

Counter-vision.

A sketch for an essay in collaboration with Mueller-Pohle and Fontcuberta.

To see is to have looked at. To have a vision is thus the result of an intention. This distinguishes seeing from hearing. One may hear without intention. The ear is indiscriminately open toward sounds, whereas the eye must open itself and glance at something. Since the ear is passive, there can be no counter-audition. The world of sounds which bathes us cannot be discriminated against. Sound pollution is thus a different problem from visual pollution. This is the first thing we must keep in mind: that the possibility of counter-vision is inscribed within the intentional character of vision.

The world of images which bathes us does not only press against us. It is also the result of our own discrimination between the images that approach us. It is we who are responsible, in part, for visual pollution. We have only to shut our eyes to shut those images out which we feel that they pollute us. But such a shutting of eyes, such a blinking which permits some images to be seen and others not, is not counter-vision. It is only a critique of vision. This is the second thing we must keep in mind: that countervision cannot be a critique of vision.

The intentional character of vision cannot be considered, if one takes into account the eye only. There is a synchronisation between eye and hand, between "theory" and "praxis", and it is this synchronisation which is at the bottom of the intentionality of vision. The hand approaches the things to be seen and it merges them into the field of vision. It fingers them and turns them around, so that the eye may see them from different angles. And the eye directs the hand in its motion and it controls it. The hand apprehends the things for them to be imagined, and the eye imagines the things for them to be apprehended. There is of course handless vision, unpractical imagination. And there is eyeless handling, blind fumbling. But the intention of vision is the coordination of eye and hand, imaginative apprehension. This is the third thing we must keep in mind: that countervision has to do with hands, that is ~~is~~ a practical, a political problem.

The photo camera is an apparatus meant to merge eye and hand: it is both a seeing-aid and a tool to be handled. The photographer is one who directs his glance through the camera toward the world, and who handles the camera for it to direct his glance toward the world. The photo camera is a melting point of theory and praxis. The camera is thus the intentional character of vision transformed into an apparatus. Photographic vision is intentional vision at its technical perfection so far. He who wants to study the intentionality of vision needs only to analyse the camera, to find out its structure. This will permit him to discover the possibility of countervision. The possibility of inverting the visual intention. Namely the possibility of turning the camera inside out as if it were a glove, and of thus revealing its inside. And this will show him the meaning of countervision: namely the vision of visual intention. This is the fourth thing we must keep in mind: that countervision is not a vision of the world, but a vision of vision.

But the camera is more than just a melting of eye and hand. It is also an apparatus producing pictures. This does not only mean that it fixes fleeting vision

on a stable surface. It also means that it transfers the processing of vision from the brain into its own black box. Thus turning the camera inside out implies that one reveals a simulation of the brain in its vision-processing aspect. Now this processing of vision is, in the last resort, a giving the vision a meaning. A symbolisation of vision. Thus, if one turns the camera inside out, one discovers how a vision becomes meaningful. One discovers that the intention of vision is precisely to give the world, as it is seen and handled, a specific meaning. And one then discovers what is the intention of countervision. Namely to see how vision provides the world with specific meanings. This is the fifth, and the most important, thing we must keep in mind: that the intention of countervision is to discover the various meanings which vision gives the world, and thus, by implication, to discover other possible meanings to give the world.

Now of course, if we keep those five things in mind, it becomes obvious that an essay on countervision will have to deal with inverted intention. ^{With} an intention no longer directed against things to be seen and handled, but against the way things are seen and handled. For countervision the center of attention is no longer occupied by the things, but by our relation to things. Countervision intends to see how we are related to things, how we give meaning to them. And, of course, how, thus having provided the things with a specific meaning, we then change them. In sum: the intention of countervision is to see our being-in-the-world, not the world itself. Therefore countervision is "abstract", in the sense of having its attention abstracted from the things of the world. But it is "concrete", in the sense of focussing its attention to our concrete existence. I believe this to be the central theme of any essay on countervision.

Let me resume what I wanted to sketch in these considerations: (1) that the problem of countervision is one of intention. (2) That it is not a critique of vision, but of visual intention. (3) That it is a practical, and therefore a political problem. (4) That its "object" is not the world, but the relation of subject to object. And (5) that it intends to render visible how the subject injects meanings into its objects. The essay on countervision will have to analyse those five points, both from a theoretical point of view, and on the basis of photographs which show such an inverted intention.