

The Imagination of Resemblance

Eva Maria Stadler

“As for similitude, it is now a spent force, outside the realm of knowledge. It is merely empiricism in its most unrefined form; (...) unless it has first been erased in its inexact form of resemblance and transformed by knowledge into a relationship of equality and order. And yet similitude is still an indispensable border of knowledge. For no equality or relation of order can be established between two things unless their resemblance has at least occasioned their comparison.”¹

The sculptures of Eva Chytilek take on the task of relating resemblances to one another within scenes. In *Index* (2012), the artist first appropriates a space by measuring its cubic dimensions and transcribing these features onto her sculpture. In this way, a pedestal records the mouldings found in the window bays and doorways of an exhibition space. But this is not enough. It does not end with the object as link between space and viewer, but Eva Chytilek continues the process of appropriation and transformation by photographically reproducing the situation, mounting this within a photograph of the exhibition space, and photographing the collage. The view is guided across the thresholds of transfer. First from space to pedestal, which assumes the role of protagonist – a placeholder for a rudimentary form of representation. The graphic lines of the space are squeezed, as it were, into the pedestal itself, almost as if this were an etui, a case for a compass² meant to describe the replicated space. The photographic repetition stages an additional threshold. The view consciously stumbles across the photograph’s border, trips over the doorstep on the wooden floor and the doubling of the room. Finally, the fractures existing between the media, formats, and materials are homogenized through a further process of illustration: namely, photography.

¹ Michel Foucault in the English translation of *Les mot et le choses: The Order of Things*, 2nd edition, pp. 74-75. Routledge, NY 2001

² In his “Arcades Project” Walter Benjamin describes ‘the residence as a receptacle for the person, and it encased him with all his appurtenances so deeply in the dwelling’s interior that one might be reminded of a compass case, where the instrument with all its accessories lies embedded in deep, usually violet folds of velvet.’ From the Eiland, H. & McLaughlin, K. translation of Walter Benjamin, *Passagen-Werk*, Tiedermann, R., ed, p. 220. Suhrkamp Verlag, 1982.

Following conceptual art strategies of working with the detail and the transference through the repetition of imagery – for example the work of Dutch artist Jan Dibbets, in which he performed a photographic correction of perspective – Eva Chytilek seeks to make visible each intersection at which the specific medial conditions cross paths. The title of this graphic once again literally demonstrates the indexicality of photography, making the subject the subject traces of recordings themselves.

In her work, Eva Chytilek starts with the potential of transformation, which she uses to steer the structure of relationships between her sculptures, objects and photographs. In doing so, similarities are not taken for granted, but instead they become much more the instruments of an expression that equally serves the coordinates of space, the possibilities of bodies, and the conditions of media.

Michel Foucault essentially distinguishes four forms of similitude that, in his conception, played a great role in western culture until the end of the sixteenth century. There is the *convenientia*, which he sees as being characterized by adaptation and connection through the proximity of places. In addition, the *aemulatio* represents imitation, the analogy shows adjacencies between resemblances, and finally the *sympathia* is described by Foucault as a force that draws the most distant of things together. Foucault's discussion of similitude, carried out in his book from the field of scientific history, *The Order of Things*, aims to alter the episteme, the forms of knowledge with which we are occupied. Initially, a mirroring of micro and macrocosmic systems was desired, in order to show that "Nature, like the interplay of signs and resemblances, is closed in upon itself in conformity with the duplicated form of the cosmos." Consequently, the symbols of the seventeenth century lost their secretive links to resemblances and, moreover, gave rise to error.

Mistakes and falsity are often the motivation for the searching eye, which Chytilek employs in finding, assessing and selecting materials. However, found objects are not conceived of as self-contained entities, but as material models. Steel pipes are newly

welded; wooden elements sanded, painted, joined together. Their original function is no longer discernable, though it is clear that this function once existed in another context. Eva Chytilek operates with the remnants of usage, performing adaptations, placing things beside one another, creating neighbourhoods, links and connections, or allowing visual lines to intersect with the aid of reflexes and reflections. In short, she operates with similarities, though here the similarities are constructed and not observed.

The work *Ohne Titel (Wandfragment)* (2012) consists of a curtain made from honeycomb-shaped elements that hang from the ceiling. Its volume cites an exhibition wall from the room in which the sculpture is installed. Here, the subject becomes the exhibition as an apparatus for showing. Furthermore, the curtain is a reference to the inner construction of the exhibition wall, itself often used as a means of artificial installation, thus becoming a sculpture in its own right, or should this rather be referred to as a prop? Because, more than with objecthood, Eva Chytilek is concerned with a choreography of seeing, in which the sculptures become the axis points. If one could allocate a form to the act of seeing itself, circling, turning, folding and bending would be less types of form than systems of viewing; systems that let the body assume a certain posture, in order to achieve a fitting means of expression like in the biomechanical theatre of Weswold Meyerhold.

This becomes especially clear in arrangements like *Ohne Titel* (2012), where Eva Chytilek places objects together in such a way that a specific power of imagination is required in order to stretch the space, allowing sight and movement equally to come into their own. For, in the end, “(...) resemblance is situated on the side of imagination, or, more exactly, it can be manifested only by virtue of imagination (...)”²³

³ Michel Foucault in the English translation of *Les mot et le choses: The Order of Things*, 2nd edition, pp. 76. Routledge, NY 2001