

Immo Klink: 'Disturbing Factors'

Artist-photographer Immo Klink's work "reflects a personal view of the last seven years during which I have been involved with creative dissent movements". For Klink, the period since 2001 has seen a pronounced shift in the relationship between the individual, the idea of the nation, and the state, in England in particular. Both the possibilities of organising public protests against political decisions, and of undertaking 'creative actions' to raise consciousness of economic or environmental issues have altered since 9/11 in the UK and US. The freedoms we are able to exercise; the ways in which we are governed; and our collective ability to examine decisions made in the name of the body politic have all been subject to revision.

Klink's gallery installation of photographs spans images taken between 2000 and 2007, and encompasses diverse subjects and geographical locations, and are not united by technical considerations. However, Klink's images, despite their range of format, size, subject and technique, act as a kind of oblique portrait of the nation in the new millennium. What has remained constant in the artist's project is the scope of his subjects, and the questions his work asks. In one of his long-term projects, looking at issues relating to security, Klink describes his most fundamental concern as being "how heightened states of public and private security are changing our urban and even rural landscapes - and indeed our political and psychological landscapes".

Several images in 'North and South' have arisen from the artist's involvement with "creative dissent movements" – with both artists, activists, and those who occupy both positions. Klink's phrase notes that, in recent years, the overlap between artistic actions and anti-consumerist protest has been marked. Political activism has been invigorated, in certain instances, by ideas derived in part from fine art traditions. Amongst others, Klink has been associated with the Space Hijackers who also feature in 'North and South', having documented their actions for several years.

In several images, Klink's concern is with the ways in which we are able to occupy and use public space, and with the changing relationship between private and public domains. He notes that in several major cities, the ownership of vast swathes of formerly public space is now in corporate hands; and that such areas are intensively 'policed' with private security and CCTV. England, he notes, has the highest number of CCTV cameras per capita of any country in the world; their omnipresence is one of the most novel features of 21st century English urban life. For example, the artist's documentation of 'sports' such as urban climbing might be thought to record small-scale experiments in extending the freedoms we are able to exercise; in reclaiming public space from private interests. Such activities, undertaken for pleasure rather than in protest, require the protagonists to breach the boundaries between public space and private property temporarily.

Other works, by contrast, capture an unalloyed hostility to consumer capitalism, such as the series 'Mayday in Mayfair'. Here, we encounter boutique stores representing global brands like Prada and Versace, occupying some of the world's most expensive real estate. Only in Klink's images, the stores resemble either hastily erected favelas constructed in cheap chipboard, or else unassailable fortresses designed to protect the exclusivity of their commodities. The retailers' opulence is

almost concealed, for one day only; their coverings protect their facades from anticipated attack. It is, commentators have noted, as though the brands – who we as consumers invariably anthropomorphise and attribute sentience to – have themselves recoiled in fear at the protestors' opposing ideology or malign intentions. The centuries-old tradition of MayDay, even prior to its reorientation by labour movements, has been based in the carnivalesque – the inversion of the dominant order. In the 21st century, as Klink remarks “brands seemed to be the symbols part of the governing power”. However, ‘Mayday in Mayfair’ also marks the end of an era; although Mayday has been an occasion for socially concerned celebration and protest even long before it’s occupation by the labour movements, in recent years concerns over public order have quashed any more than small-scale organised dissent. Klink notes that, amongst other reasons, heightened private and police security after 9/11 have contributed to “many of the so called anti-globalisation / anti-capitalist movements” weakening, or at least being in “fear of infiltration, anti terror legislation and disproportionate security measures”. However, in response, new groups like the Clown Army or the Space Hijackers have taken on board clandestine and ‘secret agent’ structures and strategies, knowing that they are under continual surveillance.

If there are fewer arenas for the expression of opposition to the status quo, as the artist notes, it is imperative to ask: “how will dissent be mounted in public in future, even in the increasing number of privately owned urban spaces; and what will the reactions of authorities be? How are public forums affected by privatisation, and by heightened security measures post 9/11?” At root, Klink argues, “these heightened states of security trigger questions about our civil liberties – and the functioning of our democratic processes.”