

Annebarbe Kau

Christoph Schenker : "A Drawing".

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Translation by: Steve Cox

The meaning of this is entirely and best to say the mark, best to say it best to shown sudden places, best to make bitter, best to make the length tall and nothing broader, anything between the half. *Gertrude Stein*

The essential cause of an art work, as Paul Valéry said, is the wish that it might be talked about.

The work always conveys in itself, so to speak, some sort of necessity for aesthetic judgment.

There are areas of art in which one does not pass judgment as to whether a work complies with the rules. Here, the paradigm according to which something is right or wrong is obscure by nature.

We are dealing with domains of the truly aesthetic. This refers to what is an event for the senses – beyond the sayable and the literary contained in an art work. This event, as one element of the work, makes the unthinkable sensually perceptible – it gives cause for thought, in contrast to the other element, which is a mediation of thoughts.

There are artists who, according to their interests, develop the one element, and those who tend to work on the other. It seems to me that in the case of Annebarbe Kau the central thing is the form which demands a content, rather than the idea which demands a form. Although her work demonstrates a character which moves back and fore between form and content, and content and form, almost without distinction, in so doing it forces us to adopt the perspective of its form – form understood here as the ensemble of relations of space, time, colour, light, temperature and sound, as a world of irreducible relationships which create the essential aesthetic effects.

With respect to the purely practical world, this inexpressible dimension is an exceptional state; and yet it forms, with its ability to extend, develop and refine, the very substance of the art work.

Perhaps a "deep" work of art can be distinguished from a "clever" work insofar as it does not illustrate bright ideas but provides the experiential background against which such ideas can develop and reach their significance. It is a work which does not express (something) but shows (itself) : our encounter with it is an experience of perception liberated from language.

It has been said that Annebarbe Kau's work is poetic. Part of what this description may be trying to capture is that in her videotapes there are certain sequences of shots and movements unfolding with relative tranquility and do not proceed in the form of a discourse but through association. Consequently, a direct rational insight into a possible, in some form given, context is denied and our speculative powers of imagination are thereby provoked into making free associations.

We may assume that a work of art embodies the knowledge, that it mirrors the proficiency and that it corresponds with the will of the artist. The apparent "dis-order" of a work – whether, as here, it is still a case of the temporal succession of independent monitor pictures or whether we are considering the incomprehensible arrangement of drawings hung on a wall – is a created composition. The cause of our aesthetic interest is this arrangement, which for us is given here and now. It is characteristic of artistic experience that possible imaginary images, sensations, emotions or meanings are always attached to specifically arranged material and to the use one makes of it. An aesthetic effect is inseparable from what, in its material specificity, shows itself to our senses. And even where an art work makes an unchanging sensual impression, the effect continues to have immediacy and the aesthetic experience remains unique.

Annebarbe Kau is an engineer of sensations. She analyses the interwoven texture of sensations – something we treat as natural – and unravels them, separating out individual sensations or combining them in a new way. As a result, what becomes clear is not how they belong together but how they are experienced as belonging together. In the context of everyday life, perception in the sense of an activity – reading, for example, or looking, watching and listening – is essentially determined and purposeful. The sensations are only concerned with perception inasmuch as they fit into that chain of cause and effect.

In Annebarbe Kau's video tape, in her space-video-sound work and in her drawing the decisive manifestations cannot be perceived as something to be utilized. The succession, the superimposition, the dissolving, the isolation and the manipulation of these manifestations are uncertain and contrary to any rules. We cannot do anything useful, anything functional, anything meaningful with them. Yet they enable us to linger in the sensation it arouses, and there we can catch the true being of experiencing – in a sense to live a happy and simultaneously terrifying life of incomprehensible order. That is, indeed, a monstrous thing. The shock is explained by the fact that we are not capable here of forming ideas about what exactly it is that moves us, and above all why it makes such a strong impression on us.

Concentrate on your own sensations when, for example, picture and sound coincide on the videotape but do not appear linked, when the movements in the picture or in the sound are slowed down or delayed, when the various sound sequence are superimposed, when at one point time is measured by the repetition of occurrences but then spreads out at another in the form of an uneventful period of expectancy, though the event itself has already happened almost before you knew it. Check out your sensations in a video installation when the light from the monitors, the sound from the loudspeakers and the movement of your body are defining the space. Pay attention to the difference between the sensation of the coloured light shining from the monitor as a drawing and the sensation of the light reflected back from the white sheet of paper as background light and from the colours on the drawing. Notice the sensation of the eye movements as they follow the drawn line and the sensation the movement the camera makes while describing a line in the air.

Annebarbe Kau's drawing is not part of any graphic code. In general it is not an expression, not an illustration and not a script, not is it a diagram, musical score or piece of choreography. Its readability remains uncertain. Is it a product or the occasion for a production? Since the graphic code is uncertain, our sensations seem to hang in the balance and are, as it were, arrested. Thus, what emerges in self-activity is what normally goes unnoticed as the condition for orientation in the world.

Yet what form does the aesthetic reaction take here? Is it mute astonishment (a thought tied to perception)? Is it a cry of satisfaction and agreement? A gesture which expresses comprehension? A comment and word of comparison? A text offering explanation? A dance which interprets?

All these potential responses to the art work involve the passing of aesthetic judgement. Yet we find ourselves in a sphere where, as I mentioned at the outset, measurement against some definable yardstick is not possible. A different kind of game is being played here. In a lecture on aesthetics Ludwig Wittgenstein once said that aesthetic judgment did not lie in what was said in words; rather, it was shown in the complicated activities - e.g. in competent assessments of something, in the way in which one might examine and select - which are accompanied by these words; words that are used in this context as gestures. In order to clarify the nature of this aesthetic judgment based on connoisseurship one would have to describe the life of a whole culture.

Just as the aesthetic is not the domain of what can be said (i.e. we say what something is and what it means) but the sphere of what is shown (where something shows that it is), so aesthetics is not a matter of speaking but (as with ethics) a matter of doing. The response to the work and the judgment are identical with the use we make of it.