

'accept all cookies'

Artists: **Agnes Fuchs, Haroon Mirza**
Exhibition concept: David Komary

"The machine is somewhat more than the structure. It is 'more' than the structure not because it is restricted to the play on interactions that develop in the space and time between its components but because it possesses a core of consistency, a core of insistence, a core of ontological affirmation that precedes the unfolding into coordinates for energy and space."¹

'Cookie' is the term used for a small text file with which an addressed website or, more accurately, its server notes the user's hard drive. It contains significant information about the user's terminal for more rapid automated recognition on logging into a special access area, i.e. it speeds up communication, the transfer of data, on the Web. Two levels that could be considered the two poles of the exhibition can be read from the title or the command 'accept all cookies'. The first of these refers to the invisible transmission of binary data, the automatic short-circuiting of the computer (browser) and the server concerned, a form of subliminal or subconscious process, so to speak. The other is a form of self-reference in illustrating/inscribing the user via computer terminal 'within itself', a form of media-specific reflection, the closed-circuit within the process of identification. The machine provides an illustration of itself within itself, effectively short-circuiting itself.

Alluding to the exhibition 'synthetic pleasures' (2003), 'accept all cookies' also addresses the relationship between the illustration of what is taken for natural ('reality') and an image in 'real space' that is already 'superimposed feedback'. Agnes Fuchs and Haroon Mirza formulate and install intermedial short-circuited dispositives to analyse the constellation of the symbolic order in relation to the 'technical viewing regime'. In the centre of the analysis now come: image-converters, switches and inter-medial interfaces. The a-visual process-based procedures – the actual subject of the research here – are transferral, translation and shifts. The reference to painting as an inner-/inter-medial translation process forms the common factor according to this logic of media categorisation. Arising directly from this is the issue of the medium, the medium-specifics of painting.

"In system-theoretical terms... it may be noticed that media and forms are constructed respectively by systems. They always presume a reference to a system. They do not exist as such. So it follows that the distinction between medium and form as well as the closely associated notion of information is purely a product intrinsic to the system. There is no equivalent difference in the environment.

The object (the artwork as object, for instance) is not itself the form, instead the difference between form and medium can be gleaned from the object. So the same 'object' can provide the occasion for very divergent observations in the different systems, it can then lead to highly divergent forms."²

The artist as a news-engineer? **Agnes Fuchs** paints: a painting of a machine, 'portraits' of machines complete with descriptive text, she paints a depiction of images of machines, of pictograms, 'translating' these into painting.

The "aesthetic machine" is the focus of the painting's investigation, both in terms of motif and the methodology, being iconic as well as media-specific. The term 'aesthetic machine' potentially signifies the aesthetics machine, the aesthetics of the machine, aestheticisation of the machine – the formulation forms a link between several semiotic layers with a 'second level observation', an observation of the observation, here meaning a transcription of the transcription.

On the first level forms of self-reference are generated, the semiotic duplication of the image by text, of text by image. These are symbols that begin to represent themselves. Writing of Magritte, Foucault talked of the lack of a common location between the graphemes and the line of the image, a "shadow-pipe".³ This signifier without a signified finds itself additionally perpetuated in processed images today.

On this second level of media-intersection follows then the question of the process of translation, the mechanical translation and finally the individual, the mental translation (back). Divergence or analogy? There is a tunnelling of human perception and the decodification process of an engine/machine that processes data, an analogy with a mere data-processing or decoding engine, a 'receptor machine'. Painting aims to provide a 'human/machine interface' (Kittler), the perception of a post-edited machine-generated translation, a correction/revision/integration of a previously mechanical translation or even engine-generated text. Fuchs adapts – in this context – the method for dividing-up an image by transforming it into numeric data with the aid of a computer, to subsequently re-synthesise it. She does not explore the material quality of nor the ideas intrinsic to painting as a medium, its 'capacity to channel' (as described by Moles). The semantic material is quasi-neutralised, transported as mere data, being transferred at the same time. The information theory pioneer Abraham Moles defines, for instance, the sound before the notion of intentionality.

