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The mysterious elevated perspective

DLA Thesis

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The subject of the doctoral dissertation

The doctoral thesis intends to analyse the complex problems of the visualization of the elevated viewpoints, vertical viewpoints and bird's eye view. My goal is not to collect completely or analyse or even completely explore historically the top view and perspective representations, systems and methods. My intention, however, is to approach from several directions the perceptual and emotional characteristics of the view provided by the elevated point of view from the artist's point of view in the real world as well as in digital imaging technology. An increasing majority of technical photos which are integrated in our environment and daily life show the real or imaginary areas of our life from a vertical perspective. Since the first picture taken from the air along an optical axis of downward perspective more than 150 years have passed. Since then pictures created with a similar procedure have not lost their popularity and mystery. In my dissertation through collecting a wide range of ways of artistic appearance of the transpositions of the view from above, I am looking for the answers to the following questions:

- What additional visual information does the vertical perspective provide or what kind of emotional behavior does it induce?
- How can the visual presentation be spiritual and yet profane at the same time?
- Why do they create artworks only comprehensible from above?
- With the parallel evolution of technology why do elevated point of view and vertical view representations become increasingly attractive to people in general, and particularly for the artists?

In summary, in this paper I would like to show the bird's eye view perspective, the mystery of the vertical view, starting from the privilege of the "Gods' eye view" in certain eras, to the experience provided by the objectivity of current all-seeing special techniques or special visual effects. The ultimate aim of the research is to investigate how the visual impression experienced through the elevated view and from the vertical view may affect the fine arts, primarily the contemporary painting.

The method of research

I approach the issues raised in the dissertation as an artist, a painter, so the majority of the examples are chosen within the world of art from the area of two-dimensional transpositions. In addition to the paintings, which are predominant in my thesis, graphics as well as different substrate constructed digital prints were also presented, moreover some subchapters are based on the vision of vertical perspective of specifically three-dimensional works of art. Works of art of all ages, different sizes and materials – for instance drawing with satellites as a new form of creating an image – are connected by a special view point, which is the view from above, allowing these seemingly very different works of art finally relate with each other. In my research I rely on my own practice, my experience and investigation, but of course I consider the theoretical understanding of the psychological background to be essential, as well. In the examples presented above I find it important to mention that the primary criterion of selection in some subchapters – for instance the parts investigating the effects of the GPS graphics and Google Earth – was the visual response given to the raised problem, rather than the content or aesthetics of the work of art. In several subchapters I present artists through one or more works of them. In these cases instead of endless lists I selected the artist providing the most complex method, solutions, possible artistic behavior for a specific question.

Structure of the thesis

The structure of the dissertation separates the theoretical and practical approaches of the issues in question into units. During the analysis of the elevated view point from different aspects I deal with the exploration of the psychological background, the generalization of the vision from the observer's position and I also intend to analyse the vision in transition due to the latest technology. It can occur that topics which have been investigated in previous chapters in my dissertation later will also be analysed from different aspects.

'The outside the body perspective' places the observing spectator into extrapersonal space. (Blank and Mohr, 2005) The involuntary use of the elevated perspective or the outer aspect of the vertical view occurs during the process of remembering. The

perspective of memories is not static in nature, it can change – in parallel with the passing of time, moving away from the given plot – and thus become third person singular. (Futó and Konya in 2008) In case of the constructive approach of the memory we distinguish the observer, that is the observer's perspective of memory. (Nigro Neisser, 1983). During its use, we recall events as if we were observing from an imaginary point of view, most often from a bird's eye perspective.

The chapter entitled 'the view from the top' explores the visual effects and space experience of the visual world perceived from above. Contemplating the world from above for a long period of time – due to lack of technical equipment – was considered to be a privilege, usually a privilege of celestial beings. They, however, could see and control everything, peek into hidden spaces, nothing remained concealed from them. This ability is envied from eternity by humans existing between horizontal limits. Since the end of the 18th century, the technology was ready to make it possible for adventurous travellers to fly in balloons into the clouds to experience the thrill of top-glance. The sights you have never perceived promised the loss of the limits of vision. The observation, the perception has acquired a new direction, implying a radical change in the interpretation, mapping and definition of the visualization and space.

