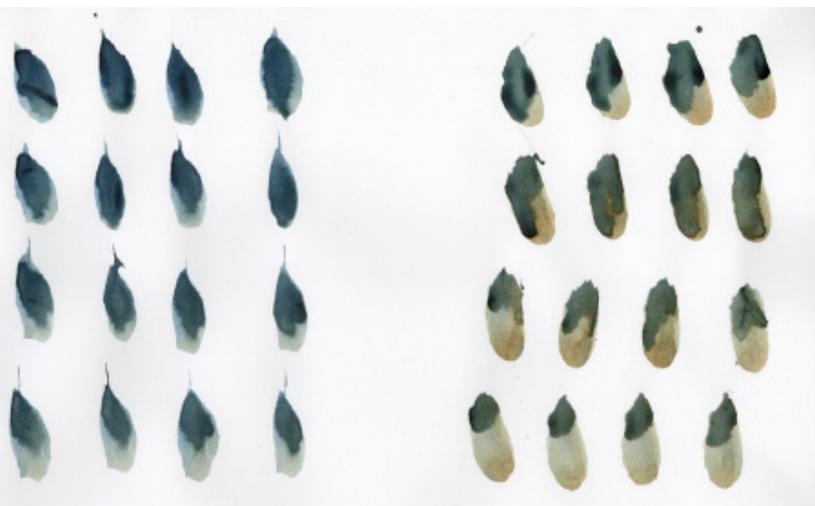


ULRIKE STOLTZ: AND YET ANOTHER BOOK? THINKING WHILE DRAWING

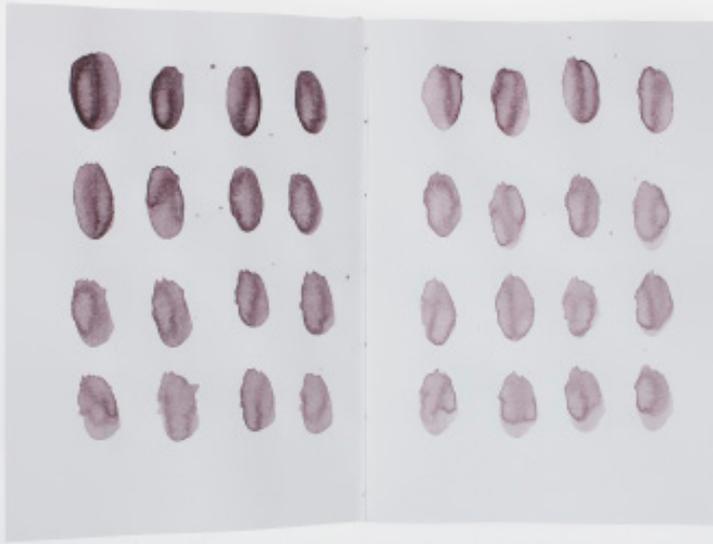
Starting to draw. Starting where I stopped drawing weeks ago. Setting oval forms on the paper, line after line. With a brush, sometimes also a nib. The paper is very white and very smooth. I use ink, first sepia, than indigo. Brown and blue. Earth and heaven. Each line has four signs. I draw four lines before taking a break. While



drawing I ask myself: What am I doing here? I could call it a writing exercise. Which would turn every sign into trying to write an o, or an O, or a zero. I could call it an exercise in meditation. Which would make the reader/viewer think: But why does she not try to draw circles? Can't she make a proper circle? Well, that's not easy without a pair of compasses. But I am drawing oval figures. They remind me of the mandorla, or the vulva, or the clitoris. Probably not just me. Well then, I am drawing a series of vulvae. But

why do I arrange them on a straight line like letters? Which story do I tell? While continuing to draw oval forms and thinking of vulvae while drawing I feel like hunting beetles or butterflies and spiking them. Bluebeard's wives. But I am not a man, I do not hunt women. My point of view is different: This could be the vulvae of my women ancestors, my mothers and grandmothers. All who led the way. The signs are quite similar, but not equal. Our vulvae are similar to each other, but not equal. Our lives are similar to each other, but not equal. What a diversity! This is what I trace. Stringing them together I preserve them. I pick up each and every one of them, look closely at it and put it aside into the row, on the string, on the line. I am spinning a thread into the past. I am drawing, slowly, and thoughtfully. I give myself over to the rhythm. I change the brush. I change the colour. Is red too loud? Is violet a colour for elderly women? Black is dead. **WHILE I AM DRAWING** my thoughts stroll around. I am walking along in Bolzano. I stroll around in the local museum. I walk across a glacier. Who was the mother of the Iceman we call "Oetzi"? His sister? The woman who shared her bed with him? Did she love him? Did he love her? Was he a good lover? They have examined the iceman in detail, his skin, his bones, they screened him through and through, found the arrowhead that killed him; they analyzed his clothes as well as the contents of his stomach and his DNA. Did they also investigate his penis, his testicles, his sperm? If Oetzi had been the icewoman: Would we know what her vulva looks like? If she would have just had her period or her ovulation? Did she use tampons or a sanitary pad? Which kind of material would have been suitable for that purpose? At what point in her cycle was she exactly? How many children would she have had? Did she use a kind of contraceptive? and if so, what would it have been? Did she have had miscarriages, or abortions? How did the milk from her breasts taste? Every oval I draw is a drop. A drop of milk. A drop of blood. A drop of saliva. A teardrop.

