



Katja Strunz

Camden Arts Centre / December 2009 — March 2010

File Note #46 **Katja Strunz** *Sound of the Pregeometric Age*



Ariane Müller

Pregeometric Shells of a Rational Curve of Degree 5

Looking up the term pregeometric in Katja Strunz's title and delving into the few hints proposed by the internet leaves me dizzy and slightly confused. It reminds me of the feeling I had when the universe was explained to me in school. It was a hot summer day and around noon. I was staring out of the window from the physics studio of my school on the fourth floor down into the neighbouring Schreber garden colony, feeling lost and also terrified. Space, time and movement in the dimensions described by the teacher distorted the visible reality of the small huts baking under the sun. I must have been ten years old. I also remember the faint feeling that it was unfair to be kicked out into this indefinite space.

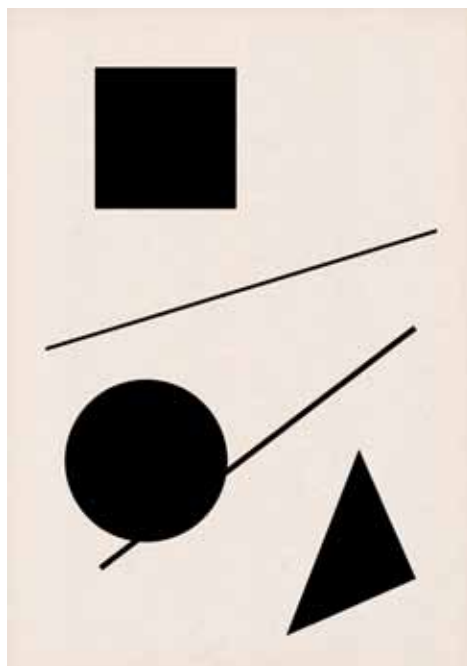
Pregeometric is not a common term, but one may find it, or invent it, if one needed to describe a time before. But before what exactly? It's certainly a sentimental feeling of beforeness anyway. One can read it as purely imaginative, maybe even comforting, or a sort of Walden term. Or remember a personal time when space, for example the space of a piece of paper, was not conceivable and making words or drawings on it would invariably blow the given structure of the rectangle. Words had to bend and bow towards the edges, and drawings would never fit, having started them too high, or low, or already outside the given sheet.

We could also take an ancient Roman story, that a visitor to one of Katja's exhibitions was reminded of, about a group of shipwrecked people who, on landing on an island would know that there must have been, or perhaps still is, human intelligence when finding forms ruled by geometry.

Einladung zur Angst (detail) 2005 / Various metals
Dimensions variable / Photo: Freddy Le Saux

In physics the term *pregeometric age* is an attempt to describe the time and space before space and time. As John Archibald Wheeler the American physicist put it, ‘Something deeper than geometry, that underlies both geometry and particles. For ultimately revealing this structure, no perspective seems more promising than the view that it must provide the Universe with a way to come into being.’ Something that, although it has no time and space, no matter and fields, is more than nothing. It is not nothing because it had the potential to provide the Universe with a way to come into being.

I have learnt that the limits of physics are defined by what physicists call singularity. Physics touches on metaphysics when we think of calculations that tend towards zero, which means, that there is no problem, at least no quantifiable one. To physically explain a singularity, you need a parallel system. To physically describe a pregeometric system you need a parallel universe.



Untitled 2006 / Collage / 31 X 21 cm / Photo: Markus Hannes
 Untitled 2009 / Digital print / 29.5 X 21 cm / Photo: Markus Hannes

Here is why:

Question: What is singularity and why do all laws of physics break down at singularity?

Answer: When a physicist refers to a singularity he or she is generally referring to a quantity which is infinite. Specifically, a quantity which approaches infinity as another parameter goes to zero, such as

$$\lim_{x \rightarrow 0} \frac{1}{x} = \infty$$

(Asked by Aditya Pattani)

It seems strange Katja Strunz first needed, and thought of, the word pregeometric before discovering the notion. And if you learn about the notion it strangely echoes in you as if it was something you already knew or had heard the sound of before. It is the sound of water in the bathtub when your head is below the water. A sound made by movement, the water being swirled by the pressure from the shower head.