This process can easily be detected with documents reviewing the history of aerial photography. A look from the top recreates the known environment, the process of transformation increases with the growing of the distance between the observer and the viewed natural or urban landscape. The spread of aerial photographs contributed greatly to the profanization of the elevated perspective. With its parallel popularity unwittingly helps, supports the general level of interpretation of the shape.

It is a fact that shapes – that can be interpreted only from above – can be found in almost every continent. Some of these mysterious figures are believed to be hundreds or even thousands of years old. They date back their origins to an age where the lack of aviation showed that these geoglyphs or mounds were established in such a way that they could not be seen in their full scope. A lot of theories have been published in recent decades seeking an explanation regarding the purpose of the geoglyphs and effigy mounds, but in most cases the evidence, the conclusions are not convincing.

Contemplating the landscape from the air today, it is not only the mysterious geoglyphs or mounds of past eras that draw the attention. The contemporary soil drawings differ in several respects from their centuries-old counterparts. They are made for spectators, apart from cases where the means of their creation, the identity of their creator conceptually remain covered, accurately documented, their evolution, amortization can also be traced from an armchair.

Early followers of Land Art – the trend that appears at the end of the 1960s – admit that they drew inspiration from the artistic relics of prehistoric ages such as the megalithic build-ups and from the mysterious surface engraving. Their works with root-like forms and figures, show many similarities, but there are at least as many differences, as well. Their efforts are not to decorate the landscape, but to change its optical image. Many classic artworks of Land Art can only be interpreted from above, and nowadays more and more artworks can be decoded on satellite captures.

The expansion of GIS and its daily use gives us the opportunity to establish new links between the elevated point of view and images and the most modern technological devices. Today's latest achievements also reinforce the attraction to the vertical view and its mystery. Satellite images removed from the everyday environment on human-scale send planetary images to the receiving stations. The different types of satellite images introduce new type of visual systems which appear more and more frequently in contemporary painting.

Nowadays with the help of easily available computer programs such as Google Earth, anyone can investigate the top view of the study of the Earth. With the use of softwares it is not necessary anymore to sit on a plane in order to see the previously unknown or even familiar cities or landscape, we can do that on the Internet. In addition we can easily change the perspectives and the heights of viewpoints. The top view, reduced abstract plane sight in a fraction of seconds may create the illusion of three-dimensional space again by a click. There is great potential in the application of data sets of GIS of fine arts. The new art form based on the GPS is called locative art. It combines the genres of art, travel, satellite positioning technology and computer components. Manifestations of this new art form can range from the extremely simple

forms to a complicated form, but in order to interpret the given work of art it is inevitable to consider the characteristics of the concept of time and its data in connection with the preparation of the work of art.

The issue raised in the title of my doctoral dissertation would not be complete without the presentation of my paintings related to this topic. These paintings reflect the problems emerging from the use of elevated viewpoints in the process of my painting practice. In this chapter I deal with the problems of composing, picturing and installations and its possible solutions. This special viewpoint requires a different image construction system than the usual, close to the ground, human-sized counterpart. The vertical axis view allows the creation of multiple direction of views or rotatable paintings. The rotatable, unclosed paintings expand the possibilities of landscape art making the mapped landscape infinite.

Conclusion

The aim of my thesis is to investigate the bird's eye view, from a perspective of vertical view of fine arts, approaching the topic from the aspects of contemporary painting. I present results and methods through analyzing and introducing contemporary works of art. My dissertation attempted to provide a comprehensive view of the unusual and exciting viewpoints. I analyzed this viewpoint from a psychological and transcendental background, furthermore I investigated for instance the possibilities of the digital technology and extraordinary systems of figure. In case of the issues in question, ultimately, it is possible that the viewer cannot grab in form, precisely define and name the spectacular elements formulated in the picture in a high level, but the viewer can find enjoyment in their approach.

Techniques used for the creation of pictures with elevated viewpoints and vertical viewpoints are constantly improving. They expand the visual definition as well as the complex interpretation of vision both for the creator and the observer.

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