

"The Dream of the Great Red Patch" from *Barbara Steiner*

I lay down on the form bed and felt the familiar keyboard under my fingers ( ... ) Tating chair"! I ordered and it rolled in front of my feet ( ... ) I ate quickly (without ordering any particular or appetising surroundings) a condensed bar and drank a half a litre of filling compound with it ( ... ) I went to the sanitary room, relieved myself, gargled a bacteriostatic fluid and lay down in a side room."



When I read "The Dream of the Great Red Patch" by Karlheinz Steinmiller, I was immediately reminded of the work of Dorothee Golz, without being able to establish any direct connection. Dorothee Golz and science fiction?

"Form bed", "eating chair", "a condensed bar" and "mouth wash" - the list can continue ad infinitum are also to be found in the works of Dorothee Golz. Karlheinz Steinmiller is a physicist and a writer of literature that is both scientific and fantastic. Dorothee Golz is an artist. A can-like object, vaguely reminiscent of a rocket, is inspected by two men with a mixture of suspicion and interest. The same sheet shows two further versions of the "rockeC", in one it is open and in the other closed. To the right of these are two fumbling hands. The instrument they hold can be identified as a fork that is about to pierce a Hot Dog. Although it seems to portray something edible and therefore positive, the scene nevertheless has an aggressive and impersonal air. Maybe, this is because the fork is reminiscent of a weapon and is about to injure the sausage-like and fleshy object. The proximity to the rocket supports this impression, so that the viewer is unaware of any pleasant associations, in spite of the idyllic sounding title "Picnic in the Woods".

In Dorothee Golz's drawings strange objects are manipulated by strange figures. Smiling women, obviously smirking, are presented as seemingly absurd figures: a Feather Duster" with tassels at each end, over-sized shovels and sinister vessels that do not reveal their contents. Scientists and gaping boys complete the scenes in the drawings of Dorothee Golz. Nevertheless, the artist always confines herself to the depiction of typical attributes: scientists are shown wearing white coats and glasses, women typify happy housewives and immediately call to mind the female stereotypes of the 50's: short and practical haircuts - but with feminine curls and never-ending smiles. The boys are depicted as being small and nice, inquisitive and precocious.

All of the objects and situations are not really identifiable, but they prompt a wide range of interpretations. It is not clear whether the details represent commercial brand names, newly invented or well-known objects whose colour and size have been altered. Be this as it may, the objects and situations depicted seem strangely familiar. One drawing has the title "Survival Measures" and shows a human being of unknown gender, whose body is covered by a bulky anorak and attached to tubes. Two other people are watching from a safe distance. The other scene depicts a similar situation: a woman is attached to a respiratory machine, two people watch from a tent-like sack and overhead is a black patch that turns out to be "the tank that drives through the mud". Even those who are unable to identify the patch as a tank, will readily perceive it as a sinister element. But even the title conjures up danger: "survival" already suggests that life in one way or another, whether as a result of injury or sickness, is in danger. "Survival Measures" points to preparations that have to be affected more or less at the last moment in order to ensure survival. The figures in the drawings can undoubtedly be seen as "stand ins" that gape, smile, act or are "acted on" in our place. In this way Dorothee Golz not only succeeds in provoking our interest, but also in involving us directly in her pictures. The gestures and movements suggested by the figures are primarily there to arouse the imagination of the viewer. The vigorous images and the perception of familiar and at the same time alien objects allow the viewer to identify himself with these activities, although these may seem somewhat disconcerting.

In her drawings and objects, Dorothee Golz perverts both prevalent social pressures and the role of women in particular. The objects have a menacing air and do not reveal their function; the protagonists of her drawings act like robots, caught in a mask that is forced on them by society. They evoke a feeling of helplessness, not unlike the science fiction of the '60's: "Cold metal touched him. Numb fingers fumbled with his carrier belt. He fought desperately, He pressed against the tentacles, shook their balljoints, clung to his transmitter. It was hopeless. The blunt and flexible pairs of fingers moved unrelentingly, quickly and dextrously; the box disappeared through the slit." This passage from Herbert W. Franke's "Thought Control" might have been taken directly from the work of Dorothee Golz. Mankind is also threatened by sinister machines in Franke's book. The protagonists and objects in Dorothee Golz's works represent the elongated tentacles of a repressive society that restrains, observes, smiles and at the same time remains immobile. People are tormented and the objects represent useful instruments of suppression. Both Herbert Franke and Dorothee Golz are no longer interested in the scientific utopias that were characteristic of the early 20th century, but rather in psychological narrative techniques prevalent since the '60's, particularly in popular science fiction. The human being and his failure to come to terms with an absurd world that fetters him form the focal point of Golz's art. Hers is a thoroughly narrative presentation, although the stories that she has to tell remain fragmentary.



