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LOCKED

in:

BETTINA POUSTTCHE - REALITY RESET

144 pages, english / german

Von der Heydt Museum Wuppertal, Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2008

A dog gnawing on a bone; a policeman removing a barricade tape; a blue light. What do these three brief, simple video scenes have in common? The common element does not so much lie in the possible narrative connection, even if it cannot be ruled out—say, because the dog is a drug-sniffing dog, the blue light belongs to the car of the policeman we see, and hence it is all a fragment of a crime story. The common element does not so much lie in the symbolism, even if it plays a role—say, because the dog, the blue light, and the barricade tape reinforce each other as symbols of violence, alarm, and power, underlined by the at times dreamlike slowness of the images and the only sound heard: the snapping of the bone. Rather, the element common to these three scenes is the fact that they show three kinds of marking and controlling of access.

The dog does not let anyone near the bone: he shields his property from the outside. The blue light, by contrast, permits access via its effect as a signal. The policeman on duty removes the barricade tape and thus is someone who first bars access and then makes it possible again, that is, a guard (was it a construction site? or a crime scene?). Thus the first is about barred access, the second about permitted access, and the third about barred and permitted access.

Another crucial dimension is lacking for our understanding: the three video pieces are themselves subject to a marking and control of access by the way they are shown. The scenes run on five monitors and—apart from the blue lights, which remain fixed on two monitors—change from monitor to monitor according to a calculated random principle. The monitors, in turn, are distributed on a structure composed of thirteen interlocking and stacked crowd barriers. This model of barrier is widely used in Germany, for everything from bicycle races to demonstrations, to keep streets clear, that is, to prevent access to them. The structure is conceived in such a way that the curious onlookers stand

on a horizontal floor element and provide a weight that keeps the structure from falling over.

So are the three video scenes joined by a fourth element that offers a *narrative* of a crime scene in a public space or refers to street violence and police power *symbolically*? These dimensions may play a role, but they are not decisive. Something else is more important: the crowd barriers are converted, first, into the means of *showing*, to display elements for monitors, and, second, into installation models for *organizing* the same. (This is in contrast with—if anyone immediately thought of it upon hearing the phrase “crowd barrier”—Olaf Metzel’s work *13.4.1981*, an outdoor sculpture in Berlin from 1987 that forms sculptural volumes in the traditional—but not therefore bad—sense, while referring symbolically to a street battle in the days when there were still squats in West Berlin.)

I remember the installation in Cologne in 2003. A dark, bunkerlike room with only one entrance; the whole volume, lit only by the flickering monitors, seemingly filled with barriers, as if it were saying: warning, room closed, locked. At the same time, however, it was necessary to enter the room to see all five monitors. Thus it also sent the opposite signal: come in, otherwise you won’t understand anything. Indeed, the source of the work’s appeal is that the control of public space by “sequenced” rules of access and nonaccess is not simply “thematized” as subject matter but also penetrates the formal-methodological approach to video and sculpture/installation. The question of the relationship of aesthetics and politics thus itself becomes a semi-permeable crowd barrier.