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Realities in Their Own Right: Fabian Marcaccio's Heterotopias in the Series *Some USA Stories*

“Who *is* a painter, after all? Man is an image maker, and painting is image-making.”
Philip Guston¹

The Dialectic of Digital and Analogue Painting

In his *Paintant Stories*, which Fabian Marcaccio installed as an environment at the Württembergischer Kunstverein in Stuttgart in 2000 before presenting it in slightly modified form at the Kölnischer Kunstverein, one motif ran through the entire panoply of the picture: a grid made of woven ropes.² Since the work was primarily based on a digital print, the grid was able to change smoothly in scale, to superimpose itself on other visual motifs, and even to blend with real paint. In the Cologne version, the artist ended up fraying the ropes and magnifying them to monumental dimensions on the white background, so that the frayed ends mutated as it were into gestural painting. (Ill. 1)

What Marcaccio exposed in this way were the fundamental materials that make up traditional painting: paint and canvas. But what once was strictly divided into the visible and invisible, entered in Marcaccio's work into surprising liaisons and swapped roles. Canvas and paint, specified as fabric and brushstrokes, assumed the character of ciphered motifs that reflected the parameters of a painting as such. Simultaneously the net structure pointed to the invisible *World Wide Web*, quite evidently so because the artist filled the loops in the weave with thousands of miniature motifs: signets, comic figures, corporate logos, cars, and time and again pornographic pictures – a cross-section of the teeming world of images on the Internet.

In his most recent works, which the artist calls *rope paintings*, the metamorphic, cipher-like net is replaced by real nets made of manila rope and climbing lines. While the *Paintant Stories* arouse the viewer's sense of physical awareness simply by their overwhelming format of approximately 4m tall by 100m long, the same experience is prompted in a different way by the *rope paintings*: above all by the tactile presence of the net and the viscosity with which the paint is applied. Marcaccio works with thick alkyds and three-dimensional elements made of coloured silicone.

It would be jumping the gun to assume that this change marks a return from digital to analogue. Walter Seitter observes with respect to the French term 'digital', which literally translates as “fingery”, that “Painting has always been a digital affair”, before turning to the mosaic “as an archaic form of the picture that stubbornly insists on its constitutive digitality”. “*Digital* means discrete or *discontinuous*: every number that appears prevents another number

from appearing. Similarly, *analogue* means: reflecting the continuously variable transition of measured reality in an equally variable way.”³ Accordingly, the author discerns elaborated forms of digital painting in Impressionism and in Paul Cézanne’s coloured “blotches” – and with reference to Marcaccio, one could also add Édouard Vuillard’s middle period, which the artist rates very highly. W. J. T. Mitchell underlines the “dialectical character of the difference between digital and analogue” in his analysis of the paintings of Chuck Close, “which although they simulate the appearance of the digital grid or monitor, treat the individual ‘pixels’ or discrete units as the objects of individual painterly operations, as if each pixel was an abstract painting *en miniature*.”⁴

Seen in this light, the physically woven net allows Marcaccio to create a kind of digital grid that offers the possibility of working with discrete units. And he uses this possibility quite specifically when he squeezes the viscous paint mass through the net from behind. The paint oozes out between the interstices of the net at the front to produce a discontinuous pictoriality. (Ill. 2)

While noticeably different in appearance from Sigmar Polke’s dot paintings, a comparison can be drawn between the procedure used by Marcaccio and that of the German artist, because Polke’s raster grid results in nothing but the dissolution of a continuous visual form into discrete units, made up of dots and gaps. Marcaccio himself speaks with regard to his *rope paintings* of “proto-pixels”⁵, by which he means those paint segments that are visible in the loops of the net. There is also doubtless an analogy to the microstructure in Chuck Close’s paintings, with the difference that the discrete units in Close’s work consist of meticulously painted coloured forms, while in Marcaccio’s work they are produced automatically as it were by the mesh. The individual bolsters of paint are not painted in any way, they arise rather as the more or less homogeneous paint mass is sliced into segments by the grid. The dialectic of digital and analogue arises as a result of this painterly procedure.

It goes without saying that Marcaccio’s new works, which were all done in 2011, present a wealth of “analogue” sections – which is to say smooth transitions between homogeneous masses of paint extending across wide areas. A good example of this can be found in *This Is It* (Ill. XX): with only a little poetic licence, the ‘curtain of paint’ – that cascades in a bleed from red to pink down the entire left third of the painting can be called an *action painting*, done however with the means of the twenty-first century. In order to arrive at such effects, Marcaccio built an extrusion press with interchangeable moulds that allow him to produce different surface structures. (Ill. 3)

