

SCREEN SPACE

Tim Woodward

Ring Around the Dowser

23 January – 6 February, 2016
(Upstairs Gallery)

Tim Woodward works across a wide range of media, including video, sound, sculpture and installation. Employing processes of free association, editing and re-imagining, his expansive effort is characterised by an ability to manipulate existing cultural objects and images, and an ongoing interest in the narrative techniques and modes of production associated with cinema. Opening up space for interpretation, Woodward's non-declarative and interdisciplinary approach therefore has more to do with the dilation of ideas, than the execution of an artistic virtuosity. Often alluding to a sphere of activity existing beyond the exhibition space, his work regularly incorporates the input of actors, non-professionals, as well as specialists from the cultural industry fringe.

His work *Ring Around the Dowser* (2014), features a priest who explains the religious ceremony of Profanation, in a video portrait of the Donald Judd Sculpture Untitled [1977] as it exists in 2014. Shot on Lake Aa in Münster, the work's title references the apparatus that blocks light through a cinema projector lens, and also "dowsing" as a method to locate secret, hidden or missing things. Language - in it's broadest sense - permeates the video, sound and installation works of Woodward. Typically his videos feature a subject who speaks, assuming the role of author or story teller. At times off-camera, these exegetical voices perpetuate readings and interpretations of select cultural objects and events. However in these moments, meaning is kept wilfully irresolute and proffered only temporarily through a network of enablers and 'actors'.

Profanation. Of the Odd.

Odd, what's happening here. Listen to the story carefully, which is told in a verb, wherein its meaning is revealed, too. The story is well known, it is the tale of the world and of the human race, since with a blade, the first line was scratched in the earth; the first distinction made. Who perseveres, what happens in the space which you hold "sacred"? Profane, pro-fanum is all which falls outside (pro-) of the space of the temple (fanum), outside the line that contains the fans and the fanatics. The name of the perpetrator, which means breath, vanitas, is also known: Abel, the younger brother, the nomadic sheep herder who was killed an innocent, is brought literally to another place, the original victim of the plow or the spade, of Cain's handy work, farmer and blacksmith, his older brother. Romulus, like Cain a "geographer" did the same to other early profanator, his brother Remus in order to defend the borders of the eternal city of Rome.

Odd that art is now dealing with profanation, that it happens at the beginning of spring in the sign of Aries. The sign of the lamb, which is, the sacrificial animal par excellence. This corresponds with the beginning of the year, spring, when the days gradually get longer. Easter is the resurrection of the sun in the east. However, a transition (passage) is also the Passover, the passing of the Holy: The decisive moment that marks the change from a cyclical to a linear and progressive view of history. The exodus from Egypt, marked in space by the boundary of the Red Sea, which for the first time produced a "before", in the form of cyclic, mythic cycles, and an "after", a layered understanding of time.

The appearance in a flame of fire from the midst of the bush, saying, "I have come down to deliver them (...)" (Ex 3) theophany, immediately drops the blade, the plow, and the line is drawn: "Set limits around the mountain and consecrate it." (Ex 19). This line is also the boundary of the temple and of the sacrifice. Profan-ation refers to the moment of the breaking into the closed circle, or through the closed line, which includes the sacred. The nominalisation of the verb in the German language also has a continuative aspect and the history

of the sacred has always been a history of profanation of the holy. It is a process that is happening in the now, in the present, in history. This fits well to the nature of the sacred, to reveal itself, to become apocalypse (that is literally revelation, discovery), to step outside the crypt, to be deciphered. Hence the sacred is the original border crosser – through wisdom (sophia) and justice (maat) – when bridging the line to the mundane and revealing itself to all (even Gentiles).

If profanation was a sacrilege it would be what ultimately happened to the prophets. In Isaiah the Lord speaks and asks what he should do with the many sacrifices: He grew tired of the rams, which burn as an offering and the fat of the cattle, he disliked the blood of bullocks, of lambs and of goats. Hosea quotes the Lord, "For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice" (Hos 6). According to Matthew, Jesus threw out of the temple all traders and clients and said, "'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you make it a den of robbers." (Matthew 21), and even the scribes and the Pharisees were full hypocrisy and disobeying the law of Moses, since they only acted just on the outside. Thus, the wise and the prophets were sent, some of them were even killed, from Abel the righteous to Zachary. The latter was murdered also in the atrium between the temple and the altar (Mt 23; 2 Chr 24), on the boundary of the sacred.

The border line drawn on the floor (ie, the geo-geography, from Greek: drawing or writing of the Earth) is a sign of violence. The word Gewalt in the German language has the meaning of both *violencia* which defines the law (violence, violer) and *potestas* (the pater and despotes) which receives the law. On a larger scale the temple represents the city or politics, respectively. Odd, that this is happening in an art exhibition, in Münster of all places, the monasterium, the monastery or the cathedral. City of Peace, even more so today when its border line, the city walls, were converted into a promenade, namely into an open, un-limiting and un-limited space. This architectural element of the city is all the more of political significance since a ring of defensive walls was transformed into an area of leisure. On an even larger scale, the temple corresponds to

the all, outer space, the infinite cosmos which is called this way, because it was perceived as ordered and beautiful as can be (cf. Cosmetics).

The place where the oddity is just unfolding now is everyone's very own temple, our body (M. Eckhart). The miracle, the sacred (in the form of the Other par excellence) reveals itself to us only if we are open for it. Our embrace as such signifies a permission to enter our inner circle and at the same time is an opening to the alien. If our embrace only included our secure places and did not open up for the strange, it still had to permit one outside element: the breath, Abel, the Spirit, the Sacred which amongst ourselves repeatedly enters and exits. The physical boundaries of the inner circle, of the human body, are - consciously or unconsciously - transgressed continuously from inside to outside and from outside to inside. Taking a deep breath knows: "I take a deep breath"; deeply exhaling knows: "I breathe out deeply." Only aware of my breathing, living in the present moment, I know that this is the whole thing: This is the present oddity in the body - Tat Tvam Asi

Gianmaria Zamagni, Exzellenzcluster. "Religion und Politik", Münster (English approximation: Manuel Talarico)

This essay was originally published to accompany the exhibition Ring Around the Dowser at Förderverein Aktuelle Kunst & Geologisch-Paläontologisches Museum, Münster, Germany in 2014.

Tim Woodward is represented by Darren Knight Gallery, Sydney.

Screen Space is an independent not-for profit art gallery that opened in 2010. Screen Space is rent-free for artists and curators. The gallery has a curatorial focus on exhibitions that incorporate screen technology or which engage with screen culture, regardless of medium.