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David Lieske  
"Atlantis"  
February 17 - March 14, 2006  
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Atlantis again. Oriental thinking and oriental culture trickle without penalty but with great perfidy into us all when we are still small and unprotected and unable to defend ourselves against the furrows that knowledge ploughs deep into our brains around the basic pillars of our own culture. However free from it we may feel, our notions and perceptions are being guided from an ambush by an ancient being with the rather quaint name of 'The Orient', and in supremely crafty fashion at that. Its demise is often fervently hoped for – but it refuses to lie down and die.

The fifteen pages thematically related to Plato's Atlantis in the entrance hall of the Daniel Buchholz Gallery leave us in no doubt. They provide the superstructure, the frame of reference and the foundation for David Lieske's exhibition, or perhaps more accurately for the building for which the artist takes responsibility as both builder and commissioning client. The latter becomes clear in the main room of the gallery when your gaze alights on the building plan for a wall. As can be seen from the plans for a Berlin architect's office in this clearly self-referential part of the installation, Lieske, who has already amply demonstrated a conceptual interest in obstacles, here functions first and foremost as the client commissioning the building. His powers as creator and over-all chief are demonstrated on a second plan, which lays out the procedures for demolishing the wall: 'The wall is destructed by the artist or according to the artist's instructions.' The client initiates and vandalizes with equal exactitude. Not uninteresting in this context is the allusion to the fact that the word architecture harbors in it the Greek morpheme 'arch' which means source and beginning. In both architectural plans the relative proportions of innovation and intervention/destruction in the mix are stated with absolute precision. This was once formulated in the following terms by the philosopher Hans Blumenberg: 'The zero point in the disappearance of order and the point of initiation or starting point for the formation of order are identical. The maximum ontological disposition is at the same time the maximum constructive potentiality.' Here lies the beauty of destruction. The productivity which resides equally in both of these two – only seemingly antagonistic – processes, is stressed in the exhibition's list of titles, where the entry 'production' from the Oxford English Dictionary, with all the word's various meanings, is printed out in full.

The architectural reference on the plans is expanded and made concrete by an object leaning against a magazine rack made by the architectural group 'Site', which became very big in the Seventies in the lee of Land Art; the rack's color has been modified to match the exhibition conditions. The rack was originally designed for the New York boutique of "Willy Wear", a brand label which has since gone out of business. A further architectural fragment from the New York collective's built pieces is to be found on the invitation card. In this case it is the realization of a complete façade (Indetermined Facade), which was designed, hand-built meticulously brick-by-brick, and then duly distressed. It was developed for one of the showrooms of the American electronics discounter 'Best'.

At this point an accent in the exhibition that was already hinted at in the wall plans forces its way into the foreground: namely the practice of working out and referring to pre-fabricated procedures in Concept Art, Minimal and Land Art, such as for example the treatment of texture, a procedure which itself threatens to become a commonplace process once again. This installation with its focus on the problem of pre-constructed and pre-determined aspects of art is complemented by a photo of the sea-god Triton, son of Poseidon, making the strikingly clumsy appearance so frequently handed down by tradition, and a handful of potting soil on a sheet of glass lying on the ground, for which we are given the following explanation: this Triton had proved himself very useful when he presented a sod of earth to the shipwrecked Argonaut Euphemos, which the latter, after some initial irritation, threw overboard north of Crete, whereupon the island of Kallista emerged from the sea, (or alternatively was produced – which would be a more appropriate formulation in the context of this exhibition) thus establishing a home for generations to come. And thus too the reference to Atlantis is restored, for originally it was believed that Triton's father Poseidon created Atlantis, hence the alternative name Poseidia for that model but nevertheless doomed island state. Plato for his part was frequently seen as a reincarnation of Poseidon. The question of the identity of the producer fades into the background here. At this point in the exhibition everything dissolves into a sodden clump of creativity and material waiting to be given a shape.

