

Kramar, Thomas. 'Forever the black smoke blows in Krems' [Auto-translated from German]. *Die Presse* Online. 26 April 2018



Forever the black smoke blows in Krems

In the nineties it was in vogue to state ends. Today one fears the "endless present": this is the motto of this year's Danube Festival. How postmodern is that? Or is it again - modern?



The virtual source never runs dry: "Western Flag (Spindletop, Texas)", video by John Gerrard. –
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It was an anticipated, much-anticipated eruption: on January 10, 1901, oil spewed from a well at Spindletop Hill (southeast Texas), yes: to splash. Two months later, the nearby town of Beaumont was a boomtown and its population tripled.

The Irish artist John Gerrard recalls the time when oil spilled on Spindletop Hill. In his video installation "Western Flag (Spindletop, Texas)" he simulates that this source would never run dry, would never run out, but only bring more dirt, not juice for traffic and industry: black smoke is constantly pouring out of the jets, into shape a flag.

Gerrard suggests a trivial interpretation. "Among the greatest legacies of the 20th century are not only the population explosion and the better living conditions, but also the significantly increased CO2 concentrations in the atmosphere," he writes: "This flag gives this invisible gas, this international danger, a picture, a way to represent oneself."

Heaven is where nothing happens

Thomas Edlinger, Director of the Danube Festival, now places Gerrard's video installation in Krems in a new context of meaning - as an illustration of this year's theme: "Endless Presence". The Now, explains Edlinger in the foreword, "puffs up to an imperious continuum under capitalist conditions": "Nothing really ends, but nothing starts again."

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Anyone who - like Edlinger - was socialized in pop culture in the New Wave era, has in mind the big, so easy and sad song "Heaven" of the Talking Heads. David Byrne sings "Heaven is a place where nothing ever happens" and "When this kiss is over, it wants to start again, it will not be any different, it will be exactly the same."

That was in 1979, when punk modernism gradually began to transform itself into post-punk post-punk, as the first began to suspect: the dawn can not last, an (aesthetic) revolution can not be prolonged ad libitum. Modernity is an epoch like any other, and it does not necessarily come back when postmodernity is over.

Or is it? "Modernity is in every epoch, and every epoch in modern times," claimed German art historian Walter Grasskamp. Whoever speaks of epochs - and that is what the Occidentals have been doing since the Middle Ages, when they saw it as the time between Christ's death from salvation and the Last Judgment - think modern, chronically modern.

"Everything seen, everything already experienced"

Even at a festival of the avant-garde - and this is the Danube Festival, even if the word has lost its strength like the oil wells in Texas - you feel fundamentally modern, think of departure, and it has something tragicomic, if you do more from year to year Feeling that the risings have become as serial as the kisses in the "Heaven" of the Talking Heads.

The smart Edlinger has made exactly this insight this year to the program. "The loop or the eternal return of the new" is the motto of a discussion, and in the program begins the description of the films of Anna Vasof with the sentence: "Everything seen, everything already experienced."

Of course, the defiant conjurations of the present, of the now, which paradoxically sound quite similar to its damnation. "The Endless Now", is the sleepy folk by Grouper described, right next to it in the program is about the (actually protracted) retreat of the Canadian ensemble "Godspeed You! Black Emperor ":" Music as self-enhancement, as a great denial and as a protest against the now. "

Sky! How nice that the refusal is again or still there. "Grim Rage" and "Endless No" is credited to Justin Broadrick and Kevin Martin, who have been performing for many, many years in formations with names like Techno Animal, Napalm Death or Godflesh, to the delight of eccentric gentlemen who have been dogma since the late eighties, that it's the same with music as it is with medicine: it must taste bitter, otherwise it will not help.

Industrial people used to like to call such music, and that brings us back to Spindletop Hill, where oil production declined in 1902 and was discontinued in 1936. Sulfur was still produced in the dried-up oil well until 1975, and today there is only a boomtown museum there. This oil rush is history. (Like the burning oil wells in the Iraq war of 1991, some of which were flawed, they would burn for decades.) They were soon extinguished.)

History like the end of history that Francis Fukuyama proclaimed in 1992, the end of physics (David Lindley, 1994), the end of science (John Horgan, 1997), and so on. You could say: The time of the ends is already over, now threatens the endlessness.

Who remembers the heat death?

And then again an end: The "perpetuation of the present," according to Edlinger in his foreword to the festival, may already be "the disaster that allows us to pass tipping points of system stability - for example with regard to financial markets or climate change."

Paradox: Today, in - alleged - stagnation, in equilibrium we fear the sudden tilt, the imbalance. In times that were perceived as more agile, directed, progressive, many feared equilibrium, including the thermodynamic. Who still remembers the heat death? The vision of the end of the world through a perfect balance in which nothing can move anymore? In the sixties she was in the mind, also as a metaphor for the soul life. Even Konrad Lorenz warned against the "heat of feeling".

Thus the apocalyptic fears change their form but remain in substance. "Their ghostly voice settles over the distorted sounds like recitations of damnation", we read in the program booklet about a female "post-industrial-act" (sic!)

THOMAS DANE GALLERY

Called Puce Mary: "Musical Existentialism in the End-time Garb."

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11 DUKE STREET, ST JAMES'S, LONDON SW1Y 6BN

TEL: +44 (0)20 7925 2505 FAX: +44 (0)20 7925 2506 info@thomasdanegallery.com