

## The Time of the Pictures: Two Assumptions

By Alexander Jackob

(1)

The West has come to encompass the world, and in this movement it disappears as what was supposed to orient the course of this world.

Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Creation of the World or Globalization*<sup>1</sup>

There is no future in these paintings. Although the rooms, buildings, and landscapes they show are reminiscent of a time in which the “outlines of a better world” (Ernst Bloch) had firmly engraved themselves into the contemporary understanding of European modernism as drafts for the future and for progress. But unlike in the projects of postmodern cultures, here the utopias of the future that were left behind are not played through either formally or in terms of content. If we understand in this context the phenomenon of future as a draft where one’s own existence sees itself approaching itself (Future Perfect), then we can express our first assumption about Jens Hausmann’s pictorial worlds in a radicalised form: the paintings by Jens Hausmann do not have a future. It is all the more remarkable that he succeeds in making the phenomenon of time and temporality so present. How does he make time visible? After all, it is often said about painting that it is an art that happens mainly in space.

Wenn Martin Heidegger in his essay “Die Zeit des Weltbildes”<sup>2</sup> [The Age of the World Picture] calls the “conquering of the world as picture” the decisive metaphysical basic act of modernity, he saw especially science, technology, art, and religion as the executive organs of this process. As imagining subject, Heidegger wrote, modern man pictures everything that exists (in his imagination) and thus makes himself the basic measure of all things, the *sub-jectum* of all being. Surprisingly, Heidegger in his thinking about the world picture neglected the question of the pictures themselves.<sup>3</sup> The initial reason for this may be that in his pursuit

<sup>1</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Creation of the World or Globalization*, New York, SUNY UP 2007, p. 34.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Heidegger, “Die Zeit des Weltbildes”. *Holzwege*. Frankfurt a/M 2003<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> When Heidegger, in the context of world pictures, defines the term “picture” more closely, it quickly becomes clear that he is not concerned with pictures as visual phenomena, but rather with an epistemological notion that, originating from Descartes, developed in the philosophy of the Enlightenment. The relationship of reason (as comprehension) and imagination is developed in particular by Heidegger in his Kant book (cf. his *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik*. Frankfurt a/M 1951, pp. 85-95). If we think Heidegger’s argument further before the

of the world picture, Heidegger took an intellectual path where language and language use itself became the actual reference point of his philosophical world experience. In this sense, he accused science of not thinking, although he at least admitted that people in their everyday life-world do “not *yet* think.” This is why he wanted to challenge readers by a strange, sometimes vexing use of language and catch them in a comprehensive movement of thinking. *Seeing* time not just as a linear construct, as it were from the outside, but actually engaging oneself in making one’s own temporality, i.e. transience with questions where one’s own existence perceives and understands itself as presence – this is one of the readings of Heidegger where the time of the world picture transforms itself into the horizon of a more material experience of time, closer to life. Nonetheless it still belongs – and this is where the problem lies – to language and the time of speaking.

When Heidegger at the end of his essay finally announces the end of world pictures, then this remains at the most a claim whose political background is as questionable as the claim itself.<sup>4</sup> In the context of globalisation and the worldwide linking of electronically supported and above all commercial pictorial spheres, the prognosis of an end of the time of the world picture seems, if not completely wrongheaded, at least rather premature.

As Joseph Früchtl so aptly remarked, the thinking of the university philosopher Heidegger and his accusation of science is flawed: his non-objectivising thinking, and thus also his language, in questions that address the relationship between philosophical theory and real-life references, showed a tendency towards generalizations and de-differentiations.<sup>5</sup> Therefore Früchtl proposes to reverse Heidegger’s concentration on the relationship of language (or

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background of current debates on the relationship of virtuality, simulation, and notions of reality, a further problem arises that should at least be mentioned here. If in fact *everything* were image in the sense of image as picture appearance, then, as Jacques Rancière writes, there would be no reality anymore, but only images, or, reverse, there would be no images from now on, but only a reality that represents itself continuously. This idea, Rancière continues, is based on an elementary conclusion: if there are only images, then there is no other of the image. And if the Other of the image no longer exists, the idea of image loses its content so there is no image anymore. See Jacques Rancière: *The Future of the Image*, New York 2007.

