

# INTERVIEW

Gernot Wieland interviewed by Kristina Marberger

Why did you start with art?

It's always a curiosity, or rather a monstrosity, to find out where art begins, so to speak. In my case, art began pretty safely in the embryonic phase [Laughs]. Where does your own desire begin, your own ideas, which you can develop as far as possible from this early imprint? As a kid, I drew maniacally. That sounds speculatively interesting now, but as a kid you think, I thought, it was normal. A childhood friend of mine has become a psychotherapist, and he once asked me how many drawings I had made in my childhood, like 500 or 1000? Through his physical response to my answer, about 120,000 – 125,000, I realized that maybe it was not so normal to spend entire afternoons or school days making drawings.

[Laughing] Ok, we also played football, beat each other, stole, cigarettes in particular, and consumed them in the forest until we fainted — a normal childhood on the county side so to speak, formed from that an incredible boredom. To the speechlessness that characterized us children, to the boredom and the threat of education, I wanted to juxtapose my own narrative, find a language, even if it was just scribbles. Of course, I had no idea at that time that drawings can have a literary quality, a post-medium condition, so to speak, a form of antipsychiatry. Too bad that at that time there were no Guattari Deleuze bedtime stories [Laughs]. A Guattari Deleuze children's book, that would have been something.

This desire to outline one's own narrative and one's own reality emerged very early in my work. Let's say, around the age of 5? [Laughs]

Who is the artist that influences you most?

I would say that writers have influenced me the most, they have opened my mind to other spaces and realities. It's strange, but when I read, a sense of home and belonging appeared, even if that home was completely fictional, without boundaries, without laws, and defined only by yearnings, fears, and notions. It was like sitting in the car and being strangely touched by landscapes passing by. You can not enter these landscapes, but they are there: they do not just pass you by as a symptom or as a place of longing. On the one hand, the world of literature was real to me like these landscapes (Bachmann, Innerhofer, Bernhard, Kafka, Ausländer, Celan), on the other hand, there is not a sole point at which you are shaped and educated or influenced by an artist, it happens all the time.

I was socialized in the 80s, and back then all my friends had a poster of Salvador Dali hanging in their room, next to Falco, Queen, The Cure, and unfortunately also Genesis and Eurythmics. One went, so to speak, into an Austrian children's room of the eighties and could not help but see "The Sleep", "The Memory" (I think that's what it's called, I am not in the psychological state of mind to google it right now) and "The Dream" by Dali. When I'm asked, "Who is the artist that influences you most," I usually respond in an adolescent reaction: "Salvador Dali," because there's nothing more uncool in the art world than him, right? However, Sigmund Freud uses the idea of a cover memory, a memory that covers a traumatic memory with a less traumatic one in order to displace the reality. Maybe this happened to me with Dali, otherwise I only saw paintings in churches of local heroes from the 19th century, which depicted mostly brutal scenes of

religious history grotesquely and badly painted, which made me either faint or laugh, so you better choose Dali, right?

Now that starts with what I am working on a lot, memory. Is the narrative of memory a reality that covers the actual reality?

Why do (in)sanity, therapy and stories about animals play such a big part in your oeuvre?

Well, when you try to look at reality, the question of sanity / insanity makes the symptoms of a society, such as fear, projection and dominance, clearly visible. The same happens if we look at animals. Maybe that's why both of them are common in my work? However, one can also naturally derive the best stories from both: from the cave painting to Oedipus and to the Bremen Town Musicians of the Brothers Grimm.

I was always interested in the analogy of the white cube and the therapy room, or a zoo. They are spaces that have a specific function, shot through with traces of visible and invisible power structures, in which everything that defines us can be negotiated. I always wanted such spaces as places of boredom, and this boredom in an immediate necessity. Lars-Erik Hjertström Lappalainen says: "Boredom is perfect for decontextualizing oneself, and therefore it is a kind of hardcore leisure time. Boredom is the afternoon of the soul and the daybreak of the spirit." Similar to humor, the most beautiful (power) shifts take place during boredom.

Can you tell us a bit more about your general motivation behind this work? Is perhaps finding justice or absolution for the characters (i.e. the abusive teacher(s) vs. the victim pupil(s)) important to you?

Hm, maybe I start with a Benjamin quote from 'Excavation and Memory': "Language has unmistakably made plain that memory is not an instrument for exploring the past, but rather a medium /theatre [...] For authentic memories, it is far less important that the investigator report on them than he mark, quite precisely, the site where he gained possession of them." The site, where I gained possession, is art.

I think I use the language of art not to find sociological explanations, rather to — in intertwining personal memories with collective history — create a consistency, that allows "other things" to speak: the feeling of injustice, and its power structures, like collective memory. Memory is a permanent process. Most narratives of memory are created as a reality that covers the actual reality. As Benjamin wrote: "He who seeks to approach his own buried past must conduct himself like a man digging."