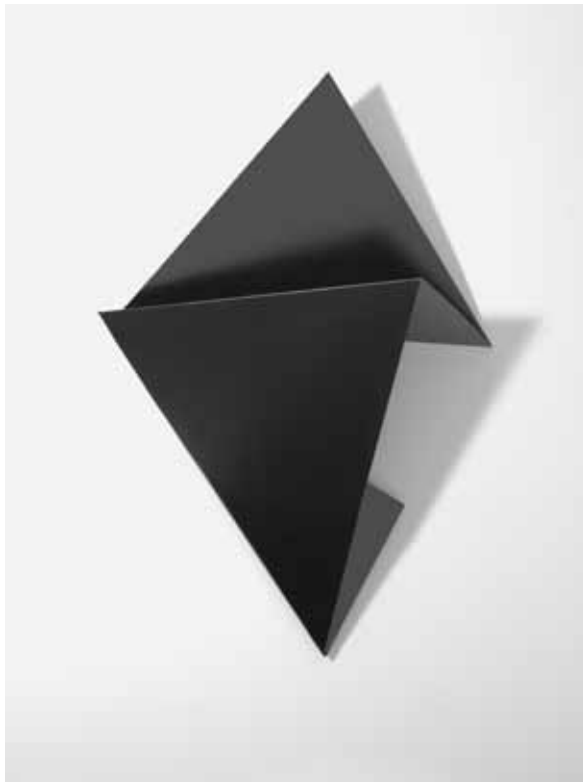
Katja Strunz’s sculptures have always touched me as echoes. As if something is echoing through her, or as if she was using echolocation to define a space or a structure. The sculptures are embedded in a sort of sound. A multi-tongued sound, like a distant motion, being cached in mute structures. The sound becomes noticeable as an echo of this motion in the space, again reverberating on the sculptures. Returning the sound, the delay of the echo describes the scope of the space. The more attentive you are, the more precise the space becomes. Providing a solid structure for this sound is an attempt to capture it, to give it a possibility of mirroring itself. It also provides an endpoint to the timeline of a momentum, that would be indefinite otherwise, and acts as an amplifier. This space thus defined is not a memory, or a recreation of a former space, but one and the same.

The space tested is the grey, empty room of abstraction; abstraction as one of the attempts to render unordered, filthy thinking as transparent and clear. Abstraction had a historic momentum and it seems to me that it has been echoing ever since, and by this defining a space. This space has become more than a memory or a surface. It is a sound. This sound resonates through art, it has its hostile noises and a distance and a blinding overexposed light that goes with it. It may appear anti-social and cold, but it also has a comforting tone of far-awayness, closeness, changelessness, infinitude and undividedness. The astronomer John Dobson also defined pregeometric structures in this way – it is changeless, the infinite, the undivided that provided the universe with a way to come into being.

When Katja Strunz installed the machine-like, person-like, instrument-like sculptures in her exhibition at Gavin Brown's enterprise in New York, though small then, they were the recipients of these echoes. Her pre-figurative elements shown now at Camden Arts Centre test the limits of the space, but by using their own sound. They are more tentative, as if they were moving in darkness, regarding their systems. Attentive, but not in the know.

However, these person-like, machine-like, instrument-like sculptures do not care so much about the concept of abstraction. They care about getting a hint about where and when they are by receiving the echoes of their own sound. Feeling lost evokes sounds, not only whistling in the darkness. The shipwrecked would shout, 'Is there anybody...?' or other such kinds of things.

Ariane Müller is an artist and publisher of STARSHIP magazine. She lives in Berlin.



