

SUSANNE VON FALKENHAUSEN

Professor, Doctor

Institut für Kunstgeschichte UE Aktuelle Kunst in Ausstellungen und Galerien, Humboldt-Universität

This text was presented at a conference attending the opening of the new Galerie Borgemeister / Hoffeld, THE DRAWING ROOM, in Mitte, Berlin, in 1999. The opening exhibition presented works of John Cage, Morton Feldman and Morgan O'Hara.

The book, entitled RAINER BORGEMEISTER Lokomotive Denken, Weidle Verlag, Bonn und Berlin, 2002, was published by Wolfgang Siano following the untimely death of Rainer Borgemeister in 2000. This text can be found on pages 240 – 242. English translation by David J. Marshall. The DRAWING ROOM was closed after the third exhibition, the last to be organized by Borgemeister.

ACCUMULATING TIME

Over a hundred years ago people began to attach a certain importance to white, pointing to an alleged quality by which white can confer a scheme of significance on phenomena gathered before its space. No image of clear form can survive the viewing of O'Hara's drawings. The gesticulations of the hands accompanying work or speech are their topic, motions compensating for the inadequacy of words or for the unfinished state of an activity. This lively mobility, which always betokens something other than itself, conveys the impression of a rustling on the paper's surface, where the white lends unity and coherence to the fleeing figures that trouble it.

One of the magical qualities imputed to white arises from its seeming to conceal within itself the uncertainty of an order that at any moment could turn into a different one. White can be indistinctly frightening, as if one were standing in the middle of a tunnel, and indistinctly promising, as if at the tunnel's proverbial end one glimpsed the famous patch of light.

Those who study art history deal mostly with artists and works that are recognized, categorized, and canonized, whose status is for that reason rarely a matter of debate. In such cases furthermore one enjoys the added advantage of the

retrospective distance required to facilitate - or even to render possible - the understanding and evaluation of the works considered. It is less easy to form a correct judgment of contemporary art. Rarely are scholarly studies available, a new terminology has to be fashioned, and the inherited understanding of what art is must be constantly reexamined. The discussions that arose in many phases of the seminar were commensurately lively. Those visiting THE DRAWING ROOM, where works of a contemporary artist and of two one-time revolutionary composers, both deceased, were shown side by side, could see that discussion was centered, not on the famous and recognized John Cage and Morton Feldman, but on Morgan O'Hara.

The reservations we experienced in preparing this paper were similar to the first reaction course participants had to the works on exhibit in THE DRAWING ROOM. Unlike the apparently spontaneous works of pithy expressiveness exhibited in other galleries, these drawings permitted a deeper understanding, hence a growing interest especially in theoretical background. The unifying thread running through the entire discussion was the close connection between chance and method, which is characteristic for all three artists. John Cage characterizes the techniques he applied in his etchings „Seven Day Diary" in terms of chance initiatives. At the same time he emphasizes that he does not have recourse to the method of chance in order to avoid having to make decisions.

In the case of Morton Feldman, chance is found in those of his compositions in which he strives „to free the sounds from the will of the composer." In the present exhibition, the principle of chance is at work not only within Feldman's work, but also in the fact that sketches he intended to destroy („I keep no sketches") were preserved and put on exhibit by others.

In Morgan O'Hara's „LIVE TRANSMISSIONS," the principle of chance is doubly present. In order to get the spatial coordinates of a motion onto paper, she holds several pencils between her fingers simultaneously. While the drawing technique

under these conditions is not completely under her control, it is without influence on the motion of the „motif." Nonetheless she constantly makes conscious decisions while drawing.

Working with the method of chance is a basic characteristic of the school of flux, of which John Cage was a precursor. Another early representative of this school was Tomas Schmidt whose works were once seen in the shops of Vienna. The members of the flux movement sought by various devices to overcome the boundaries separating different media, the boundaries between the artists and their public. Precisely this effort to transcend the limits of media is visible in different ways in the present exposition, in which two composers come to grips with the plastic arts and a graphic artist draws her inspiration from music.

The attempt to make music visible cannot be understood without the notion of synesthesia, the phenomenon of different sense organs reacting to the same stimulus. The technical jargon of different art forms bears witness to this phenomenon in such expressions as „lending color to a tone" or „finding the tone of a color." Wassily Kandinsky describes synesthesia in his book On Intellect in Art, although his interpretation of the several colors may seem rather lacking in flexibility. (English translations have been published under the titles The Art of Spiritual Harmony , Concerning the Spiritual in Art, and Painting in Particular).

A further point of contact of this notion with art history can be seen in the etchings of John Cage, where the aesthetic of chance seems dominant. The expression „the great print graphics of the fifties" seems to fit the classical moderns.

The sketches of Morton Feldman and Morgan O'Hara's drawings invite comparison with informal drawing. The similarity seems to follow more from externals than from the concept, although the focus on the ontogenesis of the art work, typical for *L'Art Informel*, is to be found in the works on exhibit in the present exposition. This is perhaps most clearly verified in the case of Morton Feldman, whose sketches were

intended, not as works of art, but as memory aids written down in the course of a lecture. The fact that these drawings are on exhibit in THE DRAWING ROOM may be taken in a good sense as an extension and completion of the concept of drawing, but may also be viewed as a kind of fetishism of art dealers. In his theoretical justification Feldman relates his compositions to abstract expressionism, a school of art that resembles *L'Art Informel* in placing the „action,“ along with other things, in the forefront.

During the course of the conference, the question that gave rise to the most intensive discussion concerned the importance of ontogenesis for Morgan O'Hara's drawings. Do the signatures on the pictures provide the key to an understanding of the picture as Morgan O'Hara believed? Is there a discrepancy between the effort put into the process and the result? Does she lack an aesthetic initiative of her own? She does not see herself as a medium; rather she decides consciously which motion she is going to communicate, where she is going to place it, what dimensions she will give it, and what means she will take to effect it. Furthermore she is very close to the Buddhist tradition according to which there are no imperfections, Buddha being in everything. On this basis, it would not be fitting, so long as one remains within Morgan O'Hara's categories, to concede the possibility that she lacks aesthetic initiative.

Work with chance demands rules and precision; for that reason alone, but also on the basis of the criteria that make readability possible, Morgan O'Hara's drawings could be grasped as protocol. But while a protocol gives us the notes of a process - as, for example, in chronophotography - the temporal dimension in the drawings of Morgan O'Hara cannot be traced back to a source. Her drawings do not come one after the other, but one within the other. In this connection, a comparison between her works and the way in which futurists-or even Marcel Duchamp - deals with motion would certainly have been of interest.

A quite different question seems to arise: how does a gallery for drawings fit in with the art scene of central Berlin? Is a project of this nature untimely and for that reason out of place, or is genuine innovation always untimely? It is as if THE DRAWING ROOM claimed to be above these categories. It simply confronts us with a statement that in the landscape of Berlin's galleries something would otherwise be missing. Elena Lledo, who directs THE DRAWING ROOM, found the notion of a seminar that fosters dialogue between art historians and gallerists a welcome innovation. Does this not almost recall the overarching element of the flux?

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Literature:

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