In the side-room in the gallery the circle is finally closed and the various threads of motif in the exhibition are drawn together, only then to lead into a crime. A further reference to the procedures of conceptual art as well as to the processes of creation and destruction is to be found in the dictum from Plato's follower Aristotle that is inscribed on the wall: 'He who invented it also destroyed it'. With this aphorism Aristotle, the self-appointed skeptic in the matter of Atlantis, who was convinced that the story of the supposedly submerged society was apocryphal, wanted to voice his critique of the Atlantis myth. In so doing he drove the metaphorical arrow-head into his teacher's heart. But the sentence has been over-painted and is now only faintly discernable under the paint. It has become a palimpsest, a sub-text that is to some extent suppressed, one which can be over-written again at any time, and this in turn can be interpreted as unease and skepticism on the part of David Lieske, the other 'inventor', in relation to the afore-mentioned process and his return to it. So Parricide on both sides. Nevertheless this attitude seems unable to rid itself of a certain ambivalence. On the one hand the critical scrutiny of pre-fabricated concepts and their appropriation and effect, on the other hand contextuality and the dependency-relationship in art, the knowledge – which some incorrigibles persist in seeing as post-modern – of the fact that is still often extremely painful to accept, that nothing can come out of a vacuum. 'No man is an island', said John Donne.

Writing on the wall – at least since King Belshazzar, who invited retribution with his hubris, stood terror-stricken before the fiery writing on the wall and a short time afterwards, or so legend has it, died at the hands of his underlings – seems always to contain a prophecy. Aristotle's critical commentary on another myth that was also much overwritten and rewritten is – placed where it is – is not only a further reference to times past, it also points to the present (for example in its relationship to the matter of destruction in the present exhibition) and to the future (deconstruction of the artwork as well as of the act of creation itself, by the artist and/or by later artists; or also in wholly pragmatic terms, in the dismantling of the installation by the artist at the end of the exhibition). And with that the exhibition works in a way that is in a certain sense analogous to the myth of Atlantis, or at least so it seems; Atlantis as an appeal to a submerged ideal society (the past), Atlantis as Utopia (the future) and also as dystopia, which is how many

felt impelled to read Plato's text. The text of the exhibition and the subtext of Atlantis ultimately coincide as frames of reference in the present.

The nowadays dubious word 'dialogue' standing as a heading above the installation in this room, ('The Atlantis-Dialogue', which, incidentally, in the case of the ancient Greek teacher and his pupil, never took place) has a distinctly malicious feel in the presence of a toppled reproduction of the Plato bust from the Pergamon Museum, over-painted with wall-paint, which lies on the floor opposite the wall with the writing. Accordingly the exhibition can – we are reminded of the entrance hall of the gallery – equally be read as a further skeptical commentary on Atlantis, and also on all the commentaries that have gone before it. The duplication that shines through here once again, can also be found in numerous oppositions within the installation, of which fact versus fiction is only the most obvious, it being the one to which every work of art has always been exposed, and not only since the modern Fall of Man. Under close scrutiny all the definite opposites –invention versus destruction, past versus future, utopia versus dystopia, teacher versus pupil, father versus son – crumble, each and every one, into ambivalence and dependency. As stated at the outset: it refuses to lie down and die. You might almost be in a Philip-K. Dick novel.

We can identify parricide as an archetypal motif among the fallen rocks of Western art without recourse to any strained references to the story of Oedipus, and there will certainly be no change in that as long as the space-time-continuum continues to exist, and one thing follows upon the other. David Lieske has managed to give this a new accent in his 'Atlantis' exhibition and takes his place with quite diabolical glee in the ranks of the murderers. Parricide however can only subvert the materiality. In our consciousness it continues to proliferate, and the original work, despite deconstruction and destruction, demands its rights. The ghosts of all those who have been there before, or are still to come, the undead of Conceptual Art and Greek mythology, and every thing else that the Occident still has to offer stand muttering round the artist,. You will be able to hear them as they waft through the rooms of the Daniel Buchholz Gallery. As well, naturally, as the voices of the dead of Atlantis.

Ebba Durstewitz

Translated by Hugh Rorrison