

Notes on the work of Felix Schramm

by Christina Irrgang

An event begins to have two sides when the standpoint of the viewer shifts, when the walls of the mind expand and place the breakthrough into the space. The moment of the change in perspective and position, the practically warped position of the gaze becomes the object by which the shift achieves a new shape. It is possible to interpret the spatial installations of Felix Schramm from this description: the sculptor conceives of sculpture out of its dialectics, he views the both-sidedness, he makes the positive and the negative the condition by which he generates his spatial forms. These in turn embrace the facet of moments of observation as a consideration in his sculptures and installations. What we see never exists just in an order, but becomes part of a structure of order that is in itself variable, the parameters of which define our view and our overview. The following deliberations on the work of Felix Schramm are based on these viewpoints of observation.

Breakthrough and manifestation: the dialectics of arranging space

Felix Schramm usually works with industrially produced material, which appear in his space-forming processes, however, as an organic growth. The installations of the artist here are observations of the form development which are generated in equal part from the crude materiality and the constructive inclusion of the emptiness that surrounds them. Even more than examining the both-sidedness, his work describes a dialectic of the space, which through Schramm's setting of the material takes place in the same: as the other in the self. In Schramm's spatial descriptions the other takes shape as a breakthrough of already observed spatial situations, as well as a manifestation of sculptural sequences which redirect the gaze in the spatial sphere along the set structure.

With works such as INTERSECTION (Magazin4, Bregenz), OMISSION (Palais de Tokyo, Paris) or COLLIDER (Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco), the artist places the on the breakthrough in the space. Schramm's spatial structures sink into what already exists and create lines of sight along their surfaces and spatial edges, which only appear through the insertion of elements into and through wall surfaces. The exhibition space becomes the visual space – and yet when viewing it an outer and an inner materialises, the search for a boundary that the mind tries to establish as it takes in the space. Glowing sheens of colour, which drop away from the partially covered surfaces of room walls or fragments of the retracted object, turn out to be a foreshadow of this spatial boundary, and at the same time as the breath of the sculpture. These coloured areas or visual areas of natural spaces attached to drywall elements define the body of the sculptural space in the room, but they also stretch it out aphysically – as a pneumatic visual space. Slightly convex bulges in the walls, or the concave warping on the opposite sides, evoke the idea of a pulsating expansion, which is executed in Felix Schramm's installation as a quiet, yet vehement exclamation, and in doing so stands in the room, as it were.

The work DIE 10 KAMMERN DER POLYGENESE (Institut Rheinumschlag, Düsseldorf) appears as a work-related setting. Drywall elements, rib lath and wooden panels are joined together here into a system which, in its accumulation of Schramm's various plastic techniques, evolves into a spatial reference system and at the same time dissolves its own boundaries. The installation, free-standing in the room, is accessible from all sides, and, taking into account its integrated elements, can be interpreted in a dramatic sequence. The system reveals, for example, the figurine, amorphous impressions made from polyurethane or wax filling in a coral structure, arranged behind glass plates by the artist: these are a constituent part of the installation and at the same time are exhibited in the structure as if in glass showcases due to their practically museum-like arrangement. The plastic work in Schramm's collages, created by the artist from torn photographic material, continues in a similar vein, resulting here in two-dimensionally abstracted visual spaces from torn edges and picture surfaces. One of them, in this case as an image panel, is a discursive part of its installation: the ink-jet print, framed in putty, contains overlapping extracts, in part views of the opposite side of the sculpture, as well as a picture of the collage itself. It is like an optical echo, since as a picture it refers to itself as a visual product, and also to the spatial construction of the object, and continues this work-intrinsically. The artist here always makes the construction visible as well, uncovers it. Thus in DIE 10 KAMMERN DER POLYGENESE, the collage integrated by Schramm can also be seen from its rear side, and even more, the rear of the picture in the sculpture at the same time also becomes the right side, seen from a different positioning to the object. You could even go so far as to say that the sculpture itself does not have a right side. It embraces the view of it all round by representing in itself a system which is created from the circling view. The choice of the view, even the shift of the view and the varying reference of the viewer to the installation can also be seen in a similar way with the torso included in the installation, which is composed of the addition of two equal rear views of a body. The plastic object becomes a real puzzle picture in the installation and provides the viewer here as well with the opportunity of an always displaced view of the sculptural structure. Felix Schramm's pictures, objects and spatial interventions work here on a dissolution of already existing structures, which is materialised and concretised physically in the reappraisal of space. Schramm generates order systems which achieve their structure only through the dissolution of the (architectural) order.

