RIDE ON
THE HARD EDGE

Susanne Bieri

Accompanied by a high-speed progression of shades in perfect synchronisation, the sharp boundaries of the green and black coloured fields and lines turn seamlessly into constantly changing three-dimensional spaces of light and colour. Carried or rather dictated by the rhythm of the music – one is not quite sure of the interdependence nor the dominance of the pictorial over the acoustic or vice versa – dynamic and abstract perspectives build up, soon flatten and curl up once again and purely two-dimensionally develop virtually into specific parallels to film sequences, whose main actors are the edges who now steer the viewer's imagination like guidelines. The unwinding, moving pictures, however, do not particularly denote any situation of concrete experience in abstraction like those of the artist, for instance. Rather, there ensues a seemingly repetitive time-space-line continuum that 'escapes' into a new dimension in ever new variations, whereby, incidentally, the apparent repetitive effect is owed to a specific situational recognisability. One may, or indeed must, describe this phenomenal flitting of the eyes as a captivating ride on the hard edge.

Observing oneself while watching *Hard Edge Ride*, the video work, created by Dominik Stauch for the exhibition at Kunstmuseum Thun, as well as his object art, his painting, his drawings and prints, one cannot help feeling spellbound by an infinite chain of associations (pp. 18–21). Countless levels of thought are layered in the graphic and pictorial works on the side, above and crosswise to each other and entwine into lusty collages of citations,

which on the one hand explicitly originate from the magic box of the non-figurative, the so-called Hard-Edge Painting, and on the other hand from art history's toolbox of more or less significant attempts at abstraction of the twentieth century.

Stauch pursues the same process in his video work, which, by the way, he also calls painting. By feeding the screen surface or the wall surface (in the case of room projections) with lines and shapes, he virtually creates a mural with contours and surfaces that seem to draw themselves independently and take up a genuine position in this process. In superimposing various levels of association, Stauch here pursues a virtual image-building analogous to painting, and hence he can really declare the video work a painting.

It is evident that Stauch's work practice – one could call it accumulating sedimentation – is based on conceptual principles. The fact that he does not adhere slavishly to their maxims and escapes the rigid structure here and there almost mischievously – one notes, for example, the appearing eye in *Hard Edge Ride* – is liberating for both the artist and the viewer and demonstrates fresh determination.

It is precisely these mentally playful forces in the work of Stauch, especially, of course, in *Hard Edge Ride*, that produce a physical reaction, namely the feeling of one's own emotion in the room and thus, in a sense, a kind of elation, naturally too and especially because the view in this road movie cannot be focused upon.

This phenomenon of movement, of resonance of one's own body in front, with and through the image space, is largely due to the over-sized in relation to the size of the human body. Viewers can be completely surrounded by the image-colour-space continuum – this is also possible for the field of vision in front of the screen depending on the distance – where one virtually reaches the limits of visibility or real traceability of what is to be seen. A certain mental parallelism with the artistic impetus arises at once in the viewer; he becomes a participant and thereby comes hazardously close to the creation process of the artist.

Inevitably, the legitimate question arises: What do we actually see of the presented things, if we see something at all other than what we want to see, due to associations. What, for example, does *Hard Edge Ride* in Dominik Stauch's oeuvre stand for? Is it an ocular experiment in human perception and association ability? Does it only want to exhaust the imaginative potentials of humans through illusionary or perspective tricks, to distinguish and recognise surfaces from space and space from surfaces? And what about the consistency between the viewpoint of the artist and that of the viewer?

Initially, we ride along like clumsy pedestrians in the hall of mirrors of envisioned imagination, then become highly mobile and quickly cross the long discourse of rotating phenomena, as already produced by Marcel Duchamp with his *Rotoreliefs*[1] in the 1930s, which were happily taken up by Nouveau Réalisme via Pop art and finally, psychedelically charged, effectively led to physical-spatial transformations; one may think for instance of Verner Panton's interiors.[2] Precisely because Stauch's work develops in a rush, we appropriate it apparently absent-mindedly, hardly realising where it begins and where it ends.

In 1995, Luciano Fabro, while teaching at the Academy of Fine Arts of Brera in Milan, commented and utilised a lecture series on space and time in the visual arts, which had been kept by Pavel Florenskij in 1923 and 1924 at the Higher Art and Technical Studios in Moscow, the Vkhutemas. Based on that, he encouraged the budding artists to show him ten artworks and ten non-artworks with the pur-

pose of examining the mind and the power of judgement of the students. According to Fabro, the power of judgement is reached when one is able to incontrovertibly define ten works of art and ten works that are not art: 'In this process of sensitisation, in this process of dialogue between doing and feeling, it allows to do and feel again what has been done, to arrive at the moment where one feels that this is a work of art, that we are capable of directing the sensation that the other person, the beneficiary, the viewer, the reader, will have. It is us who post the parcel. If we have not defined this parcel sufficiently, if we have not put it together with judgement, if we do not have the certainty to name an artwork, then we are not artists.'[3]

Florenskij himself speaks of a work of art as a reality, not as a description, 'It means more than it directly represents through the perception of the senses'.[4] Hard Edge, like the *Ride* by Dominik Stauch, refers to a painting that is not descriptive and does not use a composition that can be discerned at first sight. It is open, flat-geometrical, rationally controlled and (apparently) without emotion and is thereby an (artistic) reality.

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[1] In 1935 Duchamp created 12 Rotoreliefs based on his previous work *Rotary Demisphere* from 1925 and illustrates the principle of contrary motion like a loop.
[2] Verner Panton (1926-1998), influential furniture and interior designer of the 20th century, was one of the first to introduce Pop art in the world of furniture.
[3] Luciano Fabro, Pavel Florenskij: *VChUTEMAS. Betrachtungen zu den Vorlesungen "Raum und Zeit in der bildenden Kunst", gehalten von Pavel Florenskij 1923 und 1924 an den VChUTEMAS in Moskau, vorgetragen 1995 an der Accademia di Brera in Mailand.* Bern/Berlin 2004, p. 85.
[4] Ibid., p. 78.