

Michael Glasmeier

Pastorals

In one of his mysterious masterworks, the visionary Giorgione draws the image of a musical Arcadia, where female nudity and clothed masculinity, untouched nature and civilization, dramatic formulas of quiet and action meet. His "Rural Concert" (ca. 1510, Paris, Musée du Louvre) unites nymphs, a nobleman, shepherds, goats, trees, hills, architecture, distance and proximity into something resembling an allegory of artistic inspiration. As he stands in the center of the picture, the Venetian nobleman's clothing alone marks a caesura. He is the educated urban resident, the new 'uomo universale', who joins with natural simplicity, putting himself at the mercy of the nymphs' powerful game of inspiration. He is that ideal Renaissance aristocrat celebrated by Baldassar Castiglione: thoroughly educated, an artistic, literary and philosophical dilettante and, of course, a lute player, like Giorgione himself. As a retreat and source of inspiration, nature is the origin of poetry, of the liberated unfolding of creative powers. In this sense, we can read Giorgione's work as a programmatic Renaissance image, but also as a promise of atmospheric calm, a place to collect oneself, listen, and be present in nature – not far from cities and architecture. It is a promise that has been carried on iconographically, from Antoine Watteau ("L'embarquement pour Cythère", 1717), Edouard Manet ("Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe", 1863) to today's art (Jeff Wall, "The Storyteller", 1986), although it has never been redeemed. It is obviously a big jump from the allegory of inspiration to Rococo desire, from bourgeois leisure time to sociological studies. Nevertheless, Giorgione's original image keeps appearing. It has become a pastoral theme that dominates even film and advertising, which has to be expressed occasionally in an overly loud manner on the part of those participating in popular self-discovery programs. (Harald Schmidt, the German talk show host, once mentioned "drumming women in the park"). At first glance, William Engelen's seven-part composition "Partitur Stadtgarten" also continues the process of thinking about this pastoral theme. For instance, let us look at the three female performers singing in Arabic, on the meadow of the Stadtgarten in Aachen. At first they seem like living relatives of Giorgione's image. And yet they are sitting on a cloth that Engelen himself has conceived, in a landscape that does recall Arcadia, but which is urban, as the name states. They sit quietly on open ground, in front of a backdrop of a basin and fountain. Streetlights, pavement and artificial islands of flowers complete the furnishing of a typical urban garden. As far as the ambience goes, Engelen's pictorial design – for that is what it is – can be distinguished from Giorgione's, and yet it is more like him than those who came after – Watteau, Manet, or Wall. The musical practice alone opens up an atmospheric space that moves beyond the Aachen Stadtgarten to something strange with which we have all become familiar. By this, I mean the creative act outside, done together – not in the sense of drumming self-assertion, but as an expression of concentrated, relaxed, artistic communication in an open environment. Even stranger, though, is the Arabian singing in Engelen's composition "Suleika". However, it remains in our minds, although it is estranged from us because we want to exclude it. And yet the ornamental lines of this singing seem like the heralds of another Arcadia, which, in the nineteenth century, became an especially desirable landscape. Even before Gérard de Nerval and Gustave Flaubert, Goethe had paid homage to this new Arcadia in his "Western–Eastern Divan" (1819, 1827), without having been there himself, however. He was inspired by the fifteenth-century Persian poet Hafis and wrote his new songs as a sign of his propinquity. During this period, the aging Goethe, in his

"second puberty", was mainly traveling through Germany's countryside and gardens. The Suleika he sang of ("an ornament of virtue") was personified by Marianne Willemer, a beautiful, convivial, musical woman, who answered his poetry with her own. However, Marianne Willemer was a married woman, and this is the kind of thing that leads elderly people to youthfully pine away, inspired by Oriental songs in the sense of "what we Germans call the Geist", meaning, of the "overall view of the nature of the world, irony, liberal use of talents" (Goethe). Suleika sings, "Jedes Leben sei zu führen / Wenn man sich nicht selbst vermißt / Alles könne man verlieren / Wenn man bliebe / was man ist". Engelen had a few verses from the "Book of Suleika" in the "Western–Eastern Divan" translated into Arabic, thus literally putting them into the picture, through calligraphy. In addition, there is an extensive score with various legends, which clearly recall cartography. This connects the image of the three singers with more and more images, turning into a rapport that is sometimes acoustically, sometimes visually, sometimes ornamentally, sometimes statically in permanent movement. It can be interpreted extensively through iconographics, chronologically through cultural history and spatially through anthropology. This image branches out into other visual systems – those of notation, cartography, calligraphy, or the visual poetry of the printed cloth as something to sit on, each of which demands other perspectives, other eyes, for looking at the panorama of the park or the detailed view of the map legends and words. Engelen exposes what Giorgione does not mention, namely, the texts and notes behind his image, and in this way leads us (as he does with his architectural models) to the realm of transparency and graceful mobility. He inversely transforms Giorgione, and with this step, also transforms Goethe, who transformed Hafis, who in turn transformed the nineteenth century that transformed Giorgione, who transformed the philosophies of his time, which are transformed into interpretive models of images in the twentieth century (Aby Warburg), and so on. On closer inspection, the three singers in the Aachen Stadtpark start an eternal process of transformation, which begins with images and creates images. That is the poetry of the pastoral, the untamed power of inspiration. Engelen, whose legends describe the sounds, lays out his notations as if they were images of landscapes or other things, composed of the visual. A variety of walks ("Im Friedhof"), the growth of nature ("Bruchstücke"), a diagram of his eyeball ("Augenblicke"), or the map for the city garden ("Wanderwege") are images that become music through notation, not illustrative in the sense of programmed music, but sculptural, like the duration of notes, according to Marcel Duchamp, who employed the term "musical sculpture". "Duration – notes that start at different points and form a sonorous sculpture that lasts." The bodies of the musicians should not disappear, in an act of symphonic engulfment. They remain present, as bodies that make sound in a landscape. What is valid for "Suleika" must certainly also be true for the other compositions. When they are performed, they put images into the landscape. They are compositions for open eyes, whose sounds mix with others – birds, street noises, children playing, and people talking. They are not clarified studio sounds. They are notes that do not disturb others and are sculpturally positioned in a certain environment, only to disappear again soon. They do not draw attention to themselves by being loud, and each physical act of the musicians unfolds the way they are played, as they are open to noises and acoustic coincidences of every kind. From images to music, from music to images. Unlike diverse notation experiments by composers such as Edgar Varèse, Philip Corner, John Cage, and others who worked with cartographic systems, Engelen stays in one place, so to speak. He does not compose the world for a narrow concert hall, does not produce historical images. He remains pastoral. This is not limitation, but knowledge of the ecology of possibilities and intensities, oriented toward that "becoming", of which Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari speak in *Thousand Plateaus*.

”In a general sense, we call a refrain any aggregate of matters of expression that draws a territory and develops into territorial motifs and landscapes (there are optical, gestural, motor, etc., refrains). In the narrow sense, we speak of a refrain when an assemblage is sonorous or ‘dominated’ by sound – but why do we assign this apparent privilege to sound?” The refrain of the pastoral knows no privileges. It is there, wherever it takes place. It shows us the territory as image and mobilizes acoustic optics as the presence of bodies making music in the landscape. The privilege of the pastoral is to be able to expose the sources of inspiration as visual science for music. The landscape becomes musical and vice-versa. We should listen and look, for we can lose everything, if we remain as we are.