

About *AND* with Ursula Döbereiner and Elsewhere Volker Pantenburg

A definition from the 1811 edition of a famous German dictionary, the *Grammatisch-Kritisches Wörterbuch der Hochdeutschen Mundart*: “UND (and): a short connecting word, the simplest in the whole language, which merely describes the existence of one thing next to another.”¹ So far, so good. However, the next sentence in the definition begins to complicate matters, as it introduces a “but.” It goes on to read, “but, it connects,” a phrase followed by a list which, for its part, owes much to invisible “ANDs.” Determining which “things” are linked by this little connective word puts us on a wide variety of levels. The dictionary lists “individual words, concepts, and circumstances,” and “individual clauses of a single or a periodic sentence.”

In reading Adelung here and now, we find ourselves in the field of language alone: language dictates how language relates to language. If we leave this field and go over to the medium of drawing, the numbers of combinable elements will also increase by leaps and bounds. Words can reappear in the form of drawings, connecting with outlines; outlines can be layered and assembled to form objects or not-exactly-objects. A swarm of possibilities—even more of them now, two hundred years after Adelung, in the age of technical recombination, when drawing utensils can be a mouse, a sheet of paper, a computer screen—all of these are further varieties of AND. And this is also why, in Ursula Döbereiner’s work, the AND occurs in another, more general sense. It is, grammatically speaking, not (at least, not merely) the copula that connects two or more things, for at the same time, it also describes an entire genre of works. The AND is heading and subject alike, the word that creates order and is put in order, and because it appears on both sides of this organizational dividing line, it creates disorder.

Looking at the Web site www.ursuladoebereiner.de, it is easy to understand this. The site is constructed according to the principle of taxonomic branching: four categories, *ANIMATIONS*, *INSTALLATIONS*, *LINKS*, and *DRAWINGS*, form the first hierarchical level. Even here, though, one starts to wonder, because the alphabetical principle does not differentiate between her own works (let’s say: *ICI*) and references elsewhere (let’s say: *AILLEURS*).

If one clicks on the *DRAWINGS* link, one immediately sees more lines in alphabetical order: and in these lines—which form a chronology from 1994 to 2006, and otherwise mainly list attributes (*COLOR*, *YELLOW*, *B&W*) or substantives and proper nouns (*AUTOS*, *GENA*, *BAG*)—the *AND* is clearly an outsider; an interesting foreign body, an unconnected-connecting alien in an everyday context.

This goes along with a shot from one of the many Godard films that Döbereiner has translated into the medium of drawing. On a vaulted surface in front of a dark background are the letters *ET*, massive and immobile like a sculpture that has fallen from space. It is hard to get past this *ET*: it acts like a main character right at the beginning of Godard’s film. With *ICI ET AILLEURS* (France, 1974) in mind—the film the image is from—Gilles Deleuze saw in Godard the filmmaker “of the method of the *AND*,”² and he explained elsewhere what he meant by that: “[T]he *AND* is not even a special conjunction or relation; it takes all relations along with it, it provides as many relations as *AND*s; the *AND* not only destabilizes all relations, it also destabilizes existence, the verb...etc. The *AND*, ‘and...and...and’, is the creative stutter precisely, the strange use of language, in contrast to the conformist and dominant use of language, which is based on the verb ‘to be’.”³

What Deleuze describes as the production of a grammatical and epistemological vortex can be studied through

Godard's very specific images and sounds, through frequently unexplained relationships between image and image, word and image, between texts, sounds, and all manner of possible and impossible cross-connections. Godard sets up experimental arrangements, almost all of them surprising, often approaching punning and word play: contrasts, confrontations, assemblages. Between these elements (and, in the nineteen-seventies, between the media of film, television, and video) there is always the AND, sometimes visible as an edit, sometimes invisible. Hardly any other film director has retained such a prominent interest in montage—call it, if you will, the theoretical and practical expression of the AND in film—throughout a period of what is now fifty years. Montage can be found either between the shots, or smuggled into the visual composition, as an interweaving of discrete image segments, yet different, partial images.