Faltentuch 2008 / Powder coated steel / 200 × 141 × 57 cm
Photo: Jochen Littkemann

Design: James Goggin (Practise) & Sara De Bondt studio
Print: Xtraprint, London

Katja Strunz was born in Ottweiler, Germany in 1970 and lives in Berlin. She studied art and philosophy at Johannes Gutenberg University in Mainz (1991–93) and then went on to study Painting and Graphic Arts at Karlsruhe State Academy of Fine Arts (1993–98). Strunz has exhibited widely throughout Europe, Japan and USA including solo exhibitions 'Lazy Corner', Artpace, San Antonio, USA (2007) and 'Faltgestalt', Museum Haus Esters, Krefeld, Germany (2006). Group exhibitions have included 'Life on Mars – 55th Carnegie International', Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, USA (2008); 'Boros Collection', Bunker, Berlin, Germany (2008); 'Delusive Orders', Muzeum Sztuki, Łódź, Poland (2007); 'Strange I've Seen That Face Before', Museum Abteiberg, Mönchengladbach, Germany (2006); 'Art Scope 2005/2006 – Interface Complex', Hara Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo, Japan (2006); 'ars viva 04/05 – Zeit / time', Kunsthalle Mannheim, Mannheim, Germany (2004) and 'Land, Land!', Kunsthalle Basel, Basel, Switzerland (2003). Strunz has participated in residency programs at Mount Stuart, Isle of Bute, UK (2009), Artpace, San Antonio, USA (2007) and Delfina Studio Trust, London, UK (2003).

'Sound of the Pregeometric Age' is Strunz's first solo exhibition in London. She is represented by The Modern Institute, Glasgow; Contemporary Fine Arts, Berlin; Gavin Brown's enterprise, New York and Almine Rech Gallery, Paris and Brussels.

Reading/Viewing/Listening List

- Friedrich Schiller *Vom Pathetischen und Erhabenen* [From the Pathetic and the Sublime] Reclam (1970)
 - Lutz Niethammer *Posthistoire* Rowohlts Enzyklopädie (1989)
 - Walter Benjamin *Das Bucklichte Männlein* [The Humpbacked Little Man], in *Berliner Kindheit um Neunzehnhundert* [Berlin Childhood Around 1900: Hope in the Past] Suhrkamp (1987)
 - Christoph Ransmayr *Die letzte Welt* [The Last World: A Novel With an Ovidian Repertory] Franz Greno (1988)
 - Robert Walser *Jakob von Gunten* Suhrkamp (1976)
 - *Klassenverhältnisse* [Class Relations] dir. Jean-Marie Straub, Danièle Huillet (1984)
 - *The Magic Flute* dir. Ingmar Bergman (1975)
 - *Alexander Nevsky* dir. Sergei Eisenstein (1938)
 - *Lost* created by Jeffrey Lieber, J.J. Abrams, Damon Lindelof (TV series, 2004–)
-

All images courtesy of the artist; Contemporary Fine Arts, Berlin; The Modern Institute / Toby Webster Ltd., Glasgow.

ISBN 978 1 907208 03 4

‘Regard the flowers at eventide as, one after the other, they close in the setting sun. Strange is the feeling that then presses in upon you – a feeling of enigmatic fear in the presence of this blind dreamlike earth-bound existence. The dumb forest, the silent meadows, this bush, that twig, do not stir themselves, it is the wind that plays with them. Only the little gnat is free – he dances still in the evening light, he moves whither he will.’

— Oswald Spengler: *Origin and Landscape: The Cosmic and the Microcosm from The Decline of the West*, Oxford University Press, 1991

Published to accompany the exhibition *Sound of the Pregeometric Age*

11 December 2009 – 07 March 2010

Exhibition supported by



The Henry Moore
Foundation



www.camdenartscentre.org
Registered charity 1005829
111-113, Arkwright Road, London NW3 6DG
Tel: +44 (0)20 7472 5500
Fax: +44 (0)20 7472 5501

Arkwright Road
London
NW3 6DG

T +44 (0)20 7472 5500
F +44 (0)20 7472 5501

Camden
arts centre

Arts Council
ENGLAND

Funded by Camden Council

clure durfield foundation

Cover: *Memory Wall* (detail) 2008
Powder coated steel, bronze, patina
Dimensions variable / Photo: Jan Bauer