perhaps still have been interesting in the context of Adorno or the Frankfurt School, but which essentially comes afterwards and has made its peace with the fact that we know that our experiences stem from the media but also that this is all we have.

So we can't be Noah's Ark, we first have to learn to swim?

The idea of critique does not necessarily lead to the situation improving. It's simply the attempt to find one's way under given conditions. It's initially a matter of orientation and less of taking a place in the field of critique and passing judgement on the situation.

Like mammals that have returned to the ocean, the ocean being the new age in which the media rule, in which images are autonomous, individual, when images cease to hold water but move in large currents and circumnavigate the globe like a yacht. And there, at some point, for critical reasons, we become amphibians and live in two worlds simultaneously. Is that a way of putting it?

One could put it that way. The simultaneity is the decisive moment here: not forgetting the one, while simultaneously receiving and responding to the other.

The different realities pass right through us without causing any internal fission or split. The human lung as an organ can become the gill of a fish once more, from where it originated. We live aesthetically in all ages.

GHOST

If I'm an enlightened person and believe that the world is intact then I wouldn't believe in ghosts. But despite what my reason tells me in an effort to protect me from spectres, it is the case that were there ghosts and I was using a camera I would unwittingly take pictures of them. We have talked about omissions and what is absent in your pictures; there are also ghosts in them. Could you perhaps describe Ghost*, 2003?*

In the mid-1950s a story was reported in the French gutter press under the headline 'The mystery of the invisible hand', which I read as a subtitle for most of my work. Half a year later an English Sunday newspaper reprinted the story and whetted my thirst for more information. The story focused on a family who had moved into a new house in Brittany in which the pots and pans led a life of their own, apparently set in motion by the ghost of a former inhabitant. This is the only one of my photos that has ever included the depiction of a person. Although invisible, it's still in the picture. And it's a picture that's somehow faked, but the meaning of the representation can't be faked. The meaning is precisely…

… why the pots and pans are set in motion.

Precisely.

All things of this nature are manmade. But here human forces appear outside us and confront us.

In fact, in a manner that can't be controlled, and in this case it's actually shocking. There's a strange contradiction between the credibility of the

making of the photo and what happens in it. In the end, the proof constituted by the photo is superior to that of the ghosts and somehow undermines the ghostliness of ghosts themselves.

DIVING BOARD / STAIRCASE

Kant states famously that 'Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity.' He who is immature is someone who doesn't dare trust his own reason – one should say his sensations, his mood. How would you interpret this as regards your own work? Is this some text ordained from the pulpit or does it belong to a pre-Socratic age?

It's not only part of a pre-Socratic age but also of my school education. To be honest, I would prefer to be a little more modest in approach. I don't believe that anything in my art will help kick-start the maturity of the beholder. But it's at least an attempt to elude the passivity of the situation. And be it only by…

… creating gaps, surfaces, bouncing boards. You once built a swimming pool complete with a ten-metre diving board, a five-metre board and a one-metre board.

That was merely a launch pad into my own memory. *Diving Board*, 1994, was one of a few pieces where I'd thought about reconstructing my mnemonic image of things. In other words, I wanted to leave out all the details which I remembered and those which I no longer knew anything about.

It sounds like the site of courage.

The swimming pool is a site of ambition and precisely not about courage. I never jumped from the ten-metre board and proved my courage, yet I can very well remember the tower up to the diving board. I wanted to make photos of things that I remembered, much more than of random things that I could find around me. For this reason, in *Staircase*, 1995, I initially thought about what it meant to say 'staircase'. There's a philosophical metaphor for

this in Bertrand Russell's writings, where he says that we either recognise specific things – a table, say – because they concur with certain properties or because we've seen certain things – namely tables – and classify them in the big pigeonhole that contains every table. The former is probably the better hypothesis. But the latter is very exciting because it says that we distil our idea of the stairwell from the series of places that we've been told are called stairwells.

The case of a dog would be even more extreme. We could construct a concept of 'dog' that ranges from Pekinese to St Bernard, distinguishing it from 'cat'.

And that's why we're convinced, as Nietzsche says, that our ability to differentiate is the proof that the hypothesis is right.

But it's evidently the case that biologists identify the dog using a picture that can't be a picture: the average of all dogs possible would look pretty idiotic.

In the case of *Staircase* I referred to the stairwell in my old school, as I believed I could more or less remember what it looked like.

Could you describe how the capacity for memory works in relation to the eye? It's obviously not our eye. Evidently, agents are at work in our heads that for a few million years, or at least since language has existed, have depicted something in a manner that's completely different from how they actually look externally. And evolution has bundled together the misunderstandings that go on in our heads and the things that are external to us in a way that they can coexist. Yet there's no physiological similarity between the two. The syllables in which the brain floats, emitting little beeps all day and night, have nothing to do it seems with the world outside. Memory lies somewhere in-between.

Memory lies in-between, but nevertheless enables us to survive.

Memories are collective, meaning they are so calibrated to one another that they can thrive on our perceptual misunderstandings – as in your works, with their small errors, elisions and the white spaces.

In the final analysis it's memories that interest me. With the school stairwell, which I had remembered being square in shape, it just so happened that years later I went back to the school only to find that the stairs had a circular structure.

Experience and the public sphere are two very crucial concepts linking people. I rely on experience and can understand the experience of the others. The key issue isn't whether something is true or not.

That's also the basis for my work, even if theoretically speaking it may make your hair stand on end. I could well imagine being a carrot, but where does that experience come from? I think that my way into a situation that happened at a particular time in a particular place enables you also to have been in that place. There's no value judgement involved – I'm not saying: it really was that way – but it has a justification of its own and its own truth and perhaps its own stringency in the connections between the individuals who go on to tell the story to other people. And via these stories something, what I earlier called sincerity, can be given a form.

These are the islands on which we live.

(13.617 words)

Kluge, Alexanger / Demand, Thomas, *A Conversation between Alexander Kluge and Thomas Demand*, p. 51-112, 2007, in: *Thomas Demand*, exhibition catalogue, Serpentine Gallery, London