

Reflexions for European Photography.

Ed Sommer: Fugues.

Introduction: The German version of this essay begins with a play on the German word "Fuge", and with what Heidegger did to it in his essay on Anaximander. In the sense of this word play Sommer photographs "fugues of reality"; he shows how one runs away from it, how one composes it into a series of forms, how it drives one insane, how one splits it, and that if one does so one does not betray it. Thus his photos may be taken to be illustrations for present-day ontology.

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The face and the buttocks have this in common that they may be seen by their holder only indirectly (for instance in a mirror). But as opposed to the buttocks the face is being exhibited in public. It is turned away from intimacy, it is the political side of the body. It is to be seen not by oneself but by others. This exhibitionism (which is pre-programmed organically) justifies to some extent my taking an image of my own face as a subject for discussion: it does not "belong" to myself; but to the others.

Sommer has taken me three times for this picture. The first time he followed the traditional method, the second time he projected the first picture on me, and the third time he projected thus both precedent pictures. The series of overlapping and distortions which appear on the picture are thus exactly the scene as perceived by the camera "objectively" during the third taking. From an "objective" point of view the picture here being discussed is a true reproduction of a perceived context. Which is the type of context empiricists and positivists take as their point of departure. That context has not been manipulated by Sommer in any way; neither on the negative nor on the positiv of the photo; it is an honest documentary photo.

The context is a crossing of various spatially and temporally distinct points of view (perspectives). According to phenomenological analysis this is true of any context; they are, all of them, crossings of "intentions". Nonetheless the photo does not look like an image of a context according to positivistic ("realistic" in the Modern sense) expectations. Various distinct levels of reality may be observed there, and those levels may be measured according to their degree of reality. The lower left face is more "real" than are the other two faces, and different degrees of reality may be ascribed to the various shadows. Curiously enough, the same may be said of the white and black shapes in the picture (of the seams within reality); even they are more or less real. Observe the lower black shape; it shows the spectrum of a shoulder. Platon is mistaken if he holds that we see "only" shadows; what matters is the degree of reality of those shadows.

The various levels of reality (or irreality) are not haphazard, but they were ordered according to esthetic criteria (logical-mathematical and empirically deliberate ones). The spot lights and projectors which were installed by Sommer around the camera were handled in a way to produce this picture and no other. Which implies that it is the picture itself (and not what it shows) which is reality in the true sense. The various levels of reality as they appear in the picture are nothing but

virtualities which became actualized within the picture. The same goes for myself and for Sommer; both of us are nothing but virtualities to be actualized in the picture. The photo shows what the word "reality" means in fact: a context within which virtualities of various degrees of reality become actual through deliberate computation. And the photo shows even more: if one tries to extirpate the esthetic, epistemological and political parameters out from a real context, one runs the risk of losing the reality of that context.

Pictures like the one just discussed should be contemplated by nuclear physicists as they discuss the degree of reality of a trace left by a particle within a Wilson chamber. And not only nuclear physicists should contemplate such pictures; we all of us should do so. Because we all have problems with finding our way within the picture Modern science is proposing to us. That picture looks very much like the one here discussed, although it is even more complex; more numerous points of view cross there, and they are ordered according to logico-mathematical criteria which are more numerous than is the case here.