<sup>4</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy does point out that Heidegger turned against National Socialism with this essay. But this does not cancel out Heidegger’s inaugural speech as rector of Freiburg university, where he declared the *Führerprinzip* for the university. But precisely his nebulous post-1945 justifications for his activities on behalf of the National Socialist movement contributed decisively to Adorno being able to characterise Heidegger’s language use as “jargon of authenticity” and “ascension of the word.” See Jean-Luc Nancy 2007; Theodor W. Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity*, London 2006, p. 7.

<sup>5</sup> Joseph Früchtl, “Das Weltbild der Moderne. Eine nach-heideggersche Sicht“. in Kati Röttger and Alexander Jakob, eds, *Krisen des Weltbildes. Bühnen der Globalisierung*. forthcoming 2011.

thinking) and the world. With Ludwig Wittgenstein, he demands: “Don’t think, but look!”<sup>6</sup> That in the process of looking itself a more precise and more differentiated view of the word and the world of pictures is hidden, Heidegger has, according to Früchtl, verbosely overlooked, at least in “Die Zeit des Weltbildes.” On closer examination of Jens Hausmann’s pictures, we discover that this logos does not just claim time, but requires time. Because their pictorial language takes place in time, needs time.<sup>7</sup>

(2)

The proper dwelling plight lies in this, that mortals ever search anew for the essence of dwelling, that they *must ever learn to dwell*.

Martin Heidegger in *Building Dwelling Thinking*.<sup>8</sup>

These pictures have a future. Why this reversal?

The peculiar scenes of Jens Hausmann’s pictures seem not to be of this world. Nonetheless, they do not show utopias, no non-places. Instead, the settings where figures in their silent or awkward gestures frequently seem to wait for something (*Gedenkstätte; Abend; Modern House*) automatically raise the question where these scenes actually take place. If we remain at first in the reference field of the spatial, then we might use the everyday phrase: everywhere and nowhere. A more concrete identification is simply not possible. But if we retranslate it into Latin, the special problem of this by now commonplace phrase is revealed: *Urbi et Orbi*. Coming from the Pope’s mouth, these words mean a benediction for the city and the globe. Under the conditions of a globalisation that is progressing in spite of all crises, however, today these words seem paradoxical. Because according to Jean-Luc Nancy, a comprehensive disintegration of this localisation has been taking place since the middle of the twentieth century: “It is due to the fact that it is no longer possible to identify a city that would be ‘The City’ – as Rome was for so long – or an orb that would provide the contour of a world extended around this city. Even worse, it is no longer possible to identify either the city or the

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<sup>6</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen*. In: Werkausgabe vol 1. Frankfurt a/M 2006, p. 277 (§ 66). I owe this reference in particular to Joseph Früchtl.

<sup>7</sup> On the question of a genuine pictorial language, see Gottfried Boehm, “Jenseits der Sprache? Anmerkungen zur Logik der Bilder,” in Christa Maar and Herbert Burda (eds.): *Iconic Turn. Die neue Macht der Bilder*. Cologne 2005<sup>3</sup>, pp. 28-43.

<sup>8</sup>Martin Heidegger: “Building Dwelling Thinking.” In: *Basic Writings*, Harper Perrenial 2008, p. 363.

orb of the world in general.”<sup>9</sup> Instead, Nancy continues, the city has multiplied and developed the tendency to cover the entire orb of the world in general. In this “urban network” the distinction of city and country, or of nature and culture, and indeed of space and time can no longer be maintained. If we treat these observations not just abstractly, but tie them back to the conditions of physical experience, then the determination of certain locales or sites becomes in every respect an existential question.

Hausmann’s pictures are *inhabited* precisely by this question. They seem to be woven into a network of different sites and perspectives in one and the same pictorial space. For example, the sight barrier made of an indeterminate thicket in the background of *old german on the pool 1* can also be seen as the rear side of the forest that closes off the left side of *Abend*. The scene in *Abend* in turn can, from a dramaturgical viewpoint, be seen as a continuation of the unreal night piece *Phantom 2*, where the term phantom can be read and seen in the full breadth of its meaning, including appearance, ghost, mirage, phantasm, shadow, and illusion. A planetary human park of uprooted and finally arbitrary sites and states, then? Hardly. But this only becomes clear when we think of the pictures as concrete living situations. What we see are houses and rooms that are inhabited, if that, at most at the margins. We are more inclined to call them buildings rather than homes. This impression is not least created because basic coordinates that might contribute to the idea of a home are at stake: this applies to the relationship of inside and outside just as much as a demarcation between interior and exterior, or the relationship between proximity and distance. But not just the physical anchoring of the figures in the here seems to be almost abolished.<sup>10</sup> The paintings also confront the beholder with the question of *his or her* standpoint and the situation of *his or her* gaze. And not just because the seemingly uninhabited buildings gaze at the beholder directly from empty windows. The answer “here” is therefore hardly worth mentioning. Because with the mere description of the surroundings, which in the given cases includes both the beholder himself or herself as well as the present pictures, the question of the site, i.e. the *where*, cannot be answered sufficiently. Therefore it must be posed beyond spatial reference points with regard to the dimension of time, which the beholder and Jens Hausmann’s pictorial worlds share. Given that, it is in the actual sense the question of the *when*.

