

"SILVER LAKES"

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EN — Renaissance picture galleries, every square of whose walls and ceilings princes filled with painted images of themselves and their families, a few Greek deities and naked women, “all the famous marble scrap” of these “stone body galleries, which continue to aid the deformation of the flesh, all this we would have been spared,” wrote Klaus Theweleit in *Buch der Könige*, “had mirror makers hastened themselves a bit.” His claim is based on a reasonable speculation concerning media history: In Jericho, ten thousand years ago, people still had to bend over water to see “flowing, ephemeral images of themselves.” It was in the land of the Persians, Egyptians, Jews and Greeks that archaeologists first found polished discs of metal and gold, in the reflection of which one could faintly recognize his own face.

Yet, until the invention of large-scale mirrors in recent history, it was – in addition to the symmetrical dance – the visual arts that were expected to fuse the image of man with the totality of a body. Art had not only to depict how, but also, foremost, to ensure that the eye, harelip, torso, and gown were connected to the physical context of a representative ego: men and women in rigid postures of anesthetized limbs.

With the end of the Renaissance, “the exterior of the European body, on whose image and construction painting had been decisively working for 300 years,” was not only “finished,” but from this point on, such functions of the body’s constitution were assumed by the large-scale mirror, which was now technically possible to create. Between the allegories of war and peace not a single framed portrait hangs on the walls of the Hall of Mirrors in Versailles; rather, there is a 1/16000 millimeter-thick silver layer behind plates of glass, which reflects more accurately the majestic splendor of the Sun King’s image as an absolute ruler than any court painter could.

From this point on, Theweleit concludes, paintings could finally dream of completely new physical contexts – of deviating affect lines, feelings constructed out of pigment, coral hands, newly connected organs, waists of light, caps on knees. Friedrich Kittler had already traced a very similar connection. According to him, with the emergence of the first phonographs, poetry was no longer responsible for guaranteeing the coherence and meaning of linguistic utterances with a phantasmal voice. After this invention, everything could be recorded and repeated endlessly, allowing literature to devote itself to the noise of that nonsensical thing called language and open it up to completely different pleasures beyond the narrative of life stories – stuttering, cheering, random but always promising rows of letters on one keyboard: q w e r t. And so perhaps, in the mediality of every relic, freed from use value and artistic value, there exists a space for new, ephemeral sensuality, since the time when computers sank into the common language of 1 and 0 and only occasionally have provided us with the sensory output of long-outdated media.

Johannes Kleinbeck