

415263

63/68 Travelling At The Speed Of Thought, 3 min. loop, 16 mm, 2012 (still)



19/64 Self-titled, 28,4 x 42 cm (size variable) photoprint, 2009



55/68 Red, blue, white, 6 x 6 cm, discodip, 2011

Characters

EVELYN FOX KELLER, physicist and author. No one has ever seen her in person; they have only met her representation.
RAINER GOEBEL, cognitive neuroscientist. Soon in your brain!
WASSILY KANDINSKY, painter. He sees you in colour and sound, so be aware of the composition of your clothes and the tuning of your voice.
PIET MONDRIAAN, painter. Master of straight lines and rectangles.
LEO STEINBERG, art historian and art critic. He will tell you all about microscopes as creators of abstract art.

LEO STEINBERG: I'll just get straight to the point: is abstraction of great importance in your life?

WASSILY KANDINSKY: I tend to see abstraction as the only life.

STEINBERG: Why?

KANDINSKY: 'Abstraktiondrang' is the result of a great inner unrest in me, caused by phenomena in the world around me, a sort of spiritual agoraphobia. The living feeling of men overcome by this 'Raumscheu' is defined by cosmic fear.

STEINBERG: Isn't this 'Abstraktiondrang' also involved in the fact that the modern western human is utterly bored? The primary necessities of life have been fully satisfied. We have a roof over our head, food and items in abundance and we are not stalked or chased from our homes by any direct enemy. Therefore, sooner or later, the 'What now?' question forces itself upon each of us.

KANDINSKY: I think that 'Abstraktiondrang' is in no way a modern phenomenon, it is timeless. And consequently I do not think that you can connect it to the idea that we live in a period of total relativism. That would suggest that nothing seems to bring purpose to our life anymore. I think 'Abstraktiondrang' is a spiritual need that presses on us after we have fulfilled the necessities of life, in order to understand more about the world around us. It is not, however, to expel the feeling of emptiness, boredom and weariness.

RAINER GOEBEL: Perhaps abstraction is timeless, but whether your approach is is what I doubt.

STEINBERG: All objects and events reach us with an already existing code, while we, descendants of the romantics, demand a personal conviction.

PIET MONDRIAAN: However, I can imagine that in boredom, a man learns to push his limits, because he discards his old convictions and opinions in the presence of the void and is therefore able to arrive at new insights.

KANDINSKY: In this perspective, I would be able to compare 'Abstraktiondrang' with boredom.

MONDRIAAN: Be more explicit.

KANDINSKY: Both abstraction and boredom allow you to arrive at new insights.

KANDINSKY: I now also think of the Greek word 'scholé', which the word school is derived from. It means calm and free time. In calmness we are able to come to our senses and reflect and contemplate. In this regard, calmness is of great importance in the movement towards abstraction.

MONDRIAAN: I doubt that calmness and boredom are the same.

KANDINSKY: That's not what I'm saying.

KANDINSKY: But I do think that both refer to different stages of the same state of mind.

MONDRIAAN: They are two different things.

KANDINSKY: That follow the same line.

STEINBERG: Why do you want to separate them so badly Mondriaan?

MONDRIAAN: Because otherwise you bring everything in disorder.

STEINBERG: I think that this specification of both words is irrelevant for now.

KELLER: That is rather hypothetical.

GOEBEL: You're forgetting one thing, that there must then also be information that is decoded in the same manner by every viewer. So there must be a partially generally applied language in the brain.

KANDINSKY: But wouldn't this be amazing? A sort of parallel exhibition in your mind and reality!

GOEBEL: An exhibition only accessible through an fMRI-scan.

MONDRIAAN: Science fiction!

STEINBERG: That sounds like an impossible idea.

GOEBEL: Maybe not in the long term.

MONDRIAAN: All very nice and pretty, but what has this to do with the materialisation of subjectivity?

GOEBEL: With fMRI-scans we can make direct maps of the brain. As we can see what someone thinks, sees or feel we can materialise subjectivity, we can sketch a fairly objective view of anyone's reality. We can even provide an objective image of reality in your paintings, by scanning the audience while they look at your work.

KELLER: Our understanding of nature has now reached a stage where we cannot picture what we are talking about anymore.

STEINBERG: This statement contains an unwarranted assumption that man's intellectual ability to think abstractly is increasing and that his visual imagination is limited.

KELLER: I only mean that they are just representations of the brain. It does not directly reflect the action, let alone the 'content' of that action.

STEINBERG: The abstract art of the last half-century may well be schooling our eyes to live at ease with the new concept forced upon our credulity by scientific reasoning. We may be witnessing the gradual condensation of abstract ideas into images that fall within the range of sensory imagination.

KANDINSKY: How are memories, impressions and thoughts that lead to associations actually stored in the brain?

GOEBEL: Our brain would be full within the hour if it would store all the information that is presented by memories, impressions and thoughts. Neurologist Herms Romijn states that memories have to exist on a sub-manifest level without brain activity.

KANDINSKY: So the brain is the messenger of consciousness, a complex organ that registers consciousness, selects it and transmits it.

STEINBERG: So we always drag along a gigantic archive.

MONDRIAAN: I still truly wonder what the point would be of actually implementing the experiment with our artwork.

GOEBEL: Why?

MONDRIAAN: It springs from the realism in things, it is brought back to the things themselves.

GOEBEL: No, it is about the associations, feelings and thoughts that things summon.

KANDINSKY: As soon as it becomes possible to decode information that is created in your brain, the experience is transformed into the concrete. The inner experience is rationalised and so avoids the true realism in things.

STEINBERG: On the other hand, there may still be a mystery there: knowing more about the cognition of abstract art may make things more complex instead of simply clarifying them.

GOEBEL: I can actually imagine that this is a case of *ignotum per ignotius*, the transformation of the unknown to a still greater unknown.

KELLER: I think so too.

MONDRIAAN: Mystery and realism have nothing to do with one another.

STEINBERG: Realism is mystical.