"In short, there is no absolute structural difference between noise and signal. ...A noise is a signal the sender does not want to transmit."⁴ The forms do not exist as such in this sense, they are merely perceived as present, they are products of the receiver applied to the transmission.⁵

Accordingly, significance does not lie in the object or event itself but is ascribed by an observer. If one then transfers this notion to the cultural significance of the/an artwork in general, on its evaluation, so it follows that: "Meaning rests on a set of conventions which are *a priori* common to the receptor and transmitter."⁶

Before a background of media-specific technologically controlled translation processes, the question arises of the transfer back, of 'overwriting' the subject, i.e. of the individual perception. In the model human = engine and perception = mechanical data processing, feedback, the analogies outlined above, as well as differences become 'visible'. "The transmitter no longer appears strictly normalized, but personalized. A message becomes personal in the field of esthetic information."⁷

There is another, 'third', level of reading where the machinations today are not visibly discernable. Fuchs is alluding back to a still pre-digital, analogue view, a visual approach. These translation processes and instruments are today outside or, more accurately, beyond visibility. The control centres and the visual centres of the gaze lie in the not visibly discernable, in the processed, in the flow of data. Control via visibility founders at this point at the latest, it can 'see' its own inability today.

In this context, Fuchs quasi-designs a 'blind archaeology' of the medium, of the channels. Nostalgia meets Science Fiction: the *Imago* and *Phantasma* of the technology itself becomes legible in the face of the image of 'old machines', the forward-looking 'remembered' idea of progression, faith in an afterwards continually being evoked by the technology concerned. It is a fabrication of the permanent drive upwards, the stage-management of progress itself. This encoding by technology, i.e. the technology of measurement, the control via technology, finally also denotes a political dimension, a utopia. "So the 'availability' of information leads to the presumption of improved co-determination. ...the public introduction of the computer as a crusade between paranoid flights of fancy and the illusion of technical infallibility."⁸

Fuchs activates a 'matrix of collective memory'. Both in the paintings as well as in the integrated elements, their incorporation in the layout, the inter-medial configuration of text, picture (painting) and wall painting (graphic design) forms gaps in the actual 'text'. The grid of white patches, the gaps, evokes a (nostalgic) charging of collective memory of media-specific technical self-representation/-contextualisation and the accompanying ideology. Fuchs paints, repositioning the gaps in the image's interior 'suture' (seam) between the remembered, re-read 'film' and the 'original'. Painting operates as a testing ground, as a level of semiotic exchange and visual similarity, as a poly-semantic tableau. Fiction as a medium-immanent/painting-specific moment is formed as a fractal configuration, quasi-around a gap.

The common denominator and thematic parentheses for **Haroon Mirza's** position is a formulation – as approached above in the context of information theory – of the question of references beyond the paintings. The 'real', or more precisely 'reality', designs itself in system-theoretical terms as an issue of perception within specific socio-culturally determined settings based, as mentioned above, on "Meaning (that) rests on a set of conventions which are *a priori* common to the receptor and transmitter."⁹

In the context of the hypertext, this means then, that "the real is generated as a system of signs, as information content, as a succession of signals and data-flow, because it has long been de-coded and re-coded along electro-magnetic channels, and so been entirely scattered (Teletopology). Disregarding any kind of 'classical' reference theory – for instance Barthes' notion of 'how it was' – references can be generated, produced. They can be dissimulated."¹⁰

In terms of reference theory, the promise of 'authenticity', of anything 'real' behind the painting is thereby resolved. The painting as an operational unit – as these paintings generate real effects by short-circuiting – has long been itself a 'real' ontological 'extract' of its 'second nature', so to speak.

