

Talk with Roman Signer

Hans-Ulrich Obrist

RS = Roman Signer

HUO = Hans-Ulrich Obrist

HUO The ten plastic-foil pools are to be arranged in one line at ten-meter intervals.

RS The pools are filled with water and a tripod formed of three sticks is set in each of them. The fuse hangs from this tripod.

HUO Very much like the blow-up of the children's wading-pool in Graz.

RS In this case, the ten pools are assembled in one line and a fuse is mounted in each of them. I will be walking along this line and will ignite each of the fuses one by one as I walk along.

HUO As with the blasting of the barrel lids in Friedrichshafen the ignition will happen on the run.

RS Well, in Friedrichshafen the idea was that of a race course. Ignition happened immediately upon contact. Here in Linz I am concerned with delaying the ignition.

HUO This leads to an encounter. The delay causes the movements to become overlaid

RS That's right, in Linz I want to create a time-sculpture visualizing and combining two countercurrent movements. I set fire to the individual fuses of two meters length each. Having covered the whole stretch I wait for the first detonation to happen at the other end of the line. When the first fountain of fire goes up I start to walk back.

HUO You are looking back on where you have walked before. You are catching up on your own past and at the same time you are being caught up by it.

RS I am walking towards the explosions and I will meet the fountain about half way. The explosions approaching me are like my own shadow. Halfway along the stretch I will meet my own shadow. The act of igniting has become my past at that moment. The explosions happen at the intervals at which they were ignited.

HUO The sequence of explosions reflects the sequence of your first walk along the line.

RS The explosions are a shadow.

HUO It is a program with pitfalls.

RS Right, by setting the various fuses I have established a program. The explosions occur at the preset intervals. I walk back the line at the same speed and shall therefore meet the explosion about halfway down the line.

HUO So you determine the structure of a program. You are the one who sets it off and you provide for the deviations in advance. To me this appears to be a human and not a technical program; shifting cannot be avoided and will become part of the sculpture. The outlay of the fuses as well as your movements are not executed with technical precision. As compared to automatic equipment controlled by precise programs your work leaves room for deviations. Behind the apparently rigid operational course we can discover the human pace with its "imperfections" as to the functional. In accordance with Flusser, you facilitate reflection in a world ruled by machines about the question of finding meaning and purpose in human life in face of the accidental necessity of death.

RS I might die in the meantime. As long as I am alive, I have the chance of meeting my own past. If I walk too fast or too slow deviations will occur. Past and presence meet halfway. I am walking towards my own past.

Part of a dialogue between Hans-Ulrich Obrist and Roman Signer to be published as a book in autumn 1991.