

Presumibilmente falso

Daniela Keiser's Travels in Details

Landscapes don't exist. Forests pass by the window of the train for hours so that even the idea of travelling north in Sweden begins to blur. Until the train suddenly stops, a breakdown somewhere. In a deserted farmyard hundreds of travellers stand waiting among red wooden façades. This is a place. Not a landscape, because what that word designates is an imagined patchwork of single views. There is no arrival when it comes to details. I can stop at, focus on, immerse myself in ... Details are at once manic fixation and eccentric. The journey continues. Through the window our gaze keeps getting caught again in little bites, a yellow bicycle, crows taking wing.

“Parts of speech

Articles: the, a, an.

Substantives: day, midday, platform, S, bus, Parc, Monceau, man, neck, hat, cord, ribbon, neighbour, toes, time, passenger, argument, seat, hours, front, gar, Saint, Lazare, conversation, friend, opening, overcoat, tailor, button.

Adjectives: aforesaid, back, competent, encircled, engrossed, every, free, long, one, plaited, some.

Verbs: to notice, to wear, to start, to interpellate, to claim, to tread, to get, to abandon, to go, to throw, to see, to tell, to reduce, to get, to raise.

Pronouns: I, he, his, him, himself, who.

Adverbs: near, very, instead, suddenly, purposely, in, out, quickly, later, again.

Prepositions: about, on, of, with, by, down, in.

Conjunctions: that, or, but, and.”¹

In his *Exercises in Style*, Raymond Queneau uses the changing patterns of grammar and rhetoric to describe the same incident over and over in different ways with no climaxes and no noticeable lulls. On reading his variations, even this slight little incident falls by the wayside. Leftover are the sorted particles, which could, by way of rearrangement, serve to describe another incident. The text does not provide us with a story but rather with a host of potential stories, a point of departure that branches off into unexpected insubstantialities.

Daniela Keiser's exhibitions are akin to this kind of ramified topography. Everyone passing through experiences a change of place, thought, and people. But the intensity of the relations is ultimately not determined by the places, thoughts and people as such, but rather by the unexpected links between the particles. Thus, an essay about Keiser's work may well end at the beginning of the next journey.

“You walk into an apartment building. Suddenly a woman walks out of a flat and asks you for help. The room is dark, the air stuffy. A young man is lying on the bed fully dressed and does not respond. He is wearing blue jeans and is 1.80 metres tall. Packets of medication are lying around the edges of the bed. The woman has left without her handbag.”²

He's tall, pretty tall. But whether he's exactly one metre eighty? I picture the edge of the bed and then the little brass chain on the handbag. On the edge of the bed there is a photograph in a silver frame of an Indian leaning, decorative and relaxed, against the railing of a tourist steamboat. It would be a photograph for unclouded memory if it weren't for an inexorably intrusive bit of an older woman's knee and the hem of her skirt cut off at the lower right corner of the picture.

In Daniela Keiser's work there is no beginning. Her travels in details have no starting point, they begin headlong in the middle of another story. Neither apathy, nor nonchalance, nor postmodern cynicism accompany her associations but rather a flexible scepticism that even embraces the politically correct path of criticism. Every single aspect of her work is imbued with a lack of certainty, but not of precision, particularly in the effort to track down this absence. "I don't search, I find", was the potent attitude of the modern painter. "I don't find, I don't search, and it happens anyway" – this attitude lies beyond drifting and being driven. A heightened awareness of the event subverts all conceptual underpinnings without becoming heedless. Pictures emerge out of Keiser's pictures through layering, merging, compressing, or fading out.

In the Forest

Light is refracted in the branches of the pine trees, light broken by illumination. The beams of spotlights radiate against the sun and disperse their artificial lighting in loose draperies and sprayed frost flowers on the window. The interior takes place outside and the forest becomes intimate, as if on the Romantic stage. Next to it, a dancing bear revolves among disco lights. Like will'owhisp, spotlights search the walls as if they were a coastline where found images are flotsam washed ashore. Where a point of light passes, a gap in the context is quick to arise, a blind spot that locally anaesthetises perception. At least the little teddy bear on the large child's arm allows a resurgence of faith in the ability to tame synthetic nature.