Paintants versus Rope Paintings: The Change in Means

The expression *action painting* might at times be misleading: even if it applies to certain sections, it is not right for the pictures as a whole. In point of fact the *rope paintings* are based entirely on *synthetic* procedures. For instance, the artist even adjusts the size of the

woven net to fit the subsequent painting, sometimes changing the size of the loops within the same picture. In addition he uses ropes of different thickness, or changes the direction of the mesh specially for the motif that is to be done, as can clearly be seen for instance in the diagonal row of loops in the region of the flag in *Podium* (Ill. XX). This is then augmented by introducing climbing lines, which tighten the weave and add a splash of polychromy. (Ill. 4) And then he takes oil paint and alkyd, either separate or mixed, and applies them to both sides of the picture support. Finally, configurations made of coloured silicone, which are made beforehand by an outside workshop, are screwed or glued onto the paint mass, and then mixtures of alkyd and silicone which he has produced with an extruder press are worked into the whole. All in all, this is a highly elaborate procedure whose course may change from one picture to the next, depending on the demands involved.

In order to gauge the complexity of his current picture-making procedure, it is useful to take another look at the large *Environmental Paintants* of 2000/2001. The neologism *paintant* is bound up with the artist's associations of "actant, replicant or mutant"⁶; the terms point both to the active role assumed by the viewer and to the biomorphic process simulated by the picture structure. Faced with the *Paintant Stories*, the viewer could only gain an overall view of the work by moving back and forth in front of it, whereby the visual elements themselves determined the speed at which this was done: abrupt visual staccatos commanded deceleration, applications covering larger areas called for acceleration. Parallel to the seemingly cinematographic motion in the pictures, coupled with an at times extreme illusionism, the viewer experienced the picture as alternating between continuity and discontinuity, or as the artist himself would say, as "flow" and "cut" – a by all means film-like experience comparable to the experience of a camera pan and cut.

By comparison, interactions between continuity and discontinuity have only a limited bearing on the *rope paintings*, because the viewer can take in the painting as a whole. To return to *This Is It* for a moment: following the sequence of monumental "brushstrokes" (which as we have seen are manufactured copies of real brushstrokes) is a section in which only the netting can be seen, sparsely covered by discrete particles of paint. The viewer's gaze comes to a standstill at this point, gets trapped by it, only then to be drawn on by the baroque cloud of white, violet and black paint – colours representing the suit worn by singer Michael Jackson. Moving towards the right-hand margin, the paint thins appreciably and once again the loops can be seen in the net. These abrupt changes within such short distances already testify to the complexity of the visual form. What in the *Paintant Stories* produced a transitory, quasi film-like form of perception by virtue of their sheer size, is condensed here to a powerful push and pull which would certainly make its inventor, Hans Hofmann, blench. Viewed this way, even the

polyfocality that was to be found in the *Paintant Stories* is compacted here into the tiniest space.

And yet another decisive change has occurred: whilst in the *paintants*, which are based on digital motifs, quite heterogeneous photographic images and painted overlays melt smoothly to form an illusionistic all-over – exactly as achieved by the technique of montage in film – the latest works with their sharp breaks and elisions once again approach the collage.⁷ The *factum brutum* of the material breaks forth vehemently from the woven network, and with that the resistance to illusionistic space. The latter is largely replaced by the experience of physical spatiality. And indeed, the *rope paintings* are first and foremost painted reliefs; viewed from the side, they jut out as much as 20 centimetres into space. They consist not only of the paint mass, but also the three-dimensional appliqués made of silicone: pictorial elements with a tangible quality that outstrips even Marcaccio's early works. But only at a certain distance to the picture body do these illusionistic elements come into action, giving not only a representational reading but also triggering a certain bewilderment about what is being shown.

Astonishingly, Marcaccio achieves switching effects in this field that would be more expected from standard representational painting. Let us look at the pop star's jacket with its silver adornments in *This Is It*: when we look at the space between his arm and legs, suddenly a candle emerges from the coloured paint. What initially looked like a mere interstice, a gap, transforms all of a sudden into a motif with form, and this new reading also affects the silver adornments, for now they represent the smoke from the candle.

With this new reading, the artist is going against the "King of Pop's" pompous airs, which have been digitally conserved for all posterity⁸. He taints his glamour with the tint of death that is contained in the old vanitas symbol: the gutting candle, which is the proverbial symbol for ebbing life. In this way the artist has created a necrological portrait, such as we know from the era of Mannerism. When Jacopo Pontormo was commissioned by Lorenzo de' Medici to paint the portrait of his departed grandfather, Cosimo de' Medici, known as Il Vecchio (1398-1464), he dressed the painted figure in a bright red coat whose folds left no doubts that it was just an *empty* shell: the portrait, which was done around 1518/1519 (Ill. 5) and today resides in the Uffizi, shows the "Pater Patriae" quite clearly as a hybrid between living and dead.⁹ This hybridity is also to be found in *This Is It*, in the transition from the exuberant streaks of red on the left-hand side to the somewhat muted, cold, modulated colours on the right, which already announce the process of putrefaction.