In this sense, 'Skip_loop' by Haroon Mirza shows a landscape, in fact the animation of a landscape painting, a simulation, a rendering: binary encoded, systematically processed. The romantic view of the sea, the view of the romantic, romanticised sea, of the motif 'the sea': far away, adventure, the power of nature, the laws of nature, to which humans are (still) subjected but also succumb to. 'Nature' operates here as a symbol for a diffuse notion of immediacy and 'authenticity'. The code 'landscape painting'/'landscape' takes nature as a key cultural concept, operating in this sense more as a foil for projecting subjective desire than as the illustration of any exterior 'reality'. The Subject project (or the projection of the subject) which designs itself before the landscape painting as a romantic, feeling 'real thing' – or better, designed itself – sees itself as robbed of its design, its construct, sees itself confronted with its (own) diffuse yearning for escape to 'Elsewhere'. In this sense the code for the landscape image (painting) activates "traces of a semiology of nature, or an understanding of nature as 'real cipher'."¹¹

"Nature, according to the dominant concept in our European culture, is what is simply there and reproduces itself. According to the Greeks, this means there since eternity, and then in a Christian context: a product of divine creation. This notion of nature has been eroded since early modern times. In the time of the Renaissance nature as a whole was seen like the intricate workings of a clock.

*The possibility for the technical reproduction of nature means the end of a notion of nature that is juxtaposed with what is produced by human beings. The current appeal for nature as a value proves ideological to the extent that it refers to a notion of nature as something fixed for the moment concerned, albeit in a state of (historically irreversible) disintegration.*¹²

The emergence of the image in the realm of the naturally beautiful, escapist 'elsewhere' collapses in the six second interval (of the loop). Six seconds is a time-span which also conforms to the average viewing time of a painting or an artwork in a museum. Haroon formulates a kind of tautology in this context of the self-referential character of art. He thematises the duration as well as the function of emergence elsewhere via art, i.e. its fictitious and its – here in temporal terms – collapse, the deconstruction into the fractal, the temporal fragment.

In the context of a "digital temporal regime, a trans-human temporal regime of pure speed",¹³ Mirza animates the element of water as a digital surface. It is precisely this specific temporal aspect that is illustrated in the movement of the water, in the rhythm of day and night, in the seasons etc., precisely these forms of time would be/were those of the last instant, a last signifier for unaffectedness, realness, unfalsifiedness. It is this last instance of time that is animated as a filmic preformed fragment for the 'visual', presented as running idle, going nowhere.

In the second piece, there is a literal articulation of an intermedial translation in the auditorial space. A multiple translation once again: a dialogue, more precisely an interview about art forms the starting point and the material used for transferral. The interview by an artist with a theoretician, i.e. a meta-text on art, is conveyed in a media-specific coding process of several stages. The scan of the interview follows its reading into a language programme. Two synthetic voices of differently programmed frequencies reproduce, 'perform', the dialogue at the end in a stereophonic audio setting. The 'speakers' (both the voices and the loudspeakers) miss one another, talk 'ignoring' one another, they are more geared towards the viewer than to one another. A first level of the disfunctioning of the conveyed dialogue situation forms a metaphor for 'meta-discourse' in general: misunderstandings, talking past one another or the impossibility of a 'truth' in the centre as a differentiated theoretical potential? Art, then, forms the first level of the translation between media, the first form of artistic dissemination. Each translation conceals the danger of being translated 'erroneously', of being 'untrue' to the original sense of the work, so to speak. At the same time every translation is also a new text in the sense of a interpretation, independently of the language, the medium, in which it is articulated (anew). If one follows this line of thought, that of the chain of semiotic mediation, then the issue of the translation critical of theory means here the simultaneous embedding in the discursive field, and finally in the cultural archive. It questions, then, the mechanisms, the process of selection and those with an interest in ideology, i.e. the imposed hierarchy of culture. Who translates whom according to which premises and with which political interests?

The contrast of the pieces by Mirza provides a thematic interconnection between art (here its incorporation in museums) and virtuality, between the logic of the collection of culturally validated objects and the immersive emergence of images via processed images of a hyper-real data-space. Both generate systems of projection and desire, both are based on technology and the technologicalisation of the fictional, on imaginary libraries (of desire), both design systems of objects as their images, to structure these as projections and constructs of cultural identity. In Mirza's work both visual(?) systems appear "as major projected figures, as technoid possibilities for the realisation of the phantasmal, i.e. a complex desire to leave behind what is real."¹⁴

The museums as well as their pre-emptive 'filter', the galleries, function so to speak as metaphorical engines, as locationless space, as what Brian O'Doherty described as a white cell in suspension. This characterisation of the aesthetic engine of the 'gallery' could here just as well be an excerpt from an advertising text or the description of how a data-helmet functions, or some other simulation machine.

