

Multiviewing

Experiences in encountering art

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Whoever takes a closer look at his counterpart - people, things, products or works of art - is challenged differently in every moment of viewing. Looking at something today means more and more: remembering how to encounter something unknown for the first time ...

When I meet a cool product in a department store or a fascinating work of art in a museum, for example, I can have an interesting experience that reveals a lot about the conditions of perception in our time. From the infinite abundance of collected impressions, sometimes the subjective feeling or the certainty arises all of a sudden: *Exactly!* I've always looked for that or in the case of art, it's an incredibly strong work! What just happened to me as an acting observer? How can I now and in my own words (and less in quotations) describe what belongs to the image of my approach - namely that of a work of art? Am I not only an observer, but in reality not already an owner, if I describe it more precisely as I acquire it?

Since so much and so much happens here suddenly at the same time, let's describe it here as in a kind of thinking slow-motion: If we encounter something that inspires and inspires us absolutely, then, as I said, many things happen simultaneously: we compare the object with what we already know, we ask ourselves about the attraction that the unknown exerts on us, and we somehow spontaneously discover associations and other images with which we can compare this new and fascinating thing and translate it into our language.

This means: we act basically as if in a state of conscious revelation, a form of *Geistesgegenwart*, presence of mind. We search for a moment in which the fascinating object lets the world around us appear in another new light. By the way, this can even refer to the absent. "As long as one lives, the dead are not dead," Alexander Kluge recently formulated. The crucial thing is that you can remember: Anyone who remembers, for example, how he was enthusiastic about a work of art for the first time in his life will remember this moment years later. I met Joseph Beuys briefly (and never again) at documenta in 1977, and felt like I was under a spell then and now. The nice thing about a special encounter with a painting or something new in general is that you experience a lot of new and different things in a very short time. So you do visual multitasking, or more precisely: reflective *multiviewing*.

A work of art differs from life in that a viewer can always ask himself anew: how, what and much is actually happening here now, in the moment when I try to understand everything I am looking at? So you act as if you're doing a conscious multiviewing with the counterpart of an artwork and sometimes discover much later that you've discovered something in your life that has to do with our search for meaning and relevance: something that I'll probably remember when it's long gone. Works of art that inspire us are there so that we can "look at them for a long time and repeatedly" in order to discover something new again and again. This quotation does not come from today but from one of the most exciting texts written about art in the 18th century: from Gottlieb Ephraim Lessing's *Laokoon oder Die Grenzen der Malerei und Poesie*, 1766. "What the eye suddenly overlooks, the poet slowly and noticeably adds to us, and it often happens that we have already forgotten the first one in the last move." („*Was das Auge mit einem Male übersiehet, zählt der Dichter uns merklich langsam nach und nach zu, und oft geschieht es dass wir bei dem*

letzten Zuge den ersten schon wieder vergessen haben.“) In today's words, it takes time to understand how we imagine something complex as we look at it. And even more briefly one could ask: What is *relevant* for us right now?

Relevance in general: everyone who lives and works actively today is under pressure to recognize what is just right and relevant for them. In an exhibition, too, it sometimes happens similarly to me: I'm always looking for a work that fascinates and touches me, that reminds me of something I still want to get to know, and sometimes something that asks me what art has to do with my own life. "Art is the ability to combine objectivity with empathy". (Alexander Kluge) That sounds very romantic, but I still like it. Perhaps because it sounds so relevant today.

Whether in business, politics or in conversation with oneself: Communication costs time. Above all, however, it reveals a lack - a permanent demand for relevance. If, as today, everyone is looking for the possible relevance in their own lives, in work and especially in politics, then we always force ourselves to emphasize something that seems important to us now and at the same time to exclude the other, the irrelevant - whether one likes it or not. Once you've understood that, you've come a little closer to the tricks again. So what's relevant is what you're looking for right now - even if it's an encounter with a work you've never seen before.

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