At the Bay

Softly commencing, then steeply rising, the tense line of Vesuvius breaks off at the top before briefly resuming its path. This one line still dominates all views of the bay although Naples is spreading like a rhizome up slopes and along valleys. In the glittering region of Daniela Keiser's glasses, transparent lines lead from the blurred medusalike, pulsating periphery to an inaccessible centre. Slides lie there as if they had fallen "out of the blue"; they will never be projected but will themselves forever be the subject of projection. I think that there in the innermost sanctuary lies the imaginary panorama of all hieratic mountains that still define the image of a place: Kilimanjaro, Table Mountain of Cape Town, Mont SainteVictoire, Niesen mountain in Switzerland, Vesuvius, Fuji.

"All cities are laid out concentrically. In keeping with the basic tenor of western metaphysics, in which the centre is the place of truth, the centres of our cities are additionally characterised by abundance. All the values of civilisation are gathered and compressed in this excellent place: spirituality (in the churches), power (in the offices), money (in the banks), goods (in the department stores), language (in the agoras: the cafés and the boardwalks): going to the centre (of town) means meeting social 'truth' and partaking of the great abundance of 'reality'. "The city of which I speak (Tokyo) reveals a precious paradox: it certainly has a centre but this centre is empty. The whole city revolves around a hidden and yet indifferent place, a residence hidden behind greenery, protected by moats, in which an emperor resides, whom one never sees, literally an unknown person."³

In the Play of Languages

Anyone who writes must at least respect translators. They shamelessly expose leaky passages and iron out imprecision with precise back questions or welladvised liberties. Imagine a text that has been translated from one language to the next until all questions have been resolved or until all meaning has vanished: vacant text. Daniela Keiser subjects her police file to this play of languages:

"... abbiamo proceduto al sequestro di: UNA BANCONOTA DA 50.000 lire italiane (Cinquantamila lire), avente raffigurato numero di serie MB 363993R, perchè ritenuta presumibilmente falsa." "... a 50 000 lire note (fifty thousand) with serial number MB 363993R that was accepted as a forgery." (Does that mean it

changed hands as a forgery? Or does it mean that it was accepted although it was a forgery?)
Or as formulated a few translations down the line: “(...) possible forgeries were confiscated; a 50.000 (fifty thousand) Italian lire bank note, with the serial no. 36993.” Is this a variation on the above translation?

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The source text becomes a source of textual ambiguity, misunderstandings, and efficient abridgements. Only one thing remains unequivocal: “ma questa dichiarava di NON volersi far assistere dal difensore / and even so she did not insist on retaining a lawyer.”

In the multicultural context of progressive translation, the culture of airborne migrators and paperless communication has come close to oral history again, the legend. Meanings in exchange begin to shift. The enlightened part of the world has continued to polish its own great myth. Now a new generation of artists has also begun to narrate these myths with whimsical cherry blindness and foreign currency in glasses. Let us assume and accept that each coin is a little forgery; as a good luck charm it is covered by the hidden remnants of metaphysics and therefore still genuine in its falseness.

Hans Rudolf Reust

Translation: Catherine Schelbert

1 Raymond Queneau, *Exercices de style*, Paris 1947; English translation by Barbara Wright: *R.Q., Exercises in Style*, New York, 1981, pp. 152–53.

2 Daniela Keiser, *Lilien, Chrysanthenen, Gerbera*, *Pro Helvetia, Cahiers d’artistes*, Baden, 1997, p. 30.

3 Roland Barthes, *L’empire des signes*, Genève, 1970, in: *Œuvres complètes*, Editions du Seuil, 1994, p.767.

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