(Hi)story, Told from the Endpoint

This Is It can be seen as the overture to a series of paintings which Marcaccio has called *Some USA Stories*. In terms both of motif and atmosphere it should be placed next to the

painting *Limo* (Ill. XX). Once again the work is about luxury and glamour, even if simply on short loan. But Marcaccio similarly undermines this icon of US-American prosperity: the red carpet that has been rolled out before the limousine is literally full of holes and has a conspicuous green patch, while the red forces its way out of the holey formation like a stream of rags. The stretch limousine constitutes a privileged zone of mobility that promises no visual intrusion from outside but an all-round view from within – seeing without being seen. We are reminded of Erick Packer, the billionaire hero of Don DeLillo’s *Cosmopolis* who conducted his reckless stock market speculations from a white limousine while his chauffeur drove him around Manhattan at walking pace. When at the end of his business trip he encounters his murderer, the latter tellingly says that he is now living “offline”. The brittleness of this illusory world has also seeped into Marcaccio’s *Limo* – a journey with no return.

This can also be said in another way about Jim Jones, who set out in 1970 with the followers of the “Peoples Temple” to Guyana in order to live along the lines of a socialist commune. “Jonestown”, wrested from the jungle and euphemistically titled the “Peoples Temple Agricultural Project”, functioned for a while as a place of refuge for social outcasts on the strength of donations and self-subsistence. But ultimately the ever-increasing paranoia of its charismatic leader transformed the commune into a prison camp, so that any attempt to leave was punished as an act of treason against its founder and his cause. When the congressman Leo Ryan was prompted by reports to visit Jonestown in November 1978 with a team of journalists, his initial impression was of a large happy family. But one by one the members of the cult slipped him notes telling him of their plight. The mood suddenly swung through 180 degrees; Ryan and four other team members were murdered before they could reach the safety of their aeroplane. Jones, facing imminent sanctions and unable to see any way out, ordered a mass suicide which has gone down in the annals: parents gave their children potassium cyanide and then poisoned themselves. On November 18, 1978, 909 members of the cult died, including 303 children.¹⁰

Marcaccio shows the leader in his painting *Jim Jones* (Ill. XX) as a kind of negative pope, marked like a priest by the shiny white vestments and a bright pink stole. To the left his garments have mutated into a kind of technoid formation that gives the figure an almost extraterrestrial look. A couple of coarse streaks of paint characterise the protagonist’s face. Also noticeable is the open, cavernous, lobular shape beside his sunglasses. This spot acts as a kind of second face that descends on the picture like a phantasm. The head abruptly reveals itself as a skull, a mutation which has not a little of a horror film about it. (Ill. 6) With that the outcome of the events is already sketched out: the false pope appears as a zombie. The netting emerges on all sides behind the gaudy, bilious colours, and its translucency seems here to provide the sense of *decorum* for the depiction.¹¹ The physicality of the cult leader simply crumbles into the holes of the net.

Waco, Ruby Ridge and the Bounds of Representation

There are a lot of bodies in Marcaccio's U.S. American suite: some are the result of heinous crimes – with the mass suicide ordered in Jonestown clearly assuming the ignominious pinnacle – and some have entered history as crimes committed by the state. Doubtless the epitome of these was the siege of Waco, Texas. That was the place where the Branch Davidians had settled, a sect that was dedicated to restoring the Kingdom of David and for that reason flew the Star of David on its flag. Following rumours about illegal firearms possession and alleged child abuse, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (BATF) attempted on 28 February 1993 to search their headquarters in Mount Carmel. But the Davidians interpreted the advance of the BATF as the dawn of the Day of Judgement: shots were exchanged in which four BATF agents and six Davidians were killed. Reinforcements were brought in from the FBI and the camp was placed under siege for 51 days, in which the whole gamut of psychological warfare was employed.¹² The storming of the compound by means of army tanks and combat engineering vehicles on 19 April 1993 ended in disaster: the buildings caught fire, and a further 76 men, women and children died in the flames or from shot wounds.¹³ All of this happened in full view of a global audience, as represented by any number of camera teams, even if they were kept well away from the centre of events.

Nor does Marcaccio show any details in his painting, *Waco* (Ill. XX). The work is almost like an abstract. The title alone enables us to decipher the events: at the centre of the picture is the burning ranch, its flames turning into clouds of bluish-black smoke. The bird's-eye perspective recalls the official aerial photographs of the First Gulf War, which always presented the destruction to us as a *fait accompli*. In keeping with this, the grid assumes another quality here: it triggers associations with military grid squares, which help the machinery of destruction find its targets.

