



**Locus Amoenus / Trinitas -
Babel / Hrön**

The Holy Trinity
Anonymous
Eighteenth century
Cuzco
Peru.



Locus Amoenus / Trinitas

Video-installation and graphic Intervention of the shield with the technical specifications of the work using an image of an anonymous Peruvian painting from the XVIII century depicting the way the evangelists represented the Holy Trinity to the Aborigines. Church of the Holy Trinity (Trinitätskirche), Cologne, Germany.



Locus Amoenus / Trinitas
Video installation and performance device for a Catholic
Mass, Iquique Cathedral, Iquique, Chile, 2009.

Locus Amoenus

Locus Amoenus is a conceptual work of performance art, media art and body art in the most canonical sense. Its main object is meaning: not the meaning of this or that, but meaning itself as a problem inherent to language and the material form in which all signs necessarily must manifest themselves. As such, this piece avails itself of another language: the sign language used by the deaf. Its basic element is a video featuring a collage comprised of my hand, cut and repeated twenty-six times, representing the twenty-six letters of the Latin alphabet in slow motion. Slowed down by that magnifying glass of time that is the artificial deceleration of action, the video makes visible the passage from one symbol to the next, twenty-six in all. From b to c to d, but most of all—and this is the important part—the extended lapse of time in which the hand is neither one letter nor the next, just a hand. And then, a moment later, the hand returns to the world of the signified. The sequence is comprised of that movement from one thing to the next, until the sequence comes to an end, entering a loop so that it may start over again.

The video can be exhibited in two ways. Firstly, through installations that occasionally become performative devices involving the audience. Secondly, upon a monitor or as a projection. In the latter case, the video is subtitled with a section from the 1940 Jorge Luis Borges story “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius,” which revolves around the sudden appearance of an object intended, I propose, to suggest reality is an artificial construct, a fabric of symbols and information that are equally artificial. In this context, the work adopts the name *Babel/Hrön*. *Babel/Hrön* dates to 2003.

To make clear the distinction between installation and video, I'd like to offer a specific example. For the month of July, 2004, *Locus Amoenus* was shown at the Church of the Holy Trinity, the Trinitätskirche or Trinitatiskirche, in the traditionally Catholic city of Cologne, Germany. The installation consisted of three monitors, equidistant from one another, upon a single altar, solemn and ascetic like the heavy black stone it was fashioned from. The three monitors transmitted the same video, and the stone recalled a monolith, just like the object in the Borges story, or a sacrificial altar, but let's get back to the video. The three TV sets transmitted the video in perfect synchronization, with

the slightest chromatic differences from one monitor to the other, recalling, as well, that very transversally American phenomenon of televangelism—which is, at the same time, utterly un-German. That, however, was not the central or only objective of the piece. The aim was to allude to the way in which the Spanish missionaries adopted visual strategies that had already been declared heretical in the Europe of their day, in order to explain to the American natives the idea of a God that is three in one and one in three. Among other practices, the missionaries often painted three identical Christ figures that, today in the 21st century, would very possibly seem like three clones. I doctored the technical specifications of the work with that very same type of Trinity image, one that was painted by an anonymous artist in 18th century Cuzco. It should be noted, additionally, that the first people to conceive these representations were the (Catholic and Orthodox) Roman missionaries, when they went to evangelize the “barbarians from the North.” Paleo-Christian art is filled with examples of trifacial (three faces), trifrontal (three foreheads) and even tricephalous (three heads) Christ figures. But it was only in Latin America that these images continued to appear through the early twentieth century, as attested by a painting of the Trinity that was trifacial until 1913, and now hangs with just one face—that of Jesus—in the popular church of Señor Jesús del Gran Poder in La Paz, Bolivia. I repeated the same rhetorical figure five centuries later, before a European audience that was completely unable to recognize it as something that was once familiar. The work was exhibited with the title *Locus Amoenus/Trinitas*. Forcing slightly the concept coined by Luis Camnitzer and connecting it to Anglo Saxon conceptual art, what emerged there was—in that apparatus of semiotics, history, and philosophy of language—a kind of “Conceptualism of the south.”

Going back to sign language, both in the church and on the wall, I wanted to introduce something like the ruins of Babel: an illegible sign that leaves us with the sensation that something is being said but we can't quite access the content of the signs that say it because we can't read the message. All that can be seen is the medium of that something that is, I believe, the very possibility of language. That something, shared by all signs, is what the first Ludwig Wittgenstein, in his *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, called the logical form of figuration.