In Ursula Döbereiner's *AND* drawings, this interest in layering, in the relationships between text and image, and in coupling elements has left its mark in various ways. To move in concentric circles from the periphery toward the center: the AND is, at first, a very general category that makes it possible to file the heterogeneous under a common term. According to the logic of the AND, the *AND* drawer provides plenty of space for things that can also be found in other categories: for instance, there is a series of bag drawings, which is also found under its conventional rubric, *BAG*. After all, that is the advantage of the virtual drawer: something that is kept in the *AND* drawer can be in any other drawer at the same time; there are potentially endless ways to sort things, simply by clicking the refresh button.

In all of the *AND* drawings, there are at least two elements (objects, colors, media, layers, etc.), and that is the second level on which the AND comes into play. At first, this seems to be nothing more than a very small common denominator (the AND as a multi-functional bond that combines different elements and likes to make a mess of the rest of the categories). However, it can also combine different spaces, something that is especially clear in the large, wallpapered computer drawings. A kind of secondary architecture is applied like a net to the existing exhibition space, so that dimensions, corners, and surfaces are wedged together. This is especially conspicuous in the artist's connection of mostly functional, austere exhibition spaces with the neo-baroque, excessive, escapist extravaganza of Castle Linderhof (*esc002-esc006*, 2006/2007). Here, the AND would be the oscillation between two or more possible ways of perceiving space.

Finally, the drawings that are actually called *AND* (*UNDO01-UNDO07*, 2006), reintroduce these kinds of formal determinants to the level of naming. Without exception, their references are all taken from Godard films: *UNDO01* is a coarsely stippled felt pen drawing of two overlapping newspapers; "Palestine" can be read on one of them, something like "Contine" (the rest of the word is hidden) on the other. On one cover is a veiled woman, on the other, a woman whose face is also hidden—but, as it seems, by a motorcycle helmet. The motif, like the big ET, comes from *ICI ET AILLEURS*, and it combines two geographic and political spaces, two ways of life, and two cultures. In the montage, similarities and differences collide.

UNDO03 is also a felt pen drawing, but in a bright green. It shows Juliet Berto, with an Asian hat and chopsticks, standing near a gas pump. On the wall can be seen two letters left over from an ESSO sign: "SS" (from *LA CHINOISE*, 1967). On the pump is a big tiger, ready to leap. A second glance shows that the fuel here is marked "Napalm," and the image calls up, in an allegorical way, a political constellation (an overpowering predator, the United States, versus defenseless Vietnam), because it appropriates its technique of abbreviation from advertising.

Crosshatching and stippling are implemented to introduce yet another medium, to add yet another AND, to each of these examples. Even if one is not familiar with the films, one gets the impression that the drawings

derive from moving pictures, that have been frozen, brought to a standstill. Yet at the same time, it is obvious that the individual images are not content with their motionless state, for in Döbereiner's animations, they are actually re-translated into periods of movement. The drawings present images on the verge of motion, and they remind us that the AND (and the AND and the AND) between the film images in the projector is often made to vanish, while in Döbereiner's works, it is clearly recognizable.

Translated by Allison Plath-Moseley

1 Grammatisch-kritisches Wörterbuch der Hochdeutschen Mundart, mit beständiger Vergleichung der übrigen Mundarten, besonders aber der Oberdeutschen, by Johann Christoph Adelung, Court Counselor to the Elector of Saxony and Principal Librarian to the Elector of Saxony. With D. W. Soltau's Comments, revised and reported by Franz Xaver Schönberger, Doctor of Fine Arts and Philosophy, Full Professor of Eloquence and the Greek Language, Sub-Director of the Royal Convictus, Third Section, from Seb-Z, Vienna, published by B. Ph. Bauer 1811, p. 838.

2 Gilles Deleuze, *Das Zeit-Bild. Kino 2*, from the French by Klaus Englert, Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp 1991, p. 234, published in English as *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, Hugh Tomlinson, translator, University of Minnesota Press, 1989.

3 Gilles Deleuze, "Drei Fragen zu six fois deux," in: Deleuze, *Unterhandlungen, 1972–1990*, from the French by Gustav Roßler, Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp 1993, pp. 57–69: 67f., published in English as "Three Questions on Six Fois Deux," in Jean-Luc Godard: *Son + Image 1974–1991*, Raymond Bellour and Mary Lea Bandy, eds., New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1992.