But is that really a burning building we see? Viewed from afar, the image clearly merges with the memory of the aerial shot that has circulated on the Internet.¹⁴ But at a normal distance one can scarcely deny the high level of abstraction involved. What one may well imagine to be a representational picture breaks down into coloured details. But the meaning of the painting lies in precisely this alternation. Because as before, the artist views the disaster from its endpoint: what once had seemed real and tangible, had triggered a tide of detailed accounts, statements and outrage, vanishes with the passing of historical time into a mere juxtaposition of facts and fancies. Roland Barthes has described this process as the principle of *myth*, which “transforms history into nature.”¹⁵ This metamorphosis is a theme that runs throughout Marcaccio's painting.

Much the same is true of *Ruby Ridge* (Ill. XX). The picture of a simple door window, as bright as it seems, says nothing of the bloodbath that occurred in August 1992 in the forest of North Idaho. The White Separatist Randy Weaver had retired there so as

to turn his back on a world he considered to be full of sin. Following a denunciation made by a neighbour, the family was kept under observation for several months before FBI marksmen killed first Weaver's son and then his wife, before gravely injuring Weaver himself. As with Waco, the assault by the state authorities was widely discussed in the media and by various committees of inquiry, and Weaver and his daughters received over 1 million dollars in compensation.¹⁶

Although the disparate colouration of the painting has something unsettling about it, only the cracked pane and the hole in the window actually point to an act of violence – and even these motifs only first appear as relevant once the title of the picture has been read. As such, the artist demarcates as in none of his other works the boundaries of the historical painting. These boundaries have already been referred to by Bertold Brecht with regard to documentary photography: “The situation is complicated by the fact that less than ever does the mere reflection of reality reveal anything about reality. A photograph of the Krupp works or the A.E.G. tells us nothing about these institutions. Actual reality has slipped into the functional. The reification of human relations – the factory, say – mean that they are no longer explicit.”¹⁷

Much in keeping with Marcaccio's concerns, the American photographer Joel Sternfeld published a book in 1996 entitled *On this Site – Landscape in Memoriam*, which shows fifty crime scenes spread across the USA: photographs of quiet, unspectacular places whose tragedies are only revealed by the brief texts that accompany them. As with Marcaccio, the question is raised of how far the collective memory is able to extend and to what extent visual representation alone remains silent.¹⁸

US-American Mentalities: Excesses of Power, Violence and Paranoia

It is clear that some of the works in Marcaccio's cycle of paintings describe not so much an occurrence as a particular mentality. These include *This Is It* as well as *Limo*; and it also applies to *Militia* (Ill. XX): we see here a family or group dressed in military fatigues that belongs to the circles of the “Hutaree”, militant Christian fundamentalists who describe themselves as warriors of God and go about their dark business in the forests of Michigan.¹⁹ When looking at the group portrait one is inevitably reminded of Hannah Arendt's phrase about the “banality of evil”²⁰, which she coined with reference to mass murderer Adolf Eichmann. As in other portraits in the series, the artist succeeds in partly refashioning the faces in the group as members of the living dead: lurking behind the merry grins in the front row is pure horror in the second. And not by chance has the grid decomposed at this point; the artist comes close here to *bricolage* – a metaphor for the shoddily cobbled-together world picture of the protagonists, who are deeply enmeshed in it. Similarly the climbing lines that have been integrated into the picture give an indication of their willingness to take risks, which also is conveyed by their military kit.

The counterpart to *Militia* can be found in *Liberation Theology Christ* (Ill. XX). After first developing as a Christian movement for the poor and oppressed in South America, it has transformed in the United States into a crucible for political phantasmagorias which help the Christian fundamentalists and their militias justify their obscure ideas and actions, all with the one goal of abolishing the allegedly Zionist-controlled state powers. With *Liberation Theology Christ*, Marcaccio has erected a negative monument to these kinds of ideology – and it is already showing every sign of decay. A semi-automatic weapon slung round its neck and wearing a kind of camouflage loincloth, the body of the crucified Christ is already in the process of putrefying – the skin of his body is literally hanging down in tatters. (The artist did not miss the chance to personally model the silicon, which genuinely looks like raw flesh.) Apart from which, the body has that crude fleshiness one knows from zombie movies, while the intestines have the technoid look of a cyborg – *bricolage* both in an image of Christ and in the ideology of his worshippers.

Two further victims of just such ideologies have been captured by the artist in the painting *Eric & Dylan* (Ill. XX). “I am the gun. A Wildey 45 semi-automatic. I am god. I kill people. I was never made for hunting, just to kill humans. When someone needs to die, I kill them,”²¹ - words found on a note somewhere in the diary of the two perpetrators Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, 18 and 17 respectively. When they ran amok at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, on 20 April 1999 (at the same recurring interval as the massacres in Waco and Oklahoma), they killed 13 of their fellow pupils and teachers before shooting themselves.