But how do we enter into a relationship with that logical form?

If one assumes, as did Wittgenstein, that, logically, language cannot be spoken outside of itself—a controversial topic with a very long explanation—one would have to find a concrete sign as well as a specific language game. Strictly speaking, that sign could be anything. It could be, for example, a word by Tzara or a floating letter by Schwitters, but in this case it was the hands of the deaf. The trick was a simple one: to prolong, as much as possible, the movement from form to sign, working with a relatively universal language to fuse—confuse—both issues, somewhat like the way calligraphy and ornament come together in certain arabesques.

More than once—and not just in Europe—I was asked if there was a hidden content to decipher in these works. But the letters didn't even articulate a word. It was just a jumble of signs, but nobody realized that. That was when I realized that the experiment had produced exactly what I had wanted: an interruption of the act of reading and a crash against the surface of the sign, in which the viewer-reader is trapped, much like the way a fly gets caught in a spider web. This, in turn, brings us to a universal issue: the transparency of language. Normally, we read so quickly that we don't perceive what makes reading possible: letters. When we can read them, we pass over them so quickly, through them and on to the content they carry, we don't even realize it. But language is not transparent. Our language is as ancestral as the human race and has a common evolutionary origin with that of birds. Language is like that spider web. This is why works that are immediately understood are, at least in this sense, the most transparent. Once they have been deciphered, they quickly expire, because we have to read the next work. Here, on the other hand, in the absence of a clear meaning (signified), all that was left was the surface of the signifier without a precise message to be extracted from it, a body without content, like a larva's shell. This touches, in passing, another issue that is very typical of Christian mythology: the extravagant idea of the incarnation of the Divine Word—in other words, that in the end we are all the word of God incarnate.

Five years later, that same work was exhibited at the Iquique Cathedral, in the context of the first Chilean art triennial. In Cologne, religious services were suspended for the duration of my installation,

since every year the archbishopric would lend the space to the Kunsthochschule für Medien-Köln, the Academy of Media Arts of Cologne, so that the institute's students might exhibit their artwork. In Iquique, on the other hand, the work was put on display during the celebration of three Masses, which meant that the notion of televangelism took on new significance in virtue of the context of the installation. As the reader might suspect, the selection of that number is not coincidental. Unlike what unfolded in Germany, the work became a performative device. The three monitors came between the worshippers and three statues: of Christ, the Virgin Mary, and Mary Magdalene. To the right and to the left were bouquets of plastic flowers. Maybe the faithful perceived the piece to be a kitsch object (like the plastic flowers) or a light box with the image of Our Lady of Carmel.

The point is, they prayed through it, in front of it, and with it.

Demian Schopf, 2016.



"Die Heilige Trinität", Unbekannter Maler, XVIII Jahrhundert, Cuzco, Perù

Demian Schopf

LOCUS AMOENUS / TRINITAS

Videoinstallation

Locus Amoenus / Trinitas

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Locus Amoenus / Trinitas

Screenshot of the video used in the installation. For the complete video:

<https://vimeo.com/285022031>



Locus Amoenus / Trinitas.

Video installation and performance device for a Catholic Mass, Iquique Cathedral, Iquique, Chile, 2009.

Opposite page.

Locus Amoenus/Trinitas

Video installation, Church of the Holy Trinity (Trinitätskirche), Cologne, Germany, 2004.





Locus Amoenus/Trinitas
Video installation, Church of the Holy Trinity (Trinitätskirche), Cologne,
Germany, 2004.



Radiography of a painting of the Holy Trinity that was trifacial until 1913, and now hangs with just one face -that of Jesus- in the popular church of Señor Jesús del Gran Poder in La Paz, Bolivia.



Peruvian dancer wearing a trifacial Ukuku mask.



A scene from Stanley Kubrick's **A Clockwork Orange**



Patronage of Saint Joseph after Gaspar Miguel de Berrío
Demian Schopf, 137x160 cm., Oil on canvas, 2016.



Locus Amoenus / Trinitas
Video installation and performance device for a Catholic Mass,
Iquique Cathedral, Iquique, Chile, 2009.



Locus Amoenus / Trinitas
Video installation and performance device for a Catholic Mass,
Iquique Cathedral, Iquique, Chile, 2009.



A scene from Alejandro Jodorowsky's **The Holy Mountain**



y un cono de metal reluciente del diámetro
de un dedo.

Babel / Hrön

Video based on an excerpt from "Tlön Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" by Jorge Luis Borges.

For the complete video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EvKpeqTHEGY>