

Arnold Dreyblatt
The Resting State
By Michaela Richter, Curator

Arnold Dreyblatt's new project *The Resting State* at Neuer Berliner Kunstverein (n.b.k.) visualizes various aspects of a special mode of intellectual reflection – those short phases in which attention shifts from the present situation and focuses on experienced and possible future events. This particular neurological state occurs at intervals, our perception of the surrounding world rarely concentrates on a fixed object for a lengthy period of time, but is fluid and influenced by a variety of impressions. Cognitive scientists extensively explore those forms of information processing that occur when the brain is not involved in the accomplishment of specific tasks. In these periods of “rest” certain brain areas, characterized as default mode networks, become active, resulting in an intrinsic, fundamental preoccupation with inner states.

This subjective meandering between spontaneous memory, imagination, analysis and projection is an essential part of individual consciousness. These moments are sometimes also described by the aid of such terms as “daydreaming” or “mind-wandering”. They ensure a continuous localization of the self corresponding to an individual perception of the world and the evaluation of previous experiences. This form of introspection represents a space in which scenarios and probabilities are constantly considered as conclusions are drawn with regard to one's own future; at the same time, free association and the blending out of restrictive circumstances constitute an important basis for creativity.

Arnold Dreyblatt has intensively studied the methods with which researchers try to document this mental process and the associated “stream of consciousness”. The test persons are often exposed to a low-stimulus environment and asked at unforeseeable times to report on their current trains of thought. In the process, light and sound signals are employed, which interrupt the introspection at random intervals, as well as individual catchwords, which the study participants are expected to spontaneously comment on, or questionnaires, which retrospectively ask for a description of the experiences in the “resting state”. Dreyblatt takes up these elements in a rhythmic composition of visual and acoustic elements as well as with text fragments he has compiled from scientific studies. Archival footage from numerous sources brings together excerpts from films showing neurological and psychological tests from the 1930s to 1960s; experiential reports and questions by test persons and researchers quoted on the walls and in the sound track of the installation provide insight into the central role that visualization and language play in consciousness research. At the same time, they refer to the difficulty of making the complex process of individual “mind-wandering” comprehensible. With his installation Dreyblatt addresses not only neurological but also philosophical implications of the state under examination: while the research literature frequently questions the usefulness of the “resting state” and neoliberal jargon highlights the advantages of this human form of data processing and evaluation in contrast to a possible mental absence, it above all represents a moment of retreat from external productivity. It is a deeply private area in which one's own identity is debated and a personal image of the past, present and future is drafted. Numerous examples from literature and art adopt the narrative techniques used in the

process, in an attempt to describe the innermost thoughts of protagonists or to test new creative processes: fragmentary and point-of-view narratives, abrupt changes of scene, collage and montage methods such as those attempted by Virginia Woolf and James Joyce, by Dada and the Surrealists. In its isolation and non-linearity, this kind of narrative opposes predictability just as the “resting state” eludes objective observability – not interceptable or recordable, not anticipated and continuously questioning the status quo, it constitutes an important dimension of political thought. - Michaela Richter, Curator

ects of a special mode of intellectual reflection – those short phases in which attention shifts from the present situation and focuses on experienced and possible future events. This particular neurological state occurs at intervals, our perception of the surrounding world rarely concentrates on a fixed object for a lengthy period of time, but is fluid and influenced by a variety of impressions. Cognitive scientists extensively explore those forms of information processing that occur when the brain is not involved in the accomplishment of specific tasks. In these periods of “rest” certain brain areas, characterized as default mode networks, become active, resulting in an intrinsic, fundamental preoccupation with inner states.

This subjective meandering between spontaneous memory, imagination, analysis and projection is an essential part of individual consciousness. These moments are sometimes also described by the aid of such terms as “daydreaming” or “mind-wandering”. They ensure a continuous localization of the self corresponding to an individual perception of the world and the evaluation of previous experiences. This form of introspection represents a space in which scenarios and probabilities are constantly considered as conclusions are drawn with regard to one’s own future; at the same time, free association and the blending out of restrictive circumstances constitute an important basis for creativity.

Arnold Dreyblatt has intensively studied the methods with which researchers try to document this mental process and the associated “stream of consciousness”. The test persons are often exposed to a low-stimulus environment and asked at unforeseeable times to report on their current trains of thought. In the process, light and sound signals are employed, which interrupt the introspection at random intervals, as well as individual catchwords, which the study participants are expected to spontaneously comment on, or questionnaires, which retrospectively ask for a description of the experiences in the “resting state”. Dreyblatt takes up these elements in a rhythmic composition of visual and acoustic elements as well as with text fragments he has compiled from scientific studies. Archival footage from numerous sources brings together excerpts from films showing neurological and psychological tests from the 1930s to 1960s; experiential reports and questions by test persons and researchers quoted on the walls and in the sound track of the installation provide insight into the central role that visualization and language play in consciousness research. At the same time, they refer to the difficulty of making the complex process of individual “mind-wandering” comprehensible. With his installation Dreyblatt addresses not only neurological but also philosophical implications of the state under examination: while the research literature frequently questions the usefulness of the “resting state” and neoliberal jargon highlights the advantages of this human form of data processing and evaluation in contrast to a possible mental absence, it above all represents a moment of retreat from external productivity. It is a deeply private area in which one’s own identity is debated and a personal image of the past, present and future is drafted. Numerous examples from literature and art adopt the narrative techniques used in the

process, in an attempt to describe the innermost thoughts of protagonists or to test new creative processes: fragmentary and point-of-view narratives, abrupt changes of scene, collage and montage methods such as those attempted by Virginia Woolf and James Joyce, by Dada and the Surrealists. In its isolation and non-linearity, this kind of narrative opposes predictability just as the “resting state” eludes objective observability – not interceptable or recordable, not anticipated and continuously questioning the status quo, it constitutes an important dimension of political thought.