

# Space and Time, Remembering and Forgetting

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*On the Video installation "Split (Fragment 1-4)"*

*By Vittorio Santoro*

Vittorio Santoro's work "Split (Fragment 1-4)", 2000-02, consists of four fragments which have already been seen in other exhibitions, either as independent works or as pairs. The self-sufficiency of the four fragments allows them to stand as individual works; at the same time, as fragments of one and the same thing, they can be presented as a combination which is greater than the sum of its parts. When all four fragments are shown together the question always arises as to how they should be arranged, which in turn requires decisions to be made about the way they interact, and above all what the outcome should be.

The exhibition space of the Kleines Helmhaus does not make it particularly easy to arrange an installation. A square space with a strikingly low ceiling and linoleum floor-covering, it seems more like a music room in a 1950s school than a museum. The square floor-plan is above all problematic because it drives visitors into the centre of the room, from where one can see all four walls relatively easily and quickly. This, together with the equally problematic situation of the venue itself – within a museum whose considerably larger main exhibition already starts on the floor below – means that visitors often do no more than glance once round.

The exhibition architecture that Vittorio Santoro has devised for "Split (Fragment 1-4)" responds to these difficult circumstances with an encapsulation that only reveals the actual core of the exhibition little by little. For instance, the audio work "Split (Petra-Fragment 1)" that first reaches our ears – a conversation between two women delighted to see each other again – emits a banal charm but, without any wider context, is also distinctly puzzling. The space where this work is located is, however, hardly a platform to present a first (isolated) fragment: instead, it acts as a bait, as it were getting under the visitors' skin as they arrive. It is only in the second room that the situation becomes clear in retrospect, when it turns out that the dialogue comes from the soundtrack of a clip from Rainer Werner Fassbinder's "Die bitteren Tränen der Petra von Kant". By being anchored in the wider context of the film the audio work alters above all in the sense that the mysterious spell of a moment ago is broken; it is as though Fassbinder's images correct our own imagined scene. At the same time the dialogue gains an entirely new dimension, particularly through the appearance of a witness, standing behind a window with a Venetian blind let down, watching the women talking to each other. As a result, in the second room the actual contents of the dialogue become less important, for now attention turns to the moment of witness, specifically to the suffering of the watching woman at the sight of the intimacy between the two friends meeting again. A Venetian blind in front of the window at the far end of the room acts as a prop, bringing the film-scene to life in the exhibition space at the same time as drawing the visitor into the next room. However, perhaps somewhat unexpectedly, there is no link here to further works: the third room, with its emptiness that one is obliged to cross through, clearly has a delaying function, thereby hinting at a dramaturgy that – as is customary in films, literature and music – operates according to precisely pre-set chronology.

The actual surprise occurs when one finally enters the core of the exhibition, having passed through the three identical rooms along the side walls. In a square room1 "Split (Fragment 3)"

and "Split (Fragment 4)" each show projections of a young man leafing through the pages of a newspaper. What immediately strikes the visitor is the different speeds of what is in effect the same action: in one projection the man leafs hectically through the paper, in the other he turns the pages over in slow motion. The given chronology that has so far been strictly applied in the case of the first two fragments is now suddenly and surprisingly dispelled, and the sole emphasis on the performative act of leafing through a paper, now quickly, now slowly, creates the impression of animated stasis in space. While the time for viewing the first two fragments was clearly prescribed by the length of the narrative, in Fragments 3 and 4 it is suddenly left open. This suspension of time contrasts with the precise and fixed rhythm of the three previous rooms and, heightened by the absolute silence, has a strikingly dramatic effect. It seems that the strict control exercised over the visitor was only there to disintegrate all the more effectively at this point.

The overall disposition of the exhibition thus follows the idea of splitting indicated in the title. It is, however, baffling that the combination of the Petra Fragments 1 and 2 with the newspaper Fragments 3 and 4 in fact "makes sense", although two completely different actions are juxtaposed and, in addition, two very different dramaturgic strategies are adopted. To seek some inner coherence in the love between the two women or in the act of reading the paper would obviously be senseless since the two lovers or the (presumably) betrayed woman are just as interchangeable as the headlines flicking by in the newspapers. The shared crux of all these fragments is to be found less in the subject matter itself than in what the exhibition demonstrates through the staging of these items: different ways of choreographing time. This strategy for translating fundamental time structures into space is impressively effective in the splitting into two of the projection in Fragment 3. Leafing through the paper, or the act of reading, is nothing other than an attempt to appropriate actuality, whereby the physical accentuation of the left half of the picture suddenly turns out to be a metaphor for the interface between the present and the past: in the moment when the page of the newspaper lands in the left half of the picture, it turns from present into past. But this interface, which we ultimately experience as time, is entirely individual: time rushes by or time stands still, exactly as in the contrast here of acceleration and deceleration.

This 'subjectivisation' of our sense of time changes our view of the Petra Fragments 1 and 2 that we encounter again as we make our way out of the exhibition. Now that we know the story, it is all the more noticeable to see how it is endlessly repeated and becomes a version of that which is eternally the same. On one hand, this repetition makes it all the more touching, on the other it makes it as inconsequential as it already seemed in the conversation between the two women in the audio piece. Every story – as an event – has a measurable duration in time, but as a headline in a newspaper it turns into individual memory or oblivion. On this side of the Venetian blind there is still remembrance; on the other side, what once was, has long been forgotten.

*Translation by Fiona Elliott*

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