

Critical Visibility

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Anna Möller's typology of critical visibility encounters geometric, architectural barriers, folded structures, piles, walls full of black-and-white photos that look like wildly plastered posters. These are site-specific arrangements based on the principle of overlapping. The artist always covers over and thus blanks out something from the spectrum of that which is proposed in the index of the visible itself: seeing is a privilege and anything but a matter of course. Anna Möller characterizes this inherent feature of visibility most clearly when she makes an image (an object people strongly desire to see) physically inaccessible (*Was können die von der Sonne beschienenen Dinge dafür, dass sie uns in den Augen wehtun*, [It's not their fault that things the sun shines on hurt our eyes] 2007).

Given that the Modern Age sees both recognition and acknowledgement as linked to the visual field, to the idea that only that which we can see with our own eyes is real and true, it is precisely this concept of revelation as optical evidence that has fantastic traits: it supplants, indeed negates that seeing and being seen follow certain conditions. It is not so much that the 'means of production' of sight are unevenly distributed, but that social and cultural policies perpetuate that which is considered worthwhile seeing. Susceptible to the quasi mythical dimensions of the ocular in modern thinking, rhetoric blankets the surface of visibility. Supported by the image media, this rhetoric (re)produces the positivity of bringing something to light and sees the invisible less as the radical other and more as that which simply does not yet partake of the light as a precondition for seeing and viewing.

It seems to me that Anna Möller orchestrates such indices with regard to hegemonic aspects between center and periphery in seeing and viewing, between being in the picture and dropping out of it. Moreover, she understands seeing beyond its inherent orientation function within the space in a generally more physical dimension. Seeing becomes opaque, dense, risky, equally political and personal, and the realm of transparencies, based on the knowledge of the (central) perspective, is up for debate.

This is where Anna Möller's material processes come in. Yet it is above all temporal moments that make incisions in the visibility index. Anna Möller's installations counter both the longing and the socially and ideologically seemingly guaranteed expectation to be able to view everything at any time and with any means with a stay that makes a temporal caesura by means of a spatial intervention. Where geometric bodies or areas divide the space, such as the various sized foam panels hung at right angles to one another (*Untitled*, 2010; with Eske Schlüters) at Haus am Waldsee in Berlin or the painted MDF panels at Galerie für Landschaftskunst, Hamburg, 2008, in such a way that the spatial volume is intersected either without touching the floor or without subdividing it into closed sections, this architecture puts on display the existing architecture of the space. Yet temporary and fragmentary as it is, it refuses to repeat the authoritarian gesture of many architectural structures, to split up the territory in the floor plan or to categorically separate the private from the public space. This creates a kind of labyrinth that invites a specific form of walking and provides a different version of the overview at every point. If there is a board hanging above my head, there may still be someone who can see my lower body. So here the issue is the extent to which we can master the field in the overview.

Although the gaze is considered immaterial and can seemingly supplely penetrate all corners of the space, it can also be hard and domineering; it forms a regime that registers and classifies, incorporates and excludes. Anna Möller counters this regime not only by denying it images in the various forms of covering, but also has it collide with physical qualities. And this physical aspect with its instabilities and potential unreliability continues into the choice of material: in her preference for paper in general, because it is "weakly", as she commented in an interview, characterizing it with a metaphor of the physical, and alluding to folds (*Thoughts Are The Dullest Things #2*, 2010). Here, a few hand movements turn a flat sheet of paper printed with a motif into a three-dimensional object; turning, creasing and folding produce a form - the form of the change itself, when inside and outside, front and back are materially and physically intertwined, to no longer show themselves as that which they were. The new, in a literal sense complicated structure then dissects a view into relationships. And it is not for no reason that many folds in everyday life produce improvised toys. Yet their messages are never harmless, when they are called *Himmel + Hölle* (Heaven + Hell) or sail towards unpopular classmates in the form of paper planes.