Which language did she speak? What was her name? How did she call her daughter? How did she call her son? What hopes and expectations were expressed with these names? How did she call her lover, tenderly? What was Oetzi's name in her language? How did sound "I love you" in her language? What did her lullabies sound like? What was the song she sang while working? I draw something, I trace something, I record something. Every oval I draw could be a sound. Picked



out of the air. Where did the sound vanish to? Does the spoken word remain potent even when it does not move the air any more?

MY THOUGHTS JUMP into the present moment again. Today, it is no longer all about the artefact, it is about concept. Everything has been done already. Everything is doable. But so far, maybe not everything has been thought. Not everything as been said. I continue my drawing. I draw one oval aside of another one. Every oval an artefact. Every group of ovals an artefact, a work of art. Every sign an artificial

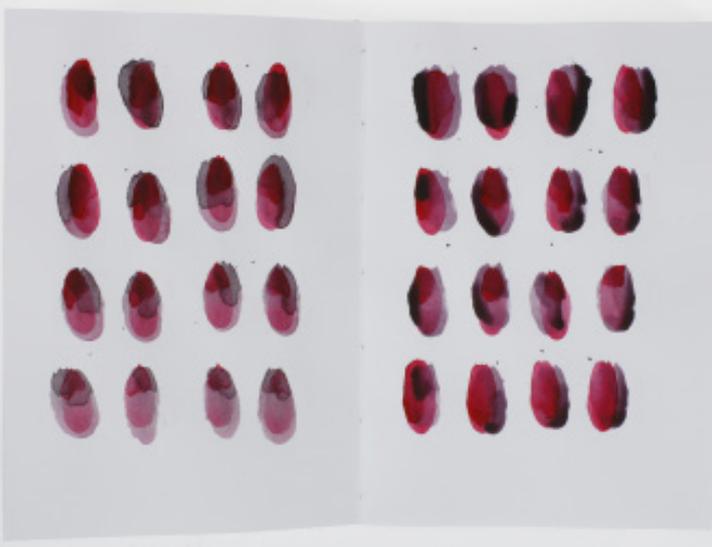
product. Not a naturally grown form. Various concepts could be drawn from that would not be enough. Has everything been drawn yet? Recorded as a drawing? Has everything been written down yet, described, confirmed? I could write down a concept especially for calligraphers and typographers: Drawing as an exercise in writing. I could also write down a concept that talks about spirituality: Drawing as Zen meditation. I could develop a concept that defines signs as sounds: drawing as composition, notation. **INSTEAD I THINK** of women, I think of myself as woman, my womanhood, and how it emerged. This has all been said before. But not by everyone? And did everybody listen? Women have higher voices to be heard better.¹ But we got accustomed to give more attention to the lower voices: "Scientists of the University of Miami recently found in a study that men as well as women prefer to hear managers talk with sonorous voices – no matter if it was a man or a woman speaking. [...] 'For our perception, deep voices represent dominance and competence, whereas higher voices often are regarded as being unpleasant.'"² Whom do we listen to? Whom do we belong to? Whom do we obey? When do we stop listening and start turning away? [The German words for belonging, obeying, and not listening all contain the verb to hear.] Everything said yet? Everything questioned yet? And isn't what we have heard and understood more important than what has been said? **NOTHING NEW** under the sun?

We will meet at new moon. I set signs on the left half of the paper, four by four. And four by four signs on the right half of the paper. This could be seen as a double

¹ says Joachim Ernst Berendt in his audioessay: "Vom Hören der Welt. Das Ohr ist der Weg", CD 3; Network Medien-Cooperative; Zweitausendeins; Frankfurt.