Fabian Marcaccio has based his picture on a police photograph that shows the two of them as they were found in the school library. Here the artist maintains a balance between abstraction and representation, allowing the scene to be recognisable. Two lifeless corpses, streaming with blood, are lying straight out or slightly crooked in front of a bookcase; to the lower right the hand of one perpetrator still rests on his weapon. Unlike *Militia*, Marcaccio has refused to demonise the two of them in any way. As such, the work recalls the great depictions of Christ’s Passion and death in Western painting, such as the crumpled body of Christ and Mary in Roger van der Weyden’s *Descent from the Cross* (1435-1440, Ill. 7) at the Prado in Madrid, which in a parallel way symbolised the compassion felt for suffering. Or one is reminded of Édouard Manet’s detached depiction of the *Dead Toreador* (1864-1865, Ill. 8) at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. To the same extent that Marcaccio’s work continues this tradition, he distances himself from the contemporary historical event.

Significantly, in *Eric & Dylan* the artist has strung climbing ropes from the upper margin of the painting – partly via a kind of built-in tunnel – down to the arm on the right-hand side and over the body on the left – as if the perpetrators were marionettes strung to something outside of the picture: metaphors for the ideological entanglements

which simultaneously make victims of the actors. A pendant to this can be seen in the stack of slit-open books, which loom quite plastically out from the upper left hand corner of the painting; they symbolise the ideological trash that led to the deed.

All that it is to be found in the works *Waco*, *Ruby Ridge*, *Jim Jones* and *Eric & Dylan* comes to a head in *Corpse* (Ill. XX), in a moloch of death. Culminating in this living corpse are all the excesses of raging paranoia, whether the apocalyptic death wishes of the Davidians or the morbid delusions of grandeur entertained by the Columbine schoolkids. As such this painting is the writing on the wall that reflects on the whole series of paintings. And simultaneously it is the direct counterpart to *Breaking News* (Ill. XX), a painting which threatens literally to burst asunder under the sheer surfeit of information: for those who have bidden final farewell to the human world and entered the downward spiral of death, the burgeoning network of the media has every conceivable justification at the ready.

In *Breaking News*, Marcaccio manages to combine all the possibilities contained in his *rope paintings*. With this combination of manila rope and climbing lines, eccentric flicks of the brush and broad streaks of paint, technoid silicone appliqués, alkyd paint applied from behind so as to protrude through the net like oversized plastic pixels, and finally the interaction between painting and lettering, we experience a resurgence of the gestural abstractionism of for instance Willem de Kooning in 21st century wraps. Because however synthetic the means, the work has more than enough spontaneous action to justify the comparison. Looking at the reality of the mass media, it is illuminating that the word “LIVE” is turned by Marcaccio into precisely its opposite; it signals never-ending, tortuous duration.

The word “DISASTER”, however, points to the spiritually-related painting *Fallujah* (Ill. XX); once again, the painting is full of disparate information. On 31 March 2004, in the Iraqi town of the same name – a hotbed of Sunni resistance against the US occupying forces – four mercenaries from the private security and military contractor “Blackwater Worldwide” were killed and their charred, mutilated bodies hung from a bridge over the River Euphrates. The painting places a suspended body right next to an oversized hand stretching up triumphantly in a victory-sign – in keeping with the catchword that did the rounds among the insurgents after the incident: “Fallujah is the graveyard of Americans.”²² In point of fact the desecration of the corpses marked a turning point in the Second Iraq War. For this reason, the artist has chosen from all the countless reports and visual documents precisely the one beacon of hope that announced *post festum* the withdrawal of the US troops from Iraq. Once again we see how Marcaccio approaches history from its outcome.

The superpower responds with a sonorous voice to the din of the city – without any noises off. For his painting *Podium* (Ill. XX), Marcaccio has concentrated on the moment that immediately precedes a presidential address. And he has given the insignia

of power, the Stars and Stripes, its own dedicated space in the form of a separate grid which, in keeping with the alignment of the flag, is set at a diagonal, while the rest of the grid is more or less orthogonal. Five microphones have been placed on the rostrum, and tense silence rules on all sides. The artist has masterfully staged the mute feeling of expectation: over a wide swathe he has dabbed the open picture support with sparsely distributed dots of whitish-blue paint. They evoke the charged atmosphere that attends such occasions: the quiet eye of the hurricane that the state authorities are ready to unleash at any time and at any point on the globe. Stronger than the appearance of any one person, the handful of components in this picture symbolise the real apparatus of power, which is invested in the attributes themselves and thus remains unaffected by changes in personnel.

Presumably most art connoisseurs will look at *Podium* and at once think of Jasper Johns's *Flag* (1954), which resides in the Museum of Modern Art, New York, and is among the most celebrated post-war paintings in the USA. But Johns was largely interested in an academic question concerning the degree of reality in painting: how can a heraldic symbol simultaneously be an abstract painting?²³ Marcaccio's work, for all its painterly finesse, is by contrast a socio-political image through and through – like the cycle as a whole.

