

HANS DIETER HUBER

Letting the Inner Screen Run Empty

If one asks a question, one probably expects an answer. However, some questions are posed in such a way that they conjure up more questions, instead of giving any answers. That is the case here. Let us prove the point. What is 'photography'? Which type of photography? Black and white photography, color photography, digital photography, small photos, large photos, slides, ekta-chromes, single shots, photo series? All these possibilities are left unanswered. It makes a big difference if I look at a small black and white photograph in front of me, and ask if it "captures our times in images", or if it is a digitally projected color photograph on the wall. "Our times", what does it mean in this context? What is it – our time and age? The mere attempt to articulate what time is must inevitably fail, a fact Augustine was well aware of: "If no one asks me, I know it; if I want to explain it to a person who asks me, I do not know it." Moreover, there are differing ways in which we express time. As duration, as flux, as time experienced, as time perceived, as linear time, as cyclical time, as subjective time and as objective time.

Yet, the concept of 'time' could also be expressed in terms of the epoch, the present or the present society. But even if I were to use "our times" in the context of our present age – by which I understand the beginning of the 21st century – it would leave two questions. First, the question of the where of 'our' times. Does one mean Germany as a whole or only the south, the north, the east or the west of Germany? Is it Europe or is it the whole world, which the adjective 'our' denotes? Can a photograph capture 'our' world in images? Immediately one begins to understand the



H. D. Huber:
The pathfinder
in my powerbook/
Der Ortler auf
meinem Power-
book, 2003

nonsense at the heart of the question. Which world? My, your, our or their world? Because, heaven forbid, that makes a pretty big difference. My world is not yours, and theirs is not ours. But who are you and who am I? If I wander around the world with my own body and experience it with my own senses, then I can surely say: ok, this is my world, my world as right now I see it, I know it, I remember it, I imagine it and as I interpret it. That is not a problem. I take my world for granted. But how do I relate my world to somebody else? Can I articulate it, express it, paint it, draw it, show it in gestures, dance it, photograph or film it? Do I even know what I am doing? And if so, at what point does the knowledge about myself, my world and my age end? Do I know the limits of my own consciousness? How do I know what I cannot know? Can I imagine the unimaginable? And what about unconscious knowledge and unconscious feelings? Do I know that I have an unconscious knowledge of the world and of our times? And if so: how can I express this in a photograph? Also unconsciously? Is it that I know if the other person understands me as I understand myself or how I would like to be understood by others? Am I understood as I would like to be understood? How do I show that I wish to be understood in this

way and not otherwise? How is *that* to be understood? In other words, would it not be better to assume that I see the other person as basically unfamiliar and different, that I accept the fundamental misunderstanding in human communication?

Is communication more the result of a misunderstanding than an understanding, or more the result of an understanding than a misunderstanding? What do "our times" mean in this context? It is so easily said. Indeed, is my world your world as well? Are my times really your times, too? When are they our world? When is our world "our age"? When it is being shared, i. e. communicated? Yes. *Communicare* means to share, to do something together, to partake in something together. What does it mean to share the times with someone? Does that mean sharing a lifetime with others? Is this the time which I, Hans Dieter Huber, for instance, share with other contributors of this book? Some are older than me. I do not share a certain segment of "our time" with them. Others are younger than me. They do not share a certain part of the world and a certain segment of time with me, namely the time before they were born. This time I had to share with other people. It is merely the now, the present, which we share. If we look into the future, it is evident that some might live longer than I, others not. A fatal accident could abruptly end a young life, bring to an end "our times". The larger the circle of people, the more it becomes nonsensical to speak of "our times". In summary, then, it is a bare second which mankind shares in this world. And I ask, how should one be able to represent that in a picture? Through symbolic reduction, one might counter. The world should best be expressed by a comprehensible, universal formula, a global formula for all. The world needs a formula – if it does not have one, it is not a world. Our time is but a universal formula of the world in which everything factual and possible is reduced to one representational image. In this way we recognize the utopian and imaginary character of our age; it is a social fantasy, which our society needs, in order to generate the impression



H. D. Huber:
*Gernot Böhme's
 atmosphere on my
 teapot in Müstair/
 Gernot Böhmes
 Atmosphäre auf
 meiner Teekanne
 in Müstair, 2004*

of community. But what does it mean to capture into images? 'Images' are, after all, in the plural form. More images come to mind than one. So, how many pictures are required to capture the world in images? It is difficult to say. 100, 1000, 10.000, a million, a billion, uncountable ones. Bernhard von Bolzano's paradoxes of the infinite suddenly greet us through the window, grinning maliciously. As well as Sartre's thought in *Being and Nothingness*, since we will never be able to capture an object completely, and since our existence is limited, we will always only have fragmentary and incomplete views of one and the same object in the world.

What does a photograph actually capture in an image? It all depends on what the beholder believes he sees in it, what he believes he understands. And is what a photograph captures into an image really solely dependent on the opinion of the observer or is there at least one single, tiny distinctive feature on the surface of the photo paper that physically captures our times? I fear I have to disappoint you. The inner screen has run empty. I sit there calmly, and only hear a buzzing noise. Outside my window it is snowing. Thick, white flakes spread a carpet of silence and respect onto the landscape. I step outside and disappear in the fog.