

## **CURRENT ARCHEOLOGY**

### **SABINE ERTL / GERHARD ERTL**

#### **THE SHADOW CAST BY THE OBVIOUS AND THE FLARE-UP OF THE LACK OF UNDERSTANDING**

Hiebler/Ertl have discovered a technique — for the time being in a handicraft sense: with the aid of an emulsion they produced themselves, they have developed a process where photographic pictures can be produced on clay plates (without — as with bought emulsions — the clay background being covered up). At the same time, this is an intellectual technique. This technique calls for the selection of the photographic pictures to be captured as well as the increased interest especially in these pictures; and it creates a certain significance-effect, which sets in with the change over of these pictures from the photo state to the clay plate state. The selection of photographic pictures that Hiebler/Ertl make relates to the very latest technical-scientific fields: With the aid of their intellectual technique, Hiebler/Erd intensify their interest for fields such as genetics, chaos theory, telecommunications, aids research and technological war strategy. It concerns those fields that produce the specifically contemporary pictures of what one — possibly with a no less contemporary dulled eye — could deem to be basic human themes: death, communications, search for cognition. This paradox relationship of the specific contemporary and the basic human repeats itself at another level. The high degree of abstraction of these pictures (both in the theoretical as well as in the artistic-formal sense) is on a level with an enormous degree of propagation. It is especially the unrecognizable state of the subject of these pictures that produces their high degree of recognition (analogously it formerly seemed e.g. the face of Einstein or his famous formula made the light of the great theory of relativity shine even in the very smallest of huts). If, therefore, science and technology are separated by a break from everyday life, having become completely unfathomable for this then, on the other hand, the signs of this break and their unfathomability have become completely accepted and familiar facts of everyday life.

The pictures that are of interest to Hiebler/Ertl function accordingly in a two-fold manner: At the level of science they are considered as being copies with a maximum of similarity (after all they are acquired with the aid of precision instruments), as an iconic symbol and, that is, as the iconic symbol that we know; as such they are being investigated carefully in the sciences, so that in future something can be understood of them. On the level of everyday life, again, these pictures act like traffic signs, in which every form of similarity is obliterated and which therefore immediately trigger off understanding and evidence; as a symbolic token (with the special feature that they — in accordance with the described paradoxes — must be termed as being a symbol of the iconic). This second symbolic level relating to everyday life makes these pictures interesting for Hiebler/Erd: They are grammalogues (as Hiebler/Ertl put it precisely) — not in as much as our present day sciences gradually recognize certain objects via these pictures, but in as much as we very suddenly recognize ourselves again in these picture (and our themes — i.e. the themes dominating our mass communications).

Therefore, they are "shock pictures" (another word by Hiebler/Ertl), which are nevertheless more similar to script than to picture and for this very reason trigger off a shock-type significance — a shock of the representation itself, which in the shock of what is represented, i.e. the significances triggered off (e.g. Aids, Gulf War etc.) perhaps only possesses little more than a weak echo.

Hiebler/Ertl are working on this shock of the very sudden and unavoidably experienced own presence with the aid of the intellectual technique they developed. It is a technique of

distancing, of the very sudden lack of understanding which is the death of the own present by way of trial, in order to marvel at its clay plate-type relicts with the strange eyes of a future archaeologist. What results is an effect of the loss of understanding, a negative effect so-to-speak, whereas Hiebler/Erd emphasize it is not the presented themes that are decisively distanced, but more the way they are contemplated.

The preciousness and the durability of this technique plays an important role in this intellectual distancing: a photo from the morning newspaper, for example, is conserved in the medium of the clay plate with quite unreasonable care — similar to the way the medium of archaeological sciences has until now turned a waste object or a discarded careless remark of the Ancient Greeks into an object of excessive attention and esteem.