Paradigms of Contemporary Historical Painting

Since Marcaccio's *USA Stories* focus equally on historical events and historically determined frames of mind, they once again raise questions about the status and paradigms of contemporary historical painting. Every artist who has tackled the current situation in their lifeworld is faced with the dilemma that the "new media", as Hans Magnus Enzensberger has stated, offer mere "shreds and shards of data",²⁴ while simultaneously they all contain relevant information. "Perhaps the most important common trait running through them", says Niklas Luhmann, "is that, in the process of producing information, the mass media simultaneously set up a horizon of self-generated uncertainty which is to be serviced with ever more information."²⁵ This mechanism is cut short by the historical painting; it requires a form of selection and distancing from the flow of events and information, so that a historical truth may be generated from its own ground.

In the early 1960s, Gerhard Richter and Sigmar Polke developed, independently of one another, painting methods that coped with the way the mass media split up the visual world, and that gave painting its own means of self-reflection. Richter's blurring technique and Polke's raster dots dissolved the media landscape they encountered, allowing it then to be pieced back together by means of painting. Unlike the actual media that are used, this approach to painting raises the question of what we think we see, and how we interpret what we do see.

At the same time Andy Warhol successfully employed silk-screening to refashion static images as quasi-film sequences and juxtapose them with empty coloured panels – in another form of media critique.²⁶ In the early 1970s Philip Guston employed a comic-like form of imagery in order to discredit the martial activities of the Ku Klux Klan. In the feigned merriness of his grotesque images, he revealed the political terror under its middle-class guise.²⁷ Fabian Marcaccio is more than aware of these developments, because they constitute the mental horizons for his own painted inventions.

When in 1988, ten years after the sudden demise of the German terror cell the Baader-Meinhof Gruppe, Gerhard Richter painted the series *18. Oktober 1977* (now in the Museum of Modern Art, New York), he did the works solely in shades of grey. Compared to his earlier works, the grey now came across as decorum: it was the colour that seemed meet and right for the monstrous topic: the violent death of three inmates in a German prison.²⁸ Given that the series was shown at the same place – Museum Haus Esters, Krefeld – where Marcaccio's *USA Stories* is now on show, it is instructive to make a comparison. Not least because there is a formal resemblance between the posture of the dead bodies in Richter's *Man Shot Down I* (Ill. 9) and the bodies in Marcaccio's *Eric & Dylan* - one that makes the differences between the two artists' approaches to painting all the more clear. Richter's method of blurring removes the work a mere breath away from the photograph it is based on; yet this minimal distance suffices to switch the feeling while looking at it from "horror", as the artist himself says, to "sorrow".²⁹ During this transformation the painting removes itself from the realm of current events and assumes a place, as is true with Marcaccio, among the portraits of the dead in art history.

Territorialisation and Heterotopia

Unlike Richter, Marcaccio's *Eric & Dylan* presents – as has been described – a whole host of painterly inventions that illuminate the complex event in a new way. These include fraying the grid structure, weaving in climbing lines, slitting open book pages, and the relief-like construction of the bleeding head - beneath which the inside seems to evert to become the outside. And last but not least the open mesh of the net, which allows the narrow layer of space to become visible behind, shows that we are dealing with a completely *synthetic construct* that does not lay the slightest claim to authenticity. And therein lies the picture's strength, as is indeed true of the entire cycle of Marcaccio's US pictures. He is in the process of radically removing himself from the reality of the media, so as to produce a reality in its own right with his very own painting tools. With this, he manages to territorialize the event within the unbroken flow of the media. The resilience of the materials, the sluggish flow demonstrates the incommensurable stubbornness of the painted picture compared to the transitoriness of the media.

With this territorialization, Marcaccio also creates however "heterotopian" spaces for these political subjects: places that have the "curious property of being in relation

with all the others, but in such a way as to suspend, neutralize, or invert the set of relationships designed, reflected, or mirrored by themselves”, as Michel Foucault describes it.³⁰ It is this perspective of the heterotopias, as visualised in the paintings, that first enables a proper perception of the social themes that are based on them.

One could also describe, however, the manner in which the *rope paintings* work via social themes as being like a palimpsest. Because only once the outgoing images have been erased do they find their way – thanks to complex painterly operations – in altered form back into the picture body.³¹ With his dark, violently charged topics, Fabian Marcaccio has created a wide-ranging panorama of US-American realities which match in their intensity Sigmar Polke’s US-American panorama *History of Everything*³².

