

μυθοποίηση – mythopoesis

GABRIEL Marianische Antiphonen I „Unter deinen Schutz und Schirm fliehen wir“

“The greatest magician would be the one who could so enchant himself, that to him the results of his own wizardry would seem like alien, self-assured apparitions. Could that not be the case with us?”

Friedrich von Hardenberg, called Novalis – fragments

GABRIEL Marianische Antiphonen I „Unter deinen Schutz und Schirm fliehen wir“ [Marian Antiphons I “Beneath thy protection we seek refuge”] is a performative narrative and exhibition by the fictional character Gabriel. It focuses on the search for, contemplation of and refuge in the mythical figure of Mary. Mary in his conception is not only experienced as the Christian mother of God, but also as a powerful symbolic figure representing the female face of God.

The exhibition is a time capsule. We accompany Gabriel – the seeker, pilgrim, artist, activist, human being and friend – on one of his pilgrimage’s stations: to the Templar Castle *Convento de Cristo* in Portugal.

The authors of the performance and exhibition are Julian M. H. Schindele and Edwin W. Moes – who also embodies Gabriel. The photographs are by Stefan Hähnel.

In the fourth year of Gabriel’s pilgrimage, photographer Stefan Hähnel visited the mythopoet, pilgrim and performance artist in Portugal. Together with Gabriel and his four black dogs, Hähnel experienced everyday life on the streets, in villages, and in the wilderness around the Marian pilgrimage site of Fátima. In the summer of 1917, the Virgin Mary is said to have appeared to three shepherd children at this place. The encounter between Hähnel and Gabriel resulted in the documentation of a narrative performance in three chapters: *The Marianische Antiphonen* [Marian Antiphons].

With this exhibition we open the first chapter. Its focus is a performance that took place on August 5, 2019 at the *Convento de Cristo* in Tomar, Portugal. Founded in 1162 by the Knights Templar, this imposing fortified monastery is located about 20 km east of the ‘epicentre’ of Fátima. Its inner church, an octagonal building, is modeled on the scale of the *Church of the Holy Sepulchre* in the old town of Jerusalem. The performance is part of the ongoing *Gesamtkunstwerk* and pilgrimage *WEG*, which Gabriel/Moes started on September 15, 2015. *WEG* again is part of the *Mnemosyne-Cycle* by *Bublitz* dedicated to the European culture and memory.

Marianische Antiphonen I is the artist’s first solo exhibition in collaboration with *Bublitz*. It is an individual mythology, a religious field and overlapping cosms of different European and non-European, ancient and pagan worlds of images, meaning, and symbols.

Antiphons

The title of the performance cycle refers to the concept of antiphons (ancient Greek “counter-sounding, answering”). These are call and response chants in which musical elements are answered by other instruments or voices.

The structural openness of Gabriel’s performance art can also be metaphorically understood as an

'antiphon'. He performs without a stage, without a fourth wall, in public space, without a visor, without (art) institutions behind him, exposed to the looks, actions and answers of others – for better or worse.

Marian antiphons are invocations to the Blessed Mother in the liturgy of the Catholic Church. Gabriel has borrowed the verse *Beneath thy protection we seek refuge – Sub tuum præsidium confugimus* from the oldest of these hymns. A call and a cry out to the protective Madonna, who, perhaps, gives us, metaphysically homeless, some shelter. "This is my service to Maria," one note of Gabriel's proclaims.

The artworks of the exhibition – background information and possible interpretations

Das Pilgerzeichen [The Pilgrim's Sign]

In front of *Thesaurós*, the exhibition site, there is a scallop imprint in the concrete. A pilgrim's sign, signpost, fossil and stamp of the artist.

Hermeneutischer Schlüssel und Motto GABRIEL MA I (Geschenk) [Hermeneutic Key and Motto GABRIEL MA I (Gift)]

The hermeneutic key can be understood as the 'motto' of this exhibition, the *Thesaurós*, as well as the exhibition cycle *μυθοποίηση - mythopoesis* in general.

Hardenberg's words, from the fragments he left behind (circa 1799), are an ethical parable about freedom and the art of freedom. A cheer for the practicable, action-guiding power of imagination. They lead us directly into the heart of his philosophy of *magical idealism*, a continuation and flamboyant fertilization of the all-shattering Immanuel Kant.

The artists would be pleased and honoured if they succeed in leaving you a lasting joy through this gift.

Zwei Antlitze – Die Wegkapellen-Madonna und die ephesische Artemis [Two Countenances – The Wayside Chapel Madonna and the Ephesian Artemis]

According to the legend, Mary, after the death of Jesus, went to Ephesus (situated in the territory of modern Turkey) with the disciple John. Today, near Ephesus is a place of pilgrimage, the *House of the Mother Mary*, her supposed final resting place.

