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God's apparitions

On the artworks of Hermann Weber

In a recent publication titled *The authentic picture* Hans Belting showed how "questions of pictures" can be treated as "pictures of faith".¹ With this book he analyses again this theme and that is picture cult, about which he has written in 2004 already.² As the titles announce already, Belting scrutinizes in these works conceptions of pictures of the culture on the one hand and the rootage of our pictures thoughts in the debates on the religion on the other hand.

Hermann Weber's work establishes in this profound problem. He as well looks at olden times and past threshold times of the European culture, from the late antique to Byzanz but also at future times and zones outside the European culture, from Africa to Arabia. On the one hand he repels the controversy on body and sign as specification if an European culture if Christian shaping into the Pre-Christian time if the cult, on the other hand forward beyond the modernism into an outer European picture perception of Non-Christian shaping. His sculptures and pictures try to overcome the dispute of the confessions and the picture in like manner. To succeed, he blinds on the hand the pictures to religious questions and cultic practices, on the other hand, he sets them free from confessional shackles. The pictures and sculptures remain in the religious and cultic sphere but their confessional horizon is further than the Roman-Catholic church. His two- and three- dimensional works begin with the deepest historical roots of the pictures and sculptures perception, with the magic, cult, religious. He treats the pictures and sculptures as objects of faith, but he sets them free from their confessional clearness and opens them by this way to the horizon of all confessions of faith. These pictures and sculptures can be considered as a cult object, amulet, talisman, and fetist, but they refer too many cultural and cultic origins to be able to appoint to one single confession that entices them to serve as an universal healer. Hermann Weber sets the picture free from the confession and with it he makes it more than ever to a theoretical object of religion.

For the sake of simplicity we begin with the sculptures, because here the coherence between theology, anthropology and art is easier to recognize in which Weber's practice of art is established firmly. There has always been the question "What is the human being?", an answer of the anthropology and all other questions like "Where do we come from?" Where do we go to? What shall we do, know and hope?", finally refer again to the question "What is the human being?" and again wait therefore for an answer of the anthropology. Hermann Weber's art is a case for the anthropology.

Hermann Weber constructs strange small houses, miniature and models of houses have staircases, that points at aristocratic and Christian forms of culture, on temples and palaces. Just so, the forms of the houses are modest - and that are pure square stone and gabled roof - that they point at democratic modesty, at elevation and equality at the same time. These

houses are however without doors and windows. Monads (gr. monás, genitive: monádos, from where lat. monas, genitive: monadis = the singularity, the unity) within the meaning of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz. The idea of the simplicity and indivisibility can be found by Platon already, Eklid speaks of the monad as from something "By which every existing thing is called unique" (in element VII 1-2), Demokrit and Epikur speak of atom. Leibniz defines this simplicity and follows: „The monad [...] is nothing else than a simple substance, which is a part of the combination. Simply without parts [...] When there are no parts however, no extension, no form and no divisibility are possible. These monads are the atoms of the nature and in one word: the elements of the things" (Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, monadology, 1714, §3).

This simplicity remembers the monoliths (gr. mons = single, and eithos = stone) bigger natural stones or other objects that exist in one piece and to whom in certain religions a cultic meaning is often attributed. Weber's small houses have leading rooms without openings, like a sepulcher, like a democratic pyramid, a pyramid for everybody, unadorned and the same for everybody. Houses are, as we know, no places for exclusion, but places of integration and communication. They form villages and towns, so communities.

At the same time, oikos denotes the hall in the antiquity, especially the convention hall of a religious association situated in a big Greek sanctuary. Oikos enclosed the family as well as the servants and slaves, the ground, the building and all live stock similar to the roman villa. The economic prosperity of the oikos secured as well the social position of the family. Aristoteles saw in oikos the smallest unit of the Greek polis - so to say the germ cell of the "state".

Houses are at the same time the building stones for economy, ecology and ecumenic. Oikos us the common root for two terms: economy and ecology. Economy (gr. oikonomia) is the house holding, administration, profitability, it is the management instruction of a house. Oikos leads us to the ecology, too. Ecology (gr. oikos = house/ household; logos = instruction) describes the science of the correlations between the living beings and the environment. Ecology and economy connect the thought of the houses.

Management of the house and the environment, one is not thinkable without the others. Behind both, the houses and the household, the management of the house and the household of the earth is the theology, the question of the household and the land lord of the universe theology and ecology are just as neighbors as theology and economy. The ecumenic (church lat. oecumene, from gr. oikoumene = the inhabited earth) proves this correlation. On the other hand it means the inhabited earth as the human living and setting space, on the other hand it means the totality of the Christians. It is as if the earth were only the living space for the totality of the human beings. That is why the common co-operation of the of the Christian churches and confessions to agree upon questions of faith and the religious work. The ecumenical movement looks consequently for the inhabitation of the earth for the Christians. Hermann Weber's undenominational pictorial diction, a pictorial diction which considers and makes visible all forms of faith, culture and art wants for this reason an earth which is inhabited

for all human beings. He sets economy and ecology the shackles of the ecumenic. His pan-religious material and pictorial diction is open to all confessions and nations. His paintings are prayer for every hour, every religion and every nation. So far, songs for the whole earth and all human beings.