And when Marcaccio signs off with the painting *Firing Squad Wall* (Ill. XX), which has been mounted on the outside wall of Mies’s villa - showing in fact that very wall in a shattered state, riddled with bullets - he goes one step further than his colleague William Anastasi forty-five years ago. In 1967, Anastasi photographed the empty west wall of the Dwan Gallery in New York, complete with ventilator grilles and electric sockets, and silkscreened the images onto an enormous canvas which he then mounted on the selfsame wall.³³ Marcaccio himself also brought the wall into play in his early works, as for instance in *The Altered Genetics of Painting #5* (1992-1993, Ill. 10), inasmuch as they still bore traces of paint from the painting, and thus took part in the work’s extension.

The new painting, *Firing Squad Wall*, turns out to be a palimpsest in the true sense of the word. It erases the wall beneath it, so as to replace it with a hybrid configuration that is both on the real wall of Villa Esters and simultaneously points to its phantasmal counterpart. In all likelihood this phantasmal counterpart, which prompts us to picture a firing squad at work, has its real location in Germany during the Nazi era – or everywhere in the world where dictators continue to demonstrate their power by such means. With that the artist points out that the US-American themes of violence are not merely restricted to the territory of the superpower. Most likely they are everywhere.

Text illustrations

1 Fabian Marcaccio, *Paintant Stories*, 2000, partial view of the installation at the Kölnischer Kunstverein 2001

2 Fabian Marcaccio, *Breaking News*, 2011, detail (unfinished)

3 Marcaccio’s extrusion press, work samples

4 Fabian Marcaccio, *Breaking News*, 2011 (unfinished)

5 Jacopo Pontormo, *Cosimo dé Medici Il Vecchio*, around 1518/1519, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence

6 Fabian Marcaccio, *Jim Jones*, 2011 (detail)

7 Roger van der Weyden, *The Descent from the Cross*, 1435-1440, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid

8 Édouard Manet, *Dead Torrero*, 1864-1865, National Gallery of Art in Washington, D. C.

9 Gerhard Richter, *Erschossener I / Man Shot Down I*, 1988, from the series *October 18, 1977*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York

10 Fabian Marcaccio, *The Altered Genetics of Painting #5*, 1992-1993

¹ Philip Guston in conversation with Dore Ashton, in Dore Ashton, *Yes, but... . A critical study of Philip Guston*. New York, 1976, p. 159

² Exh. cat. *Fabian Marcaccio, Paintant Stories*, ed. Martin Hentschel and Udo Kittelmann, Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart, Kölnischer Kunstverein; Bielefeld, 2000. The ensemble of works has meanwhile entered the Daros-Latinamerica Collection, Zurich.

³ Walter Seitter, "Painting has always been a digital affair", in exh. cat. *Painting pictures: painting and media in the digital age*, Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg; Bielefeld, 2003, pp. 30–35.

⁴ See W. J. T. Mitchell, "Realism and the Digital Image", in Jan Baetens et al, *Critical Realism in Contemporary Art: Around Alan Sekula's Photography*, Leuven University Press, 2006, pp. 12-27

⁵ From the digitally recorded discussion with the author in the artist's studio, 03. 11. 2011.

⁶ Fabian Marcaccio, *Paintant Stories*, documentos daros 1, ed. by Hans-Michael Herzog, Zurich, 2005, p. 86.

⁷ Marcaccio remarked with regard to the *Paintant Stories*: "It comes from the multiple heterogeneity of collage, moving to a new type of continuous, homogenous media integration." Udo Kittelmann in conversation with Fabian Marcaccio, in exh. cat. *Fabian Marcaccio, Paintant Stories* (see note 1), p. 57

⁸ Michael Jackson, *This Is It*, directed by Kenny Ortega, DVD and Blue-ray disk. Columbia Pictures, Sony Pictures Home Entertainment 2009.

⁹ This ambiguity is also mirrored in the attribute of the laurel branch that has been cut off on one side, but is putting out new shoots on the other, and with a banderol bearing a citation from Virgil: UNO AVULSO NON DEFICIT ALTER (When one is plucked away, another shall not be wanting). Cf. Doris Krystof, *Pontormo*, Cologne, 1998, p. 78.

¹⁰ A useful source is Stanley Nelson's film *Jonestown – Life and Death of the Peoples Temple* (2006), on *YouTube*.

¹¹ The concept of 'decorum' developed from the Greek term 'prepon' and was translated by Goethe as "das Schickliche" – that which is meet and proper. With the Stoic philosopher Panaetius, the 'prepon' was "broadened and deepened in a new way that had consequences for all times", for it became "a basic concept of ethics" while "simultaneously emphasising the 'aesthetic' side." Alste Horn-Oncken, *Über das Schickliche. Studien zur Geschichte der Architekturtheorie.* (= Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen. Philologisch-Historische Klasse. Dritte Folge, Nr. 70) Göttingen, 1967, p. 95.

¹² Among other impositions, the inhabitants were barraged with Nancy Sinatra's song "These Boots Are Made For Walking", which includes the refrain: "one of these days these boots are gonna walk all over you", and an even more explicit allusion: "You keep playing where you shouldn't be playing and you keep thinking that you'll never get burnt. Ha! I just found me a brand new box of matches, yeah...".

