

NIELS WERBER LINE

in:

BETTINA POUSTTCHI - REALITY RESET

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Every line divides space and permits two operations: following the line, remaining “in line” as a formation, accepting the line as a boundary; or deviating from the line, dissolving the formation, violating the boundary. Whether a line of fire or a traffic line, the issue is always what side of the line one is on. The area beyond the line entails risks. The line—as Ernst Jünger and Martin Heidegger agree in their respective essays called “Über die Linie” (About/Across the line)—opens up a “critical zone,” that is, an area of risk that forces a person to weigh things up and decide.

The video *Line* poses this problem as a question of power. In various formations, uniformed police forces pace along a white line that cuts boldly through the lower third of the image frame. It is not clear what roles are played by the line and the policemen, who march along in it both directions beyond the right or left edge of the image. Occasionally one sees, at the upper edge of the image, elements of a crowd-control barrier. The power of the state is found, typically and here too, this side of the line. Beyond lurks its “other.”

The line does not, however, simply divide space into this side and that but also organizes it. The white line effortlessly brings the movements of the body into a linear form. The forces of order that patrol on the line make it abundantly clear that it is precisely this line that constitutes the order that the stripes serve. They cannot be overstepped. This line could be anywhere, and the uniforms could bear any symbol. The significance of the line for the organization of movement is explored and reflected on aesthetically in several of Bettina Pousttchi's works: *Take Off*, *Landing*, and *Starker Staat*.

The lines that cut through our everyday lives and put us in our place can all be reformulated as prohibitions —do not cross—that challenge us to transgress them. That is why the state reinforces its

lines. The more security forces guard a line, the clearer it becomes that transgression is expected. The strong state is thus always a weak state, preparing for a state of emergency because it is expecting to be challenged.

Pousttchi's meditations on the framing of social space go beyond the line, however. Her installations cannot be restricted to the alternative of this and that side of the line and its dialectic of boundary and transgression. She showed *Line* together with *Pertinent Block*, an installation made up of barriers. These crowd-control grilles that play a central role in the installations *Locked* and *Landing* are encountered in public spaces everywhere a crowd of people has to be directed and diverted temporarily. Such barriers guide airline passengers to their gates and fans to their venues. It is not the power of the state that organizes the social space here but rather a variable, mobile, flexible, modular, temporary architecture whose logic is not that of the law (and its transgression) but of discipline, and we have become so accustomed to its regime that we have almost lost sight of alternatives.

Bettina Pousttchi's oeuvre enables us to experience these different topographies of power and direct our gazes past their manifestations to the conditions of the constitution in aesthetic research into fundamentals.