Hence, the elements and scenes in her drawings can also be seen as a form of remembrance or the recall of past traumas. This fragmentary quality enables Dorothee Golz to appeal to our imagination: thus, the inflatable ball with its white interior must remain deserted. Some of her objects give the impression of being the material equivalent of the objects that appear in her drawings. Although the flesh-coloured scaly object and the green form are aesthetically appealing they also evoke a vague sense of unease.

To return to science fiction, Herbert W. Franke's advice for a sci-fi author could also apply to the art of Dorothee Golz: "in order to write science fiction one has to have a number of talents: that of being able to understand technical problems, together with a propensity for formal reasoning and analytical farsightedness, on the one hand, and creative fantasy, the ability to leave well-trodden ways and to associate freely. on the other; these must also be paired with the ability to put yourself in your protagonist's place, to provide lively descriptions of events and characters, and to evoke excitement and interest". And Dorothee Golz's art is developed along similar lines to the texts of science fiction authors. Science fiction never describes anything too far-fetched: in the final analysis it describes the threats and dangers of the present, although these are presented in seemingly utopian guises.

**"About the Longing for and the Principles of Deception"** Interview with Alexander Braun, 23.10.96



*AB: A certain ambiguity is characteristic of your work up to now. Your objects evoke reminiscences of everyday life, and immediately call specific associations to mind. And on the other hand, they are based, at least in part, on a very free and immaterial artistic process. Both elements are united in your new objects, although it would seem that you now put more emphasis on the discrepancy between both levels, instead of blending them synthetically as you did before. If I recall your large work involving a plastic bubble for instance, it was not possible to draw a sharp line between those parts which were borrowed from everyday life (chair and lamp) and the indefinite and amorphous form that was slightly reminiscent of the sculpture of Hans Arp.*

*DG: I don't think that I'm all that interested in investigating the principles of our formal and functional material world anymore. I'm much more fascinated by the psychological dynamics that is hidden behind what seems to be unambiguous and familiar. I have come to the conclusion that it is more and more important to look for the human element in things and to present this. On top of this, I started to draw a while ago and this led to a very intensive dialogue with my sculptural work. The completely different technique of drawing has changed the way I look at things in three dimensions.*

*AB: There are figures ? in other words protagonists ? in your drawings as opposed to your sculptures. Has this also had an affect on your attitude to the viewer? Do your more recent works call for the viewer to assume the role of a user to a greater degree?*

*DG: Not so much as a user, as a active participant. It is important to me to reveal those aspects that are hidden behind the objects and human actions, aspects that lie outside or beneath the manifestation of things ? which often conforms to their functional use.*

*AB: Let's try to take the seating in the bubble as a concrete example. There is a chair, a lamp and a unidentifiable object. How can the metaphorical offering you present to the viewer be described here?*

*DG: He should be conscious of a world of thought, an imagined world, that exists alongside the real and tangible world. There is an internal perception of our experience parallel to what we see and to the things that surround us. An alternative version of reality unfolds like a film alongside to the external one. Things are articulated in a different way on this film ? they have a different form. We are thinking and rational, but also emotional beings. Something is always going on inside of us. Parallel to the forms that we perceive in the outer world, forms evolve within each of us that can be seen as an interpretation of real experience. This is like an mirror image of our inner thoughts, which not merely reflects external influences, but is also affected by individual interpretations and additions. As far as the bubble is concerned, while the chair and the lamp represent a formation that is familiar to us from everyday life, the abstract form is an addition that has crept in and that cannot be readily defined, because it does not conform to any specific qualities we already know. However, this something also affects our perception and our concept of reality and truth. The fisheye perspective of the bubble emphasises this, because it internalises the scene and separates it from our outer experience. The interior reveals itself as something that follows its own laws. The space at the centre of the bubble can be viewed from all sides, nothing is hidden from our gaze, but it doesn't follow the rules that govern*

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that reality to which we actually physically belong. In spite of all of this openness, an exact line is drawn between here and there. It represents something else.

*AB: An image from recollection or reverie?*

*DG:* It could be an image from recollection or a projection; at any rate something extricated, something that is aloof. The bubble form indicates that the world and our consciousness may be viewed as a reflection, just as reflection also forms a world of its own. Because we are in a position to create a world in our thoughts, the question presents itself., what has the greater claim to being real?