"Presence before a work of art means that we absent ourselves in favor of the Eye and Spectator, who report to us what we might have seen had we been there. ... This complex anatomy of looking at art is our 'elsewhere' trip; it is fundamental to our provisional modern identity."¹⁵

If one then again poses the question in this context of the external pictorial references one could speak of an authenticity beyond any scheme of dual representation/correspondence, of a system-immanent authenticity, systematically generated as well as represented. "What the paintings (the objects) ought to deliver are imaginary systems of authenticity, which should not be directly accessible but allow virtual access, a foil for imaginings and projections."¹⁶ Accordingly, it is a form of authenticity that is based on that matrix of systematised, systemic images (museum), on a staging of the progression that allows the subject to be located on a fictional linear time-axis. On the other hand, the work addresses a construction of the authenticity or actuality of a here and now that has been composed for the purpose of allowing a simulation => generation of that moment of returning from elsewhere (virtuality).

Notes:

¹ Felix Guattari, 'Über Maschinen', in: Henning Schmidgen (Ed.), *Ästhetik und Maschinerismus*, Merve Verlag, Berlin 1995, p. 121 (quoted here in translation)

² Jörg Brauns, *Dispositive. Überlegungen zur Ausdifferenzierung von Mediensystemen im 19. Jahrhundert*, <http://www.uni-weimar.de/~brauns/dispositive-vortrag.pdf> (quoted here in translation)

³ Michel Foucault, *This Is Not a Pipe*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1968

⁴ Abraham Moles, *Information Theory and Esthetic Perception*, University of Illinois Press Urbana, Chicago and London 1968, p. 78

⁵ Abraham A. Moles, *Art et Ordinateur*, Editions (quoted here in translation from the German published in 1973)

⁶ Abraham Moles, *Information Theory and Esthetic Perception*, University of Illinois Press Urbana, Chicago and London 1968, p. 197

⁷ Abraham Moles, *ibid.*, p. 131

⁸ Timothy Druckrey, 'Diabolische Unsichtbarkeit', in: *Information. Macht. Krieg*, Ars Electronica 1998,

http://www.aec.at/de/archiv_files/19982/1998a_290.pdf (quoted here in translation)

⁹ Abraham Moles, *ibid.*, p. 197

¹⁰ Reinhard Braun, 'Vom Diskurs zur Differenz zur Zerstreuung', in: Joachim Baur (Ed.), *Almanach 1998, Werkstatt Graz*, Graz 1998,

http://braun.mur.at/texte/differenz_2398.shtml (quoted here in translation)

¹¹ Hartmut Böhme: *Natur und Subjekt*, Frankfurt am Main 1988 (quoted here in translation)

¹² Gernot Böhme, 'Die Natur im Zeitalter ihrer technischen Reproduzierbarkeit', *Kunstforum* Vol. 114 (quoted here in translation)

¹³ Mike Sandbothe, 'Mediale Zeiten', in: Eckhard Hammel (Ed.), *Synthetische Welten. Kunst, Künstlichkeit und Kommunikationsmedien*, Essen 1996 (quoted here in translation)

(* More precise details of the interview's contents and participants are not relevant in this context as the interview concerned is taken only as a model.)

¹⁴ Reinhard Braun, 'Systeme-Schein und Effekte medialer Präsenzen', in: *Reflexionen. Zu Kunst und neuen Medien*, Triton Wien, Vienna 1993,

http://braun.mur.at/texte/systeme_0593.shtml (quoted here in translation)

¹⁵ Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: the Ideology of the Gallery, Space*, University of California Press, Berkeley-Los Angeles-London 1999 (orig. 1976), p. 55

¹⁶ Reinhard Braun, 'Von der Erscheinung zum Effekt. Paradigmen der Musealisierung', in: *und, Das Buch zur Museumswelt und darüber hinaus*, Leykam, Graz 1991,

http://braun.mur.at/texte/museum_0292.shtml (quoted here in translation)