Economy and ecology are the essential fields of faith and questions. Defending the own economy, the own household problems as well as the own exploitation of earth as preparation for a nation or confession he pushes aside that the earth is the house of all human beings. Economic and ecological questions are therefore disguised or legitimated as faith questions. The more fragile economy and ecology are, the more massive, military and brutal religious wars are carried on. The true teaching of a theological foundation of economy and ecology consist in the fact to show us, that the Christian religion is only one among many interpretation of economy and ecology. A real understanding of houses, household and equality of all inhabitants of the earth is relativated by the Christians, above all the Catholicism within the religious movement and grants to the Protestant and orthodox church an equal status, grants on the whole to all religions a legitimate free hand.

Hermann Weber's houses without doors and windows are places of solitude and taciturnity, that is why some works are also called "hortus conclusus" (lat. = closed garden). These motives of taciturnity play a special rule in the symbolic of Virgin Mary. It traces back to an interpretation of the song of Salomon of the Old Testament. There it is called "... In a closed garden my sister is a bride, a closed garden, a sealed up source" (Song of Salomon, 4, 12). So you can find on many painting of Mary Virgin enclosed garden by which the "hortus conclusus" is indicated. With the motive of the Virgin Mary's symbolic and its reference on a closed garden we also see the bridge, which Weber constructs between the closed houses and closed faces of painting. The houses are legs covered with oil color and lead on the walls. Because of the indicated bridge there are faces on these blocks, faces from people without eyes. In the majority empty faces. Here as well are no facial marks for communication. The people are locked up, the houses are locked up, refusing instead of showing the way. That means, the sacral and economy are also realized formally by encircling the faces with lead-base alloy. These locked up faces, empty, without eyes or with empty eyes live in the loneliness of the room as the title of Hermann Weber's catalogue from 1999 is called.³ He does not only paint about it, but writes many poetries himself about the closed eyes and the dumb mouth. Just like Weber models blind closed houses, he also portrays blind closed faces. For him the people's faces are as sacral as the houses where the people live in. That is why Marlene Angermeyer - Deubner refers to those lines of Achmatova: "The house is so strange as if it were only a shadow. And I seem to lay out. Quite strange things the mirrors have kept for themselves in the evening fatigue...".⁴

In his sculpture and paintings he does even not carry an ecumenical campaign, but on the contrary, he changes the ecumenical into a economy and ecology which is appropriate for all children of god, for all faces of god. To make his message understood by everybody, he refers to Russian icons, photographic of reliquary shrines or a painting of Francesco de Zubaran The

Sudarium from Veronika. And he even makes cycles with titles like From God's Nightmare.

Weber's archaic materials refer not only to alchemist and cabbala thoughts , but mainly to pre-Christian, Byzantine and Arabian visualization. His skill of metal inlay works resp. metal enclosure and parts of them refer to the lead glazing of the glass - painting.

The origin of the glass - painting can probably be found in the sassanidic Persia. The glass - painting exists above all in the sacral domain, since the late Middle Ages there are examples however out of the profane domain. The Gothic prevails general as the first flourishing time, especially the glass - painting in the French cathedrals, where they were part of a total conception. The late medieval cabinet glass - painting is a special group. Since about the middle of the 15th century glamorous four pass panes exist on this field. After the decline of the glass - painting during the Baroque, second flourishing time began with the 19th century, which lasted until the beginning of the 20th century.

We know the enclosure of faces by lead from the glass windows of the Middle Ages. As in that time colored glass was disposable only in modest surface dimension, bigger surfaces had to be assembled and fixed by metallic alloy. With it, the technique developed to enclosure Hermann Weber developed a new conception, and this was to form the face senses themselves (eye and mouth) out of lead. As the enclosure served originally for the fact to outline eyes and lips, they now serve for presenting eyes and lips. This metallic enclosures, resp. alloys impress of motionless, yes even caught in chains faces, of shackled faces, mummified faces. Weber develops new faces from old Egyptian funeral cults. Byzantine iconography or Catholic baroque devotion. As if it deals with faces of ghost, specters, mummies, faces, scratches out empty. Bu in reality it deals with God's faces, for God can only reflect in all faces. For this reason, there are also faces where the metallic enclosure mutates to veils and with it refer explicit to Arabian face tradition , resp. conceptions. This is exactly the point from which Weber's work gains its force. In his masks, in his metallic faces, in his metallic enclosures of faces, we realize less a vision of anger, oppression, desolation and of the thrown on a being, than much more an innovation of out occidental ideas of people's faces.

Our idea of human being is namely much too much impressed by the Christian picture tradition, which offers us two options. In conformity with Moses' the Genesis all human being are likeness of god: "And God spoke: Let us form people according to our idea, similar to us; they shall reign about the fish in the ocean and the birds in the sky, about the cattle and all wild creeps, that moves on the earth. And god created the human being according to his idea, to his idea he created him; as man and woman he created them. And god blessed them and spoke to them. Be fertile and propagate and fill the earth and be a subject of it." (1. Moses 1, 26 - 28). In the New Testament only Christ is designed as God's picture (Herbräer, 3; 2. Korinther 4, 4); The human being becomes God's picture, when he follows Christ, that means becomes similar to him (2. Korinther 38) so the Christian NewTestament restrict the genesis. By his pictures Hermann Weber opens again the genesis of the human beings. In his transgression of

Christian pictures traditions and his discovering of Outer European picture traditions he is on the confessional field of the genesis. On oikos' field on the earth habitable from all people. By this way he creates a planetary, global vision. With his pictures Weber puts the question, how do God's faces look like? Are they disguised, veiled or under veiled faces? Are they Christian or Mussulman, Palestinian or Israeli faces? Are they white or black faces? Are they Asian, Arabian, American, African faces? Weber's answer is radical: all faces are sacral, all faces are God's faces. This is the lesson of Ikon.