The installation *Zwei Antlitze – Die Wegkapellen-Madonna und die ephesische Artemis* consists of two elements: an etching by François Perrier from 1638 and the so-called Wayside Chapel Madonna.

Both figures can be found standing on a square stone. Engrossed in a millennia-old dialogue, they are two sisters, the same thing embodied differently.

Gabriel searches by looking for Maria, the female goddess of Christianity, but he also finds the descendant of Isis and Astarte, the foam-born Aphrodite and Hathor, Kybele and Artemis. In Mary, Gabriel finds the manifestation of a principle inherited from the mother deities of the ancient world.

The Wayside Chapel Madonna comes from a pilgrims' chapel, closed in 2011, that was located on the Way of St. James in Belgium. The rough concrete figure shows a strong and intrepid Madonna crushing two snakes under her feet. By choosing this figure, which is iconographically closely related to the motifs of the *Crescent Moon Madonna* and the *Virgin of Victory*, the artists underline the power of the particular Mary which feels most close to them.

In the figure of the Ephesian Artemis, in a nearly exemplary symbolic form, a multitude of narratives telling of the migration of god's names intersect.

Artemis, the virgin Greek-Olympic goddess, is the patron of the nascent life. Here in this depiction we see her as she was worshipped specifically in the ancient metropolis of Ephesus. The pictorial tradition goes back to an older goddess who was worshipped at the same place: the Anatolian goddess Kybele, the so-called Magna Mater.

Marianische Antiphonen I (Tafel) [Marian Antiphons I (Board)]

For each of Gabriel's performances there exists a so-called *Tafel* [Board].

This board gives us, in the text-image combination of nine photographs and nine text fragments, an overview of the course of events in the performance from August 5, 2019. The most important acts are outlined in simple, sometimes humorous, sometimes cryptic words. Postfactum we reconstruct as viewers – poetizing ourselves – the past, its sequences, empty spaces, physicality, and interstices.

The most important acts were: going to the *Convento de Cristo*, the refreshment after a long journey at a well, the retreat of the 'soldier', who puts down his boots – his most important tool – cleans them and then cleanses himself in three ritual acts, entering the house of God, into which he carries the newborn life, the *Coming God*.¹ (He is in the form of a kitten, to which Gabriel gave the name NEO). Then the expulsion from this house by a representative of the institution and the return to the starting point and place of the cleansing ritual. There Gabriel writes four letters to the shepherd children and to Mary. He becomes a messenger and receives the inner call to carry them to Fátima, the location of the Visions of Mary. The further course of this journey is the subject and content of the *Marianische Antiphonen II & III* [Marian Antiphons II & III].

Zwei Autoren: Feldarbeiter – Hausarbeiter [Two Authors: Fieldworker – Houseworker]

The work *Zwei Autoren: Feldarbeiter – Hausarbeiter* is another joint work by Schindele and Gabriel. A vitrine with two red booklets. One of them has been stripped and obviously exposed to various weather conditions, the other one is neatly labeled (Edwin W. Moes/Gabriel), with traces of use, but in good condition.

Both notebooks were purchased in November 2017 as part of a triple pack. In the following month, Schindele brought one of these notebooks as a gift and greeting to Sagunt, Spain. This was the first personal encounter between him and Moes/Gabriel after seven years.

If one compares the condition of the two objects, two radically different lifestyles are reflected in an almost flagrant manner. Houseworker – Fieldworker. The two booklets allude to the joint authorship of the character Gabriel. It is an organic and dialogical process in which the actions and path, the signs and movements of Gabriel are at the disposition. In a new, still unfamiliar way, as Schindele says: „For Moes invited me to write with him in 2018 toward an alter ego – which he himself is – and that has existed since 2005.“

MA I – Die geleitete Feder [MA I – The Guided Quill]

Before a mighty late Gothic portal, we see Gabriel. Sitting, writing, focused. When you look at the wooden door behind the artist, associations of a heavenly gate are almost inevitably awakened. And indeed, the holiest of holies of the Templar Church lies behind it: The inner church is modeled 1:1 after the *Holy Sepulchre*, Jesus' supposed grave, in the old town of Jerusalem. The almost graphic ornament of the doors, the rich Manuline decoration, the heavy materiality of the building, they seem to glow in the heat of the day and in the play of light and shadow.

¹ The 'Coming God' is a title of the god Dionysus as used since ancient times. For us of this place particularly interesting that Dionysus, probably a male variation and adoption of female goddesses. How can a male god genuinely stand for fertility? Manfred Frank (* 1945) writes in reference to Friedrich Schelling (1775–1854): "so it is not far to the presumption that the cult of Dionysus was from the beginning connected to the veneration of the great mother and has kept them under different circumstances. So Dionysus and Kybele/Semele/Demeter stood, long before the Confusion of the Delphic and Athenian cultures in a direct relationship" (Frank; 1982; *The Coming God. Lectures on New Mythology*).