² says Paul Johannes Baumgartner, who works as a radio speaker and is specialized to teach manager and women how to speak (better): <http://www.amica.de/liebe-psychologie/tid-3893/die-macht-der-tiefen-klaenge-wie-sie-mit-stimmtraining-die-karriere-ankurbeln_aid_11035.html> (12.9.2016)]

spread. I am thinking book, again and again, over and over. I don't think of a book, I don't think about the book that could come out of these drawings. I think book. I think within the book. I think as a book. I think in bookform. I think of a text. But I think the text also as a visual form. I think text as image. I think the letters and their form in relation to the signs I set on the paper. I think of the text as reflection of the signs, of drawing. It could be a book about writing. Or a book about drawing. Or a book about the relationship of writing and drawing. It could be an instruction on meditation. Or a piece of music. Also available as an audio file, on an attached CD, or for download, QR code on the last page. **THIS BOOK** is decoding hand written signs. The signs are simple and clear. In geometry, why does the oval not have the same status as the circle and the square? Because every ellipse has



two foci which our thinking turns around. The reading room of the Warburg Library in Hamburg was built in the form of an ellipse – for that very reason.³ This is no longer simple. This is too complicated. You say you are a simple person – the German equivalent of that saying is: “knitted in a simple way”. I draw one oval aside of another. Like meshes on a knitting needle. I put on meshes, I am knitting, I am casting the meshes off. Mesh after mesh the thread describes an oval. Physically, the oval is not there at all. Airborne acrobatics. Every

mesh describes an arch in the air, thus catching a story. Like this, mesh by mesh, drop by drop, like an eye blinking, the moments make up a sequence. While knitting we connect space and time. Space-time and space of time emerge in front of our eyes. We swathe ourselves in it and feel warm. Knitting is never simple.

I THINK ABOUT reviews and discussions about books I heard or read about recently. The contents seems to be no longer important. Books in the post-digital age. “Post-digital’ [...] refers to a state in which the disruption brought about by digital information technology has already occurred.”⁴ Is that not valid for all kinds of books? Or does anybody really believe that books would be still set by hand? Not even this one. A new age has begun. We do not know it yet. But it has already a name: Anthropocene.⁵ We do not know how to deal with it yet. What shall we say about it? What is important enough to be written down, to be recorded, that is: to be passed on? What is important for us, for our existence, for our lives, for the

³ information about the Warburg Library Hamburg according to a radio essay of Hessischer Rundfunks (hr2) on the occasion of the re-opening of the library in Hamburg on April 20, 1995.

⁴ Florian Cramer: What is post-digital? APRJA 3, no. 1 (2014), accessed June 22, 2015, <http://www.aprja.net/?p=1318>, now also in: David M. Berry and Michael Dieter, eds., *Postdigital Aesthetics: Art, Computation and Design* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 12–26. Quoted according to: Hannes Bajohr: *Experimental Writing in its Moment of Digital Technization: Post-Digital Literature and Print-on-Demand Publishing*. In: Annette Gilbert: *Publishing as Artistic Practice*. Sternberg Press, Berlin 2016, p. 100–115; p.103]

⁵ The term is supposed to describe that we now live in an age in which everything is made by man; but there is also a discussion as the term suggests that everything is doable without any limits, an idea that might lead to “transhumanism” or “posthumanism”.

future of our children? Is it all just about “happiness”⁶? And if so, which kind of happiness, of joy, of bliss would it be? We programme ourselves. We reprogramme ourselves. We write a new programme for us. As if we could know why we are here. But is it not that the book once was invented exactly to find answers to this question? To negotiate the old question: what is the meaning of life? The contents of most books have fled into the digital media. Not just the telephone book, but also dictionaries, thesauri, encyclopedias, cookbooks, novels, non-fiction books, atlases. A few islands have been left: elaborately designed books for children (as today’s parents want to give their children at least a memory of what once was a book); guidebooks (the lifespan of which seems to be limited, at least in my eyes); expensively printed picture books, which means: Coffee Table Books which are looked at only once, and look good otherwise. What has not made the migration into the new media of our collective memory will be forgotten. We don’t know what we will lose on this long way of transformation, what will fall by the wayside, collapse. The knowledge of our ancestors is changing. It has been ruminated a hundred times before, and digested, and spit out, and fermented, and distilled, and drunk and drowned. This is how it stays alive. But still something, and many things perhaps, is being lost, irretrievably. Old wine in new bottles? What my early sister collected and put in her artificially and beautifully knit and knotted net — where has it disappeared to? Fallen through the meshes of memory. The book has nothing more to say. It’s form becomes a form of potentiality: It could be a book, it will be printed on demand, but nobody demands it, nobody asks for it. Oh demand, desire and longing! Those who’ve got already everything may as well give up the book as a material object. Those who don’t know their own body, don’t recognize it any more, will most probably develop a fear and will be afraid of other bodies, too.

