

On the Charisma of Ciphers

“Nothing could be more remarkable than seeing a man who thinks he is unobserved performing some quite simple everyday activity. Let us imagine a theatre; the curtain goes up and we see a man alone in a room, walking up and down, lighting a cigarette, sitting down, etc. so that suddenly we are observing a human being from outside in a way that ordinarily we can never observe ourselves; it would be like watching a chapter of biography with our own eyes, — surely this would be uncanny and wonderful at the same time. We should be observing something more wonderful than anything a playwright could arrange to be acted or spoken on the stage: life itself. — But then we do see this every day without its making the slightest impression on us! True enough, but we do not see it from that point of view.”

Ludwig Wittgenstein

Questions & Answers

Linde Hollinger: When I saw your most recent works for the first time in the studio, I was surprised to see how much they differed from your previous works; it almost seems as if a radical break took place in and with your scriptural method project. Is that what happened?

Axel Malik: Yes, I can well understand that because the works' dissimilarity does make the impression of a discontinuity. But the scriptural thread has not been broken, because I have altered numerous parameters of the writing, it has moved off into other areas and into new terrains.

L.H.: What changes did you make and where do you see connections despite the differences?

A.M.: Firstly, the size of the movements is decisive. The vibration space of the individual settings is no longer linked to the miniature. The sign-like characters now shimmer, shoo and rush their way through a limitless area. Just as every letter has a virtual space at its disposal, each sign previously had such an imaginary rectangular enclosure. This setting of boundaries and tension in the action space—the field of occurrence for the implosion of the movement amounted to an average of two centimeters—was the requirement and prerequisite for the gestures in their structure matrix to be able to develop such a high degree of difference and complexity. By comparison, the emphasis of the now much larger traces of movement is no longer oriented inward in terms of motor function and spin. They are less encapsulated in their form and as well as their figuration, but more dispersed and less graspable instead.

L.H.: Isn't that also related to the row, what has become of it?

A.M.: Yes, precisely, the row; it is a fixed point in the movement, the ground on which the movement is located. The row is simultaneously a specification and parameter for the line of vision. Because the alignment of the rows has been dissolved in many of the recent work, the settings are moving away from the vertical stand, becoming more fleeing and striving instead.

L.H.: In this way, the irregularity and instability jumps from inside the sign to the total area of the picture. But how did the sign's fine line become transformed into these diffuse physical forms?

A.M.: The writing movement changed its aggregate state when I began using coarser writing instruments, utensils that can unfold and withstand much greater pressure such as thick medical syringes and especially massive poster pens. The gesture of the act of writing has thus been expanded from the hand to encompass the whole body. Movements that were previously much more inwardly curved now expand into increasingly open torsions. The settings sometime get very close to each other, arriving at a tight obtrusiveness. And even when there is more space between them, they can still mutually reach out to each other spatially over larger distances. It is a relationship system consisting of flowing contacts and dynamic networks. By changing from black to opaque ink and making use of broad poster pens, the previously thin line of writing now attains an expansive physical structure. The movement procedure itself is still a guided drawn line, but the consequences of pressure, twisting moments and centrifugal forces now cause the line to no longer remain in its track and to resemble such occurrences as being spilt, squirted, broken or shredded. The scriptural core of the movement line is cast in it.

L.H.: What has happened in the sphere-like fluctuating pictures?

A.M.: Yes, the aggregate state of my palimpsests has changed as well. The overwritings that previously resulted in black by means of ever denser linkages now produces the opposite through the use of milky fluids with a high binder content. Up to over 30 phases of overwritings and erasures add up to translucent transparencies, beats and movement spheres. Several of the complex condensates have absolutely nothing written on their surfaces any longer. The ciphers are concealed underneath and emerge only with sidelight and after a prolonged period of observation.