Facets of order

An interim assumption: the artistic works of Felix Schramm deal with the shift which the sculptor discusses in differentiated sculptural forms within his work. This can be observed concretely in his transforming and contraction of wall surfaces, but also intangibly in the ever changing interpretation of the overall construction and of the relationships of the materials to one another. The respective form here stands in relation to the structure surrounding it. It even emanates from the moment of the interim space. Schramm's sculptural spatial installations seem not to be based on a striving for the whole, but rather an observation of the whole in its parts that can be recombined, including the axes, the tear, the bulge, the possible orientation of the gaze, and also to

that effect – physically and symbolically – the interface. One can picture moments of observation joining together, condensing into spots, or the lines of sight in rays, taking place simultaneously, but also in succession. These ideas are joined by those about perspectives, which only present themselves through the new orientation of the viewpoints that are in the process of being created, and which hint at an idea of the structure. A structure that always leads back to both-sidedness, to the positive and negative, to the volume and to emptiness. The whole is thus based on a counter-rotating principle, which, coming from different directions, describes a form. The whole is intended as an order, but the order as a structure made of facets, which is intensified through a change in viewpoints and standpoints (as an internal image: the crystal). At the same time the situation of overlapping, but also the moment of exchange between two sides, intended both materially and mentally, brings out the form which becomes clear in units in the physical relationship in which we observe it. The growth of the form here takes place from the inside to the outside, but this is in all directions.

A note should be included at this point: the pair of concepts described by Niklas Luhmann, "Distinguishing and identifying". In his book "Schriften zu Kunst und Literatur", published posthumously in 2008, Luhmann speaks of form as a boundary marker, form as a "form of two sides", meaning the inside and the outside. These are ideas that Luhmann formulates above all in his essay "Die Kunst der Gesellschaft" (1995/1997), referring back to George Spencer Brown and the challenge to "draw a distinction", (i) and which he commented as being a second-level observation (one's own distinction and identification with respect to a further distinction and identification)(ii). In this publication he again makes reference to the specificity of the spatial moment when he writes: "We are in this space, and no other space, but this wouldn't be this space if there weren't other spaces or quite different things at all."(iii) Both sides, as well as the various spaces or spatial structures that open up, can be connected to one another only through the factor of time, in a linking confrontation and demarcation – and thus enable the transition from this to the other space, or from that one to the other one. Time – in the form of movement in the spatial – encircles the location of the viewpoint, surrounds it, pulls together, so to speak, the "two sides" described by Luhmann into the form, which condenses an order of facets into a picture perceived as a whole. The "distinguishing and identifying" serves as a procedure and course of events of this order structure, similar to the concentration of rays into spots, of expanding areas in the space into specific visual moments.

A that is energised from its surroundings and leads to observation

In Felix Schramm's sculptures and installations we have seen the space surrounding the object as part of the space which describes the object: it holds the dissolving and gaping shapes, their stretching of relative strengths, visually together as a structure. One form here cannot be seen without the other one. More than this, it is an observation, a viewing of the form, by the form, even a permanent shift of what is formed, whereby the glance, the look that scans the form, is always changing in the course of one's own spatial reference to the sculpture. The gaze of the viewer circles cumulatively, and

produces a variety of images which in the observation ultimately result in a set of images. This set of images does not follow any linearity. Rather it is generated more in the accumulation of sensations, from things seen, forgotten, again revealed, discovered – this set of images formulates the artistic composition and the architectural construction. It consists of a loop of things distinguished and identified, of the non-restricted multiplication of the two sides, of a synthesis of immediacy and the concealed. The perspective that is energised from the surroundings of Felix Schramm's installations leads to an observation, described by Luhmann as a second-level observation, "[...] that is: the simultaneity of distinguishing and identifying (keeping an eye on the other side) and the recursive networking in a before and after of further observations, which for their part again have to be identifications that differentiate."^{iv} This observation is reflexive, and above all it assumes something already previously seen, which in the light of what follows, occurs in correspondence and communication. Synthesis here is always at the same time also the starting point for a further possibility that follows. The re-entry into the form which follows on from these ideas of Luhmann can also be seen in just this way in the references to form in the work of Felix Schramm. This re-entry is not based on any law, on any interpretation, and even less on any direction to be followed when viewing his works. It is based on keeping an eye on the other side, which can be grasped without any attribution.

This leads to the concluding assumption of these observations, considerations and comments on the work of Felix Schramm: It would be wrong to talk of chance, although a dramaturgy of randomness becomes apparent in the tangibility of the three-dimensional installations of the artist. The accidental element is most probably the rhythm of time, which we as viewers individually follow, define and which allows us to draw our own curve of tension in our perception. The two sides of the event are visualised in this and keep on assuming different shapes in a spatio-temporal contraction.

Things that were previously separate are placed in a new context. As onlookers we influence not the form in this way, nor the event, but our attitude to what confronts us against the other – figuratively and in abstract form.

iLuhmann, Niklas: Die Kunst der Gesellschaft, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, 1997, p. 72ff.

ii cf. Luhmann, 1997, p. 101.

iii Luhmann, 2008, p. 300.

iv Luhmann, 1997, p. 102.