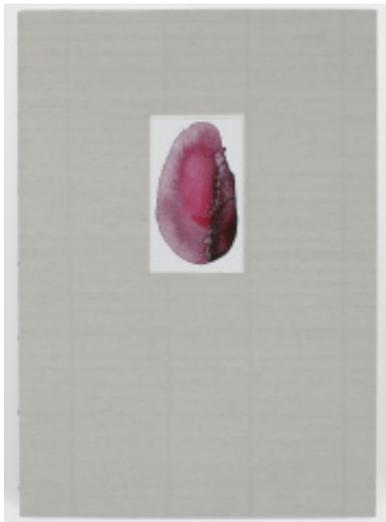


How shall thus the book be recognized and valued and loved as a bodily object? The book is a sensuous thing.⁷ Every form of sensuality wants to be guarded, tended, taken care of, and celebrated. **I CONTINUE DRAWING.** I set one oval next to another. Untiringly. Why are some pages better than others? What is my benchmark for this decision? Why do I judge at all? And what do I condemn? Is there any tree that condemns one of its leaves? On the other hand: Am I always concentrated enough? When my thoughts go astray too far away I don’t remain with my drawings. This is to be seen. The question is not if one oval is aesthetically better than another. It is about the drawing being the trace of a movement on the paper, and the story that the drawing tells about this very move. About the ephemeral nature and the concentration, about the force and the weakness, about the fluent and the

⁶ The declaration of independence of the United States of America says: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.” https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Life,_Liberty_and_the_pursuit_of_Happiness (accessed: 24.9.2016)

⁷ Thank you, Hans Peter Willberg! (HPW: Das Buch ist ein sinnliches Ding (= “The book is a sensuous thing”), Leck 1993)

interruption, about what cannot be said with words. Which has not to be kept silent and secret. What cannot be spoken of has to be drawn or painted or sung or danced.⁸ It must not fall into oblivion. It remains in the world anyway, but it must have the right to remain in our world, it must be given a place, and it must take this place. And it must be appreciated. This is why we have to educate our eyes and ears and have to make our skin permeable again. “What did the voice say? That one has to write like this. Like the fractal breeze on the almost white.”⁹ Perhaps we have to go back very far, as far as where the wind comes from, to rediscover and retrieve what we can write about. To find again a form in which what we have recovered may be transported. Weaving a net of letters. A net for thoughts. How do we want to live in the future? How do we want to work together? We live on a turning point, in a change of times. And we know it. “Se vogliamo che tutto rimanga come è, bisogna che tutto cambi.” [“If we want everything to remain as it is, it is necessary that everything changes.”]¹⁰ Perhaps it is quite appropriate that I am writing (and drawing) a book about women and our story. After all we have only been a margin in the history of the book. Still not each of us has a room of her own.¹¹ And still, since five thousand years at least, all of us women bear the curse of Enkidu. On his deathbed, he, Gilgamesh’s companion, delivers this long and horrible curse: “Cursed be those who made me be what I am now, who broke me out of my wildernis, out of my perfectly happy and content life ...”¹² This curse is being strengthened with regard to the woman who went to find him in the wilderness and brought him civilization. How can we banish this curse? What can we put against it? How can we deal with this hatred that we are confronted with everywhere in the world, on the street, in our houses, in the media, in the internet, again and again, and that could hit each and everyone of us any time? And still.



Only small steps are possible. Now, as the book has been given up by those who rule the world we can make it our own. Like Cassandra I go and meet the women living alongside the river.¹³ I have a book with me. A book with some writing exercises. A book for meditation. A book telling our story. Without words.

⁸ What a pity, dear Ludwig Wittgenstein, that you could not see and consider this. .

⁹ Michel Serres: Die fünf Sinne. (= The Five Senses) Eine Philosophie der Gemenge und Gemische. Suhrkamp stw 1389, Frankfurt am Main 1998, p. 156 (translated for this essay by u.s.)

¹⁰ Giuseppe Tomasi de Lampedusa: Il Gattopardo. Quoted according to: <<http://www.italialibri.net/opere/gattopardo.html>> (accessed: 14.1.2011)

¹¹ Thank you, Virginia Woolf! (V.W.: Ein Zimmer für sich allein. (= A Room of one’s own.) Berlin 1978)

¹² Quoted according to Raoul Schrott: Gilgamesch. Fischer, Frankfurt am Main 2011 (4. Aufl.), p. 113(f.) (translated for this essay by u.s.)

¹³ Thank you, Christa Wolf! (C.W.: Cassandra. Darmstadt, Neuwied 1983)