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REALITY EFFECTS

Hannes Loichinger on Jay Chung and Q Takeki Maeda in the Kölner Kunstverein



"Jay Chung and Q Takeki Maeda: The Auratic Narrative," Kölner Kunstverein, 2019, Installation view

A few years ago Jay Chung and Q Takeki Maeda published the text "I'd like to use" (2008) with considerations on the increased importance of press releases in the art field. An "I" with an unclear subject position postulated that it was less and less about the negotiation of images and the references contained in works of art, but more about declarations, credibility and the transfer of reputation in institutional contexts.¹ The information on an exhibition in the Isabella Bortolozzi gallery (2006) subsequent text referred to generative semantics, the linguist Robin Lakoff and the dependence of linguistic utterances on their framing. In the exhibition mentioned, the focus was on the literally "framed" press release - in Chung and Maeda's works such as *Untitled (Isabella Bortolozzi is proud to)* (2006) broken down into the formal structure of linguistic tree diagrams. Viewed from today, the continuing interest of artists in the use of linguistic expressions in relation to artistic works, art-field-specific formats and structures can easily span an arc to the exhibition at the Kölner Kunstverein. And it is precisely this retrospective evidence of the "facts" that seems to be the subject of the exhibition.

The press release on “The Auratic Narrative” suggested a retrospective and immediately distanced itself from it. In general, abstracting from the individual case, the text explained the tasks of an exhibition, “which is supposed to give an overview of the overall work of an artist”, what “usually happens in the form of a story” - that of critics and gallery owners, Mediators and other consecutive instances collectively told, eponymous “auratic narration” and its archetypal narrative structures. The exhibition covering all four floors of the Kunstverein with works from 2006–2019 - predominantly photographic works in the exhibition hall on the ground floor, installation formats on the first floor, showcases on the second and a “retrospective in the retrospective” in the basement - is now thus facing a double task: with the combination of artistic works, press and wall texts, showcases, publications and partial reconstructions of past projects on the one hand to function as an exhibition by Chung and Maeda; on the other hand, as part of a “retrospective”, to stand up for a transparent chain of relatively abstract artistic works, their situated contexts and forms of communication, through which the history and reputation of artists can be represented and made plausible in their historical embedding in the institutional structures of the art field.

This double structure was made clear by the arrangement in the Riphahnsaal, which is festively furnished with high tables. Surrounded by the ten banners from the series *10 Years of Jay and Q* (2012), the film *Untitled* (2015) ran on two monitors, in which three artists typified by actors (avant-garde, conceptual art, contemporary art) play table tennis in a bourgeois atmosphere in the open air. Recourse to a classic strategy of self-preservation, monologue about the decay tendencies of the art of the subsequent generation. The elements of the arrangement referred to a show jumping tournament co-financed by Chung and Maeda in *Ladeburg* (2012), thus invoking the retrospective format, which had already been implemented in 2012 and with other means, and could at the same time be an imprecise reconstruction of the exhibition at REDCAT (2012) in Los Angeles - “the first major solo exhibition in the United States by Berlin-based artists Jay Chung & Q Takeki Maeda”².

Questions of presentation, representation and their mutual interpenetration also complicated the audio recording *The Teeth of the Gears* (2011) on the second floor of the exhibition. In it, Martin McGeown, one of the two gallery owners, tells the story of the Cabinet Gallery in London, scripted by Chung and Maeda. The seemingly autofictional narrative revolves around the fear of making wrong decisions, of losing artists to competing galleries and of not being able to join the youngest generation. Narratives of this kind, which concern structural transformations and general movements in the art field, do not hang in the sky of ideas. Like the reality that correlates with them, they are linked to effects for various actors in the art field, as the book *Letters* (2019) exhibited in a showcase on the second floor and available as a limited edition at the cash desk of the Kunstverein makes clear. The text contained is a compilation of excerpts from the archive of the now closed Düsseldorf gallery Schmela, which is kept in the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles. The published research concentrates on correspondence from the difficult time for the gallery (1980–1992) after the death of Alfred Schmela, which offers itself as material for a counter-model to the heroic success story of self-evident and only illustrative facts: not responding to letters Artists, purchases canceled at short notice, rumors.

As Helen DeWitt points out in the introduction to *Letters*, even an institution such as the Getty that safeguards the historical memory of art history cannot do without archetypal narrative structures and heroism.³ In the Scope and Content of Collection of the Schmela Gallery's inventory, Alfred Schmela is described as “passionate art dealer”⁴ and by taking up the topos of the “love of art” implicitly addressed the problem of how objectifications - from the history of a gallery or the development of an artistic practice - can be meaningfully related to one another and registered. Further overlays of individual and collective history can be found on the wall texts *The Auratic Narrative (Parts I – IV)*, which are distributed over all four floors and are identified as the work of Chung and Maeda. The texts collaged from canonical publications of the last 10-15 years are attempts to condense relevant discussions in the field of contemporary art and the attitudes associated with them: market, strategy and competition (Part I), networks and friendships (Part II), identity politics (part III) and a kind of retrospect on “fictional expectations” (part IV) that go hand in hand with becoming an artist. The connection between the wall texts and the individual sections of the exhibition remained speculative. The area in the basement, separated by a museum cord, with three works, including the *Untitled* edition (2018) for the Kölnischer Kunstverein, was completely inaccessible except for the wall text (Part IV), as if moments of the sometimes doubtful retrospective in the auratic narrative were only in provided to a limited extent.

As part of the framework program of the exhibition, the slide show *Moulting* (2019) with advertising material from the Shiseido company from 1923–1960 introduces another mediating entity: art funding. At the opening, a handout reminiscent of the Getty inventory lists was distributed with information on the origin of the material reproduced on the slides, introduced by the phrase "Shiseido has supported and cultivated the arts over its entire 145 year history ...", adapted from the company's website.⁵ Since Shiseido is also cited as a sponsor in Cologne, the game of authorship, representation and institutional structures turns into recursive. In the end there is no escape. In "The Auratic Narrative" every reflexive gesture of refusal is in turn part of the coherent history of the development of an artistic practice - that of Chung and Maeda. The game goes on.

"Jay Chung & Q Takeki Maeda: The Auratic Narrative," Kölnischer Kunstverein, April 12 – June 23, 2019.

¹ Jay Chung/Q Takeki Maeda, "I'd like to use," in: *Starship*, 11, 2008, S. 22–25: S. 25.

² See the REDCAT press release of June 27, 2012.

³ Helen DeWitt, "Introduction," in: Jay Chung/Q Takeki Maeda, *Letters*, Kölnischer Kunstverein 2019, S. 7–13: S. 9f.

⁴ See the website of The Getty Research Institute, accessed April 23, 2019, http://archives2.getty.edu:8082/xtf/view?docId=ead/2007.M.17/2007.M.17.xml;chunk.id=scopecontent_1;brand=default.

⁵ On the Shiseido website, the sentence is slightly different: "Shiseido has been cultivating and supporting the arts from day one," <https://www.shiseido.com/about-theshiseido-brand.html>, accessed April 23, 2019.