

## TRANSPARENCY

“Transparency” is what Anna Konik calls an installation with four video projections and narrations that show four people — one could, yes, speak of characters, as in the theater — in “life size”: Tadeusz, the Polish collector from Warsaw, whose apartment completely disappears under many piled objects; Mija, a Berlin native who calls herself the “weather witch” and mourns her recently deceased husband; Frau Wichmann from Stuttgart, who, when the war broke out, had to interrupt her studies and still adores her Italian fiancée; and Herr Brozy, the metalworker who fled from a French prisoner-of-war camp in Marseille and built a house for himself “in self-help”. “They live,” says Konik, “in illusions, searching — lonely and desperate — for human connection. They are grounded and sometimes astonishingly well prepared to reflect on their own destinies.” Even if we have gotten to know them thanks to Konik’s interviews, they are in reality still invisible, transparent people who are overlooked on the street. No one knows where they live, how their apartments look, how they have lived, because no one listens to them when they speak. In her work, Konik stages these people’s invisible, inaudible aspects so that the audience must ask itself of its ability to be able to listen to others, to connect and include them.

“I remember” is “Ich erinnere mich” in German and “je me souviens” in French: In the two latter languages, the act of remembering not only requires the presence of a subject that brings remembrances from the memory to light, but also the corresponding object, the self, to whom one can show or tell these memories. Without an image of oneself as a projection screen, no memory is possible. Without an object that listens to one in the act of remembering, there is no articulation of the memory. “The spoken memory, the voiced, is already a form of discourse that the subject has with itself,” describes Paul Ricoeur in his philosophical essay “La mémoire, l’histoire, l’oubli” . This discourse with the self as a subject and the self as an object is usually made possible with the interference of a third person who allows the process of “re-remembering oneself.” It must be someone who — whether private or professional — is close to the narrator: a friend, relative, doctor or psychologist, in our case a Polish artist who sought out and created proximity with older Germans and one older Pole. The four characters remember their own lives in their conversations with themselves: nothing grand or spectacular that the media would feed upon; they tell the seemingly banal. Everything that makes up a life: between birth, something they can’t remember; and the near horizon of their death, which they can’t imagine — childhood, youth, love, war, marrying (or not), working, living with a partner or alone, being forgotten, but not forgetting oneself, infinitely suffering from the lonely life, and having nothing more to tell, as all four say at the end of their narrations. The latent presence, or sometimes even the temptation, of death, is palpable and inexplicable — and simultaneously threat and liberation. In their memories, the characters always exist in relationship to the collective memory that structures the history of the 20th century: the two world wars, National Socialism, the division of east and west. With the exception of Tadeusz, who created his own life system, the four characters are more objects of destiny than they are subjects of lives they could have created. Their lives are first and foremost the results of external influences that could just as well have been a parental decision, the loss of a spouse, God or a disease. Ultimately their own deaths are not singular events; but rather represent nothing other than an additional stroke of destiny that will end their lives. This is especially valid for the two women, Mija and Frau Wichmann. Herr Brozy, on the other hand, can look back upon independent decisions that codetermined his life. He fled from a prisoner-of-war camp and built his own house, while Tadeusz lives partially outside reality.

In their conversations with themselves, all four always tell the same things, use almost the same words. But “always the same” is infinitely varied, so that the story is never really the same, and the narrator is held captive under the spell of his or her own ornamentation.

These infinite variations on the one hand and the symmetrically constructed scenes on the other, allude to an aesthetic in which ornamentation, mirroring — as an imitation of nature's perfection — and variations in existence lend an aesthetic form to these four characters. The doubling of the images in every scene is reminiscent of the circularity of time and an empty and terrible reality that would produce nothing besides these repetitions and variations. "What is possible is only the surprise..." says Konik, quoting Polish essayist Jan Blonski's text on Beckett, "...that one of the repetitions will be the last." Time feels excluded from the four stories, as if the characters now stand temporally barred, in closed rooms, locked into their apartments.

With the images' replication on a symmetrical axis, each character receives its own double, so that the subject-object relationship of "remembering oneself" can become visible to the viewer. In their conversations with themselves, with their doubles, Konik's characters overcome the monotony of monologue. They listen to each other, are silent together, cut each other off, say the same thing at the same time or repeat themselves, complete each other, although there's no one besides themselves who would listen. But Konik listens, as do we, the listeners, so that suddenly it is aurally clear that every monologue possesses the characteristics of a dialogue.

With its double, the narrator becomes the scene's reference point; with the double, his life becomes something to be experienced. The French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan explains in his famous essay on the "mirror stage", that "the function of the mirror stage establishes itself for us, from now on, as a characteristic of the function of the imago, which consists of creating a relationship between the organism and reality, the inner world to the environment, so to speak." The space between the narrator and his double is the dialogue's physical experiential space, both the inner and environmental world of memory, which therefore also includes us. The viewer perceives the dialogue as a whole — through the principle of doubling, all layers of memory become present, and respond to the constant repetition like a single character in the game of two mirrors that alternately answer themselves and infinitely multiply. What is said left and right of the axis is the same, since the characters tell the same story, their own lives. But it's not the same: As in Baroque architecture, this mirror game is also a game of false symmetries, since within the space's perfect mirrored construction, the characters do not exactly correspond to each other and constantly move independently of one another: all life signs in a tableau, the body position, the breath, the language itself, lead their own lives. Anna Konik uses the principle of symmetry to enlarge the space, focusing the viewer's eye on the center. A communicative space of the character in conversation with itself opens in the middle of the picture. Like in the Renaissance architecture of an L.B. Alberti — who uses symmetry as an architectural tool to "center" political power — the inner space of thought becomes the center of a construction that makes a small living room or tiny kitchen into a magnificent palace room. But Konik's characters do not harmonize with the world. They tend more toward conflict with it, corresponding to the Baroque thought that prefers an imaginary, fantasy universe. Through such stylistic tools as line breaks or ornament, both the Baroque and Konik's work express this conflict or overcome it in the unity of its convergence.

Through Konik's videos, the monologues of Mija, Frau Wichmann, Tadeusz and Herr Brozy become not only dialogue, but also a kind of cathartic conversation during which their entire lives become an eight-minute story: the flow of time slips into a grey zone, as if everything suddenly stood still, as if the characters would "grant a rest" (Konik) to themselves and us before death. "I'm finished now," "That's enough," "I've said everything," are what the characters say at the ends of their dialogues. They are at the end. Not only the end of the narrations, the conversations with themselves, but also at the end of their own lives. It seems as if they have found a form of pacification through the proximity to themselves and to Konik,

the artist who listens to them. An additional illusion of this production? With her project “Transparency,” Konik wants not only to built an aesthetic construction with successful video effects — she also gives invisible people their identities back, recreates the loose ties between generations, restores closeness and brotherhood, makes the unbroken unity of people something to be experienced, something that is simultaneously a fundamental experience and the reason for human existence. She knows very well that all people were, are, or will be “transparent.”

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