

## The Hypotenuse: The Scent of a Right Angle

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On the occasion of the solo exhibition by Nikolaus Gansterer “WHEN THOUGHT BECOMES MATTER AND MATTER TURNS INTO THOUGHT” at Kunstraum Niederoesterreich, in Vienna, Austria from 6. 6. 2013 to 27. 7. 2013.

In a right-angled triangle the hypotenuse is the longest side, which is opposite the right angle. One could explain that the use of this term to describe a triangle goes back to Plato or to the Pythagoras theorem, which is also called the hypotenuse theorem. If  $a$  and  $b$  are the two legs of a triangle and  $c$  is the hypotenuse, then the equation  $a^2 + b^2 = c^2$  applies. The sum of the areas of the squares of the two legs is equal to the area of the square of the hypotenuse.

One could say that this equation has established itself in cultural history. Alongside the mathematical law, however, one could also say that the term “hypotenuse” sounds wonderful purely phonetically: “hypotenuse” – as if one could thereby describe the melancholy of a promise, a beautiful flower that one gives to one’s beloved in order to express the indescribability of love, to give shape to the inexpressible, yes, colour + shape squared: “Oh, a hypotenuse! What a scent, the soft leaves” Then followed by the appropriate look and kiss, which only confirm that one has understood the “declaration” (Erklärung). The hypotenuse as a declaration of love with the scent of a shared future. Here it appears to be important that one pronounces the “-use” ending long: “hypotenuussee”, the “s” voiced and the “e” like a French “è”, as dark as the beauty of melancholy.

Now, on the other hand one could maintain that there is no flower called a hypotenuse, which hidden from the light grows into a declaration of love. In this sense, the declaration may indeed not correspond to any fact at the other end, but the declaration itself seems understandable. Just the sound of the hypotenuse – its phonetic scent – could give its name to a beautiful flower. A flower that only exists in the imagination, a flower that only lovers can see and smell.

This explains the conjunctive, the possibility. If the declaration aims for clarity, then it describes the reasons and grounds if you will: a landscape of causality. Why something looks the way it does seems to have a reason. The reasons for the reality do not always appear in the picture of reality, remain hidden, hide like the gentle hypotenuse. The explanation (Erklärung) seeks to trace the arc between the hidden reasons and reality, develop as it were in the gap between the two. Its task ... no ...rather the desire that it follows consists in making the two ends of the arc, the reality and the reason for it, known to one another. Essentially it lives from the fact that the two do not know one another, that reality knows its reason only as an unknown quantity. And the reverse is true, that only one reason for reality can seldom be drawn on and cultivated. Often only the whole bunch seems sufficient for a reason, thus reasons that do not know one another and are only introduced to each other through the explanation: the right angle, the triangle, the legs, the hypotenuse, the lighting, Pythagoras, the poetry, the water, the colour, the scent and love.

The explanation itself, however, does not just develop between the reasons it describes and the reality it seeks to describe as understandable, but hides as a gap, as if it itself were not a quantity, as if it had no history of its own. As a simple in between it would only be of a secondary nature, always endangered by the correct reasons that contradict it, that dispute its existence. As a false explanation it is then forgotten and supplanted by the next correct explanation. It is unnecessary to mention the virulent cultural history of the various explanations, their history, which represents a pure history of displacement; their mythological history, which explains the world through myths, the history of science, which explains the world scientifically, the history of

enlightenment, the dialectics of enlightenment, the return of the everyday myths, the history of research as a history of explanation and so on. In sum, a square of changes and rejections, of convictions, corrections and refutations. Hypotheses, Entantitheses, hypotenuses, “antitenuses” – small and always too strongly smelling flowers in order to underline the linear error, a “scientifically coloured forget-memot”. Flowers of doubt and mistrust. Critical flowers.

If one wishes to “explain” the works of Nikolaus Gansterer – finally but nevertheless too soon, temporarily – then as the possibility to take the explanation itself into the picture, to portray the explanation, to give it a face, to explain the explanation. Thus as an attempt not to clarify *something*, but to draw the explaining itself, the gap between the conception of reasons and the conception of reality, to trace and sketch out this gap. To define the drawing as something that follows its subject and at the same time runs ahead of it. The tool box of his aesthetics draws on the history of explanations, on the vocabulary of sketches, models, diagrams, experiments, hypotheses and corrections. The subject of his explanations is only one variable, changeable, perhaps accidental: the world, art, the modern – with and without post – biology, thinking and feeling, love, freedom, the identity of an alter ego, memory, revolution, the ear, the gaze and one single day, an odyssey, sometimes without Homer and Joyce.

Millimetre paper, in order to be quite exact, a set of experiments to give shape to the history of its explaining. To raise the explanation and drafting or reasons itself to a subject of reflection. Learning to understand wanting to understand. As if there were a mechanism of understanding, a physics of explaining, an aesthetics of substantiation. What happens “WHEN THOUGHT BECOMES MATTER AND MATTER TURNS INTO THOUGHT” – the title of his exhibition. The reasons are as variable as the materials and media that are employed, and as the thoughts that trigger them. Perhaps it is also the thoughts that suggest and justify particular media and materials. If explaining itself moves to the centre of explaining, then the themes and reasons are just props, and themselves become materials and variables.

In the knowledge of the history of displacement that is inscribed in the history of explanations, change counts as a law. What appears to be explanation is essentially transient, has a half-life, the knowledge of limited duration. If one looks at his drawings, the fragile arrangements of balancing objects, the insistence on the momentary, the balance, the pausing, then at the same time one sees the process, what is processual in his work. An aesthetics of in between, which already sketches out both its ends of the before and after, the past and the future, the model of a temporality. As an explanation it lies in between, in an in-between time. As an explanation, it also keeps at a distance what it speaks of, what it explains. The model and the map, the mapping, trace their motif inasmuch as they abstract it, leave it in order to be something else. The drawing of something essentially also appears as a drawing for its own sake, as the drawing of a drawing. The model is also a model of itself, a suggestion of the materialisation of an explanation. Against the background of his three-dimensional installations, his stagings of space, the space itself appears as a model-like figure, as a possibility. As if one were to transform reality itself into the state of a model again, to bend it back into just a manifestation of an explanation – knowing that this ultimately remains hypothetical.

If reality presents itself as the product of changed and changeable explanations, then it itself appears only as a hypotheses, as a model and possibility of an understanding. Only the model-like is real, the distance to the unknown which one meanwhile attempts to explain. In this sense, the attempt at explanation also stands for the attempt to maintain a distance to what one is explaining. The scale of the model or of the drawing indicates the distance to the object that is traced and sketched out in it. A distance to the grounds, essentially a floating in space and time. And these coordinates of floating provide the model for a life that unfolds between the justifications and the conceptions of reality like the leaves of the hypotenuse, a scent opposite the right angle.