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<sup>9</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy: *The Creation of the World or Globalization*. New York, p. 33.

<sup>10</sup> Bernhard Waldenfels, *Ortverschiebungen, Zeitverschiebungen. Modi leibhaftiger Erfahrung*. Frankfurt a/M. 2009. See especially the chapter “Leibliches Wohnen im Raum.”

The Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben speaks in his book *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans* of a fundamental difference between the experience and the representation of time.<sup>11</sup> As Agamben shows with the help of the work of Gustave Guillaume, the human mind has the experience of time, but not its view. This is why it needs a spatial construct, such as the linear representation of past – present – future. The present forms an ongoing transitional time between the two segments past and future. The problem lies in the fact that this representation is inadequate because it is too perfect. In order to really understand something, Guillaume says, it is not sufficient to view time in a constructed or ideal state: you must represent the phases that thinking underwent in order to construct it.<sup>12</sup> So if thinking itself brings to mind and to the present the time phases that it needs in order to represent time as picture-time, one becomes aware of a peculiar separation: personal time experiences and the time of pictures (as picture time) can never coincide, cannot be shared.<sup>13</sup> There is only one form of time where these different levels of time touch one another: Agamben calls this time the time that remains. That is the time that time needs in order to end. This touches both the time from moment to moment as well as the time from “now on” to the end of all time. But because this time, too, for man in his existence always has also to rely on representations, we are confronted with the question of which forms of representation can do justice to such a notion of time. This notion of representation also includes the idea of making present, and then this approach to the notion of time raises the question of presence. Under this aspect, Jens Hausmann’s paintings seem to exist, as it were, at the margins of time. They operate at the thresholds of current civilized experiences of space and time. At the same time, however, as sometimes vexing reference points of visual experience, in the final analysis they don’t escape the context of “everyday” life worlds. If this provokes the question *where* or *when* these scenes take place, then that does not just thwart the mundane time scheme of past – present – future. Rather, we can also sense a rupture between the subjective experience of time and its visualisation in pictures. Those who want to expose themselves to this need not just time. They must also ask what they are prepared to “imagine” when they think about the notion of the present and thus also of the future.

The time that is innate to these pictures lies not just in them. It lies in the willingness to acknowledge that they are not just in this world, but *of this world*. What is inherent in them is more than just a substantial hunger for the present. They remind us that every present tense

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<sup>11</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*. Stanford 2005.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Analogously to this, we may point here to the difference between saying and what is said.

deserving its name needs a space for living, a habitat, that goes beyond general terms and technical ways of access, that enables the question of present tense and presence in the first place. This experience cannot be reduced to a denominator. It lies in the eye of every beholder himself. The views that Hausmann's paintings offer are based on a different, non-prevalent notion of the future.<sup>14</sup>

In this looking at the world, the future is not seen as a mere resource or reserve. Indeed, these paintings offer forms of seeing that call for the daily business of founding cognition and existence. Addressing a notion of the future and the world does not just mean giving more space to seeing, but also more time. This is not by any means the only quality of Jens Hausmann's paintings. But it is foundational, because it is open for what is coming.

Translated into English by Wilhelm Werthern ([www.zweisprachkunst.de](http://www.zweisprachkunst.de))

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<sup>14</sup> On modernity's notion of the future in the age of science fiction and film, see Joseph Früchtl, *Das unverschämte Ich. Eine Heldengeschichte der Moderne*. Frankfurt a/M 2004. See especially the chapters "Der Übermensch als Kunstprodukt," "Philosophie als Science-fiction," and "Science-fiction und Kino."