¹³ See Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States*, New York, 2005. Timothy McVeigh, the man responsible for the Oklahoma bombing exactly 2 years later, on 19 April 1995, at which 168 people died, later explained in an interview: "I didn't define the rules of engagement in this conflict. The rules, if not written down, are defined by the aggressor. It was brutal, no holds barred. Women and children were killed at Waco and Ruby Ridge. You put back in [the government's] faces exactly what they're giving out." Cited on: www.historycommons.org/timeline (which includes other extensive sources on the Waco siege).

¹⁴ Unlike many other events in American history, the Internet sources for this are highly contradictory. American Internet users have noticed that a large number of original sources and eye witness accounts have been erased. Probably the best documentation is from William Gazecki: "Waco: The Rules of Engagement" (1997), on *YouTube*.

¹⁵ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, ed. and trans. Annette Lavers, New York, 1983, p. 129

¹⁶ See for instance “Randy Weaver: Siege at Ruby Ridge”, by David Lohr, at www.trutv.com (undated)

¹⁷ Bertold Brecht, cited in Walter Benjamin, “A Short History of Photography”, translated by Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter, in Benjamin, *One Way Street and Other Writings*, London, 1992, pp. 240-257, here p. 255

¹⁸ Gerhard Richter’s publication *War Cut*, Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Cologne, 2004, takes however the opposite route. The artist photographed 216 details from his abstract painting *Nr. 648-2* from 1987 (Paris, Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris) and combined the photos with texts that appeared on 20 and 31 March 2003, at the beginning of the Second Iraq War, in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. The experiment raised the question as to what extent historical snapshots in the form of reports are able to give our perceptions of abstract motifs a representational twist.

¹⁹ “Krieg gegen den Antichristen in Washington,” www.welt.de dated 31. 03. 2010

²⁰ Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, (first edition 1963), New York, 2006.

²¹ Cited from: “Criminals Are Made, Not Born: Eric and Dylan’s Journals, <http://forums.superherohype.com/showthread.php?t=296976>, p. 12

²² See for instance: Jeffrey Gettleman, “Enraged Mob in Falluja Kills 4 American Contractors”, in: <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/03/31/international/worldspecial/31CND-IRAQ.html?pagewanted=all>

²³ As has been analysed in depth by Max Imdahl, “‘Is It a Flag, or Is It a Painting?’ Über mögliche Konsequenzen der konkreten Kunst”, in Imdahl, *Gesammelte Schriften, Bd. 1: Zur Kunst der Moderne*, hrsg. und eingeleitet von Angeli Janhsen-Vukićević, Frankfurt a. M. 1996, pp. 131-180

²⁴ Hans Magnus Enzensberger, “Das digitale Evangelium”, in *Der Spiegel*, Nr. 2, 10. 01. 2000, p. 97.

²⁵ Niklas Luhmann, *The Reality of the Mass Media*, translated by Kathleen Cross, Cambridge, 2000, p.82.

²⁶ As for example the work *Mustard Race Riot* (1963), reproduced in exh. cat. *Andy Warhol: Retrospektive*, ed Kynaston McShine, Museum Ludwig, Cologne; Munich, 1989, p. 266.

²⁷ See for instance Hentschel, “From Abstraction to the Figurative: Philip Guston’s Stony Path” in exh. cat. *Philip Guston, Gemälde 1947-1979*, Kunstmuseen Bonn, Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa; Ostfildern, 1999, pp. 47-59

²⁸ See Hentschel, “Gerhard Richter, Museum Haus Esters”, in *Artforum*, May 1989, p. 167.

²⁹ “It’s supposed to be different. Maybe I can put a name to it. Here, take this example, I would say the photo generates *horror*, whereas the picture of the same subject evokes *sorrow*. That would come very close to my intention.” “Gerhard Richter / Jan Thorn-Prikker, *Ruminations on 18. Oktober 1977 Cycle*”, in *Parkett*, No. 19, March 1989, p. 145.

³⁰ Foucault, Michel. “Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias,” in Joan Ockman, ed., *Architecture Culture 1943-1968*. New York, Rizzoli International Press, 1993. pp. 419-426 here p. 421

³¹ For the concept of the palimpsest see Klaus Krüger, “Das Bild als Palimpsest”, in Hans Belting, (ed.): *Bilderfragen. Die Bildwissenschaften im Aufbruch*, Munich, 2007, pp. 133-163.

³² Exh. cat. *Sigmar Polke. History of Everything. Paintings and Drawings 1998 – 2003*, Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, Tate Modern, London, 2004

³³ See Brian O’Doherty, *Inside the White Cube. The Ideology of the Gallery Space*. San Francisco 1986, pp. 32, 34