*AB:* I would like to talk about another of your works, about the sculpture titled "Successful and Less Successful Days". In this case, you do not let two levels of reality conflict with one another, instead you concentrate on the presentation of an amorphous band, consisting of varying thickness of mass, that lies on the ground. This form could be interpreted as an very open metaphor, in other words it would lend itself to all sods of interpretations, if you hadn't chosen such a specific and very limiting title. The title suggests that each increase in volume refers to a particular day and that the variations in thickness reveal whether these days may be regarded as having been successful or not. Do you see

any danger here that you might have chosen a form of artistic expression that was originally open to all sods of associations, only to be excessively narrowed down by its title?

*DG:* In this particular case, I think the title is a very important element of the work itself. Formerly, I did not use any titles for my works, because these would have merely represented a superfluous addition. But in this case the title is an integral part of the whole. I wanted to give the sculpture an added dimension, that reveals that something was given form that can't actually be represented in form. "Successful and Less Successful Days" are not only an abstract idea, but also something that cannot be judged objectively, because they would be judged subjectively and differently by each individual. When can a day be called successful? Incidentally, this object was preceded by a drawing, in which I quite spontaneously drew two meandering lines alongside each other and filled the ensuing blanks between them with symbols for the days of the week. This is how the title arose. After a few weeks, during which the drawing lay in my atelier, I suddenly had a three-dimensional impression of the form while viewing the drawing. It became clear to me that even the most abstract ideas or statements (in this case the title) could be given formal and plastic expression. The coexistence of tangibles and intangibles is not the point here, but perception with the aid of senses and concepts that are haptically verifiable. I try to explore what can be expressed beyond the thinkable.

*AB:* In this connection, it would interest me how you see the relationship between your drawings and sculptural objects. In the drawings, where you don't simply favour figural elements, but also narrative structures? in other words where you introduce story lines - the viewer finds it easier to perceive your intentions, and you find yourself more readily understood.

*DG:* I think there is a special affinity between the drawings and the objects and that each influences the other. At the same time, both contain autonomous elements. Of course, I use a different vocabulary in my drawings and hence may even strive towards a different goal. I can evoke associations more readily with the help of drawings, by making different motifs correspond with one another on the same sheet. In the case of the sculptures everything must converge into a single form: i.e. the sculptures are all conceived with an end in view, whereas the drawings offer much more scope. When I work with spatial forms I have to begin a process of reduction, while the opposite is true of drawing: I am able to experiment, I can easily reject some things and can employ a greater diversity of concurrent elements to argue my case.

*AB:* The first time I saw photographs of your bubble, I was struck by parallels to the design of the late '60's and early '70's; for instance to films like Stanley Kubrick's "A Clockwork Orange". Can there be a distant connection between these and your work. You put heavy emphasis on the unconscious and at that period there was a strong synthesis of introspection and psychedelic consciousness, together with an expansive and extrovert form of utopianism.

*DG:* Yes, I believe there are some common points. The formal organisation of environment was closely related to the hopes and visions of the period. Back then, the period itself was already presented in a way that anticipated visions of the future. Some of these elements are undoubtedly present in my work, although? in my opinion? there is a much greater emphasis on the themes of deception and self-deception. There is a certain discrepancy between what manifests itself externally and the needs and longings in each of us. But is the exterior you speak of not determined by our longings? Aren't sitting rooms so cosy, because they represent a projection of their owners' own longings? The longings, yes - but not the truth. We are apt to express longings rather than the truth. One of my objects consists of the pink covering for a car seat. It is

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actually commercially available in this fleshy?pink colour. I think that even banal things ? once their actual function has been seen to ? can express hidden longings. A lot of things reveal erotic forms for instance, although these are often totally redundant as far as their actual function is concerned.

*AB: How do you see the role of your own works? Do they just reflect this situation or do they plead for more honesty in the organisation of our environment?*

*DG: These works point out self?deception: they make it apparent I believe that people need this kind of deception in order to compensate to a certain extent for deficits in their lives. In other words, compensation by means of self?deception, which in my opinion leads to the danger of indolence and ignorance. This form of indolence undoubtedly has a lot to do with deep?sated longing for happiness and fulfilment*

*AB: In a way, your artistic output runs on similar lines to that of the manufacturer of the car seats. He unconsciously exemplifies this in a functional context, while you realise it with the aid of free association in the sphere of fine art.*

*DG: I wouldn't like to see it reduced just to this aspect, but fundamentally you are right. Yes. Maybe that is the thread that winds its way through my work and joins earlier works with more recent ones.*