Undermining the positioning of her work on the one hand and the envisaged observer stance on the other, Anna Möller marks out (un)specific places in artistic practice, places of marginalization. Thus the edges of the gallery and of the page appear to be emphasized. Some give a text or an image space and a footing, while others frame the convention of the exhibition venue. The artist's aesthetic practices involve the body in a special way, for it is fundamentally enmeshed in perception: we have to bend down to examine *Untitled (Letters to) #1-4*, 2010. The work, Anna Möller's latest, consists of several parts and is near the floor, not at eye level. Plexiglas beams protrude at an angle from the wall just above floor level, on which thin newspaper prints pile up and hang over the edges of the beams, but also, owing to the labile quality of the material, form organic rolls of a sort. We are told the omitted texts are from Virginia Woolf or Gertrude Stein, which is substantiated by the statement alone. For instead of reproductions of the original texts, all we can decipher are handwritten margin notes and graphic-typographic markings, like those we make ourselves in book margins while reading. They may later show which questions guided the artist while reading and at the same time, in logical consistency, produce a fragmentary, informative sub-text. Yet for the time being the words and sentences are at the edge of the white sheet, enabling a dark rectangle to show through from the underlying pages in some spots. Naturally we are interested to know exactly what is there, for just anything and nothing specific being there would contradict the positivity of seeing. They are photos, apparently, that served as bookmarks. We can only speculate on the artist's motifs, yet we remain caught in the metaphors of the eye; on the level on which we search for clarity they are not shown, while within the dialectics of the visible and invisible they are highly present.

The easiest thing to do would be to imagine these covered photos as the image material Anna Möller collects based on what fascinates her and her preferences regarding themes and forms: targeted, random, linked by similarities and associations, in any case on the border between personal and public, we are reminded of the format of poster actions, where the artist plastered such images alongside and over one another without differentiating between her own and those of others (*Untitled*, 2009; with Björn Beneditz at Kunstverein Harburg; *What's so poetic about ... (Ramallah)*, 2007; *What's so poetic about ... (Herzliya)*, 2007). Remarkably, in architectural contexts the (in)visible photos often represent bodies, faces, postures and gestures, mostly even female bodies. This brings an element of softness into the work, of fragility, and the moment of the shot transports the impression of improvisation and mystery. Can we really see her comment in this way on the disciplining architectural structures that translate all processes of human life into routines?

Although we can read Anna Möller's individual notes on the newspaper sheets of *Untitled (Letters to) #1-4*, 2010, their function in outlining a context is more significant. They do certainly signal a personal form of reading, but it also becomes clear that each text does not really exist itself, but exists in being read, indeed, multiplies when being read, thus many texts themselves become part of collective practices. Moreover, with her margin notes Anna Möller creates an aesthetic equivalent for a specific form of communication. For the indirectly cited notes also relate to the marginalization of the female subject in general and particularly the personal and social things that female cultural practitioners thought about a hundred years ago - without having been resolved today. Where, in the end, was and is women's political identity?

The *Deutsches Wörterbuch* started by the Brothers Grimm defines embarrassment as "indecision in taking action". It seems to me that embarrassment is a momentary individual condition, while hesitation as the "active pausing between decision and indecision" can become a critical method. As literary and cultural scholar Joseph Vogl shrewdly noted in his tentative theory of hesitation (*Über das Zaudern*, Zurich, Berlin, 2008), "a complicating sense is articulated [in hesitation], which seeks less the answers to the questions and solutions to the problems, but rather suggests that unresolved questions and problems continue to persist in the given answers and solutions." This is where hesitation, whose productivity Anna Möller uses for her purposes, has its political significance, particularly because we live in a society of sharp-wittedness and heavy military strikes. The one phenomenon lives off an unquestioned technological, the other off an allegedly ethically motivated maximization of visibility. To embarrass both, Anna Möller uses blanking out to create a framework that points in at least two directions: inward, where there is more or something else (still) to see, and outwards, where in her arrangements of images and architecture she reveals reservations regarding the dominance of visibility. Nothing is circumstantial in Anna Möller's work, for any such elements would principally reproduce or even concretize, in the traditional distinction between primary and secondary aspects, a hierarchy. There is something radically equalizing in the reference structures. And that is the consequence of the well-known relation-shifting function of hesitation. Anna Möller sees it as her method of leading the observer to the conventional elements of their analyses.