Our view of the artist is framed by the rear view of two female profiles in the foreground. Are they watching him or the door? What effect did the performance have on random tourists who happened to be there?

He is holding a feather in his hand. Gabriel writes. Different writing utensils around him, ink, paper, a book of Spinoza that is important to him, as well as the red notebook. One might also see NEO's paw peeking out from behind Gabriel. Regarding this act, the *Tafel* [Board] says, "Gabriel finds peace. He sits on the steps in front of the Manueline portal. In an inner antiphony he writes the four letters to Maria and to the shepherd children." These letters make him a messenger. He was ordered to carry them to Fátima, to the place of the Visions of Mary, to the holm oak. What might their content be?

Urraum Altar [Primal Space Altar]

Die Dritte Waschung oder die Honigtaufe (Werkzeuge) [The Third Ablution or the Baptism of Honey (Tools)]

The photograph *Die Dritte Waschung oder die Honigtaufe* [The Third Ablution or the Baptism of Honey] corresponds directly to some objects that are arranged on a small altar a few meters in front. Gabriel calls this altar the *Urraum Altar*. The *Urraum* [Primal Space] is a central concept in his performative art. „In every performance and when I go into a trance, I create for myself a primal space in which I am only with myself. It is a kind of hermetic shelter that I demarcate, sometimes visibly, sometimes invisible to outsiders. Its purpose is to protect what is inside, and vice versa, to keep the outside from the inside.”

This *Urraum* is a sharply cut and polished square sandstone slab. On it, we find some tools: a glass vial with honey, a PET bottle and “one of my aluminum feeding bowls. It is the bowl with which the third ablution, the baptism of honey, was carried out. I and my animals have eaten and drunk from this for years. They are shared vessels between humans and animals.“

The symbol of honey is one of the recurring motifs of the *Marianische Antiphonen* [Marian Antiphons]. The bee lives on the border of plant and animal. Its honey, along with milk, is one of the ancient offerings made to Mother Goddesses since prehistoric times.

MA I – Die Dritte Waschung oder die Honigtaufe [MA I – The Third Ablution or the Baptism of Honey]

„I, man, I am dirty, and before I enter the sanctuary I must cleanse myself. The respect for the symbols and one's own faith requires it.“

A classic, almost geometric picture structure. In the foreground we see Gabriel, nearly naked, at a moment when he is deluging himself with an amber-coloured liquid. He is standing on the stone slabs of the courtyard of the *Convento de Cristo*, below him a square folded blanket – the marked primal space. In front of him the instruments of his ablution: olive oil, milk, honey, water. Behind him a wall, which by its architecture almost forms a cross. The pilgrim's clean shoes stand next to it.

The photograph is called *Die Dritte Waschung oder die Honigtaufe* [The Third Ablution or the Baptism of Honey] and shows the last of the three symbolic cleaning acts before Gabriel enters the interior of the *Convento de Cristo*. The elements used for these rituals, which point in their symbolic quality to the most diverse corners of global (cultural) history, are united in their quality of being arch images of purity and the immaculate.

The protagonist himself has closed his eyes, all his attention seems to be directed towards the inside. It is a strange moment; a movement that cannot be fixed seems to lead down through the

whole picture. Pathos and rest, activity and standstill, river and sea. Polarities intertwined.

Die Pflanze homo absconditus [The Plant homo absconditus]

In many cases, the performance artist vouches for the ephemeral artistic act with his physicality, which always brings with it the problem that we as third parties are 'only' confronted with memory objects of a past action, whether photographs or relics from the performances. In order to underline this absence and, at the same time, perhaps, also as a solution, Gabriel insists that a plant be present in each of his exhibitions. As they indicate both his presence and absence, he calls them, alluding to the eternally hidden god deus absconditus, *homo absconditus*.

Paar #11: 1968–2019 (Werkzeuge) [Pair #11: 1968–2019 (Tools)]

These boots are a cross-generational performance relic and a memory object par excellence.

First, they are the eleventh pair of shoes that Gabriel went through on his pilgrimage *WEG*. "My most important tool from August to October 2019." Specifically, they play an exposed role in the *Marianische Antiphonen* [Marian Antiphones] as symbolic instruments. Taking them off and cleaning them in the first *Marianische Antiphone* is the leading symbol for the act of finally coming home after a long journey. The *Tafel* [Board] says, "Gabriel is cleaning his boots on the main square of the old Templar castle. Return and retreating, the soldier comes home – these are his thoughts."

Walking without shoes is also a recurring feature in the artist's grammar of movement. In this performance, he enters the *Convento de Cristo* barefoot, which could be read as a gesture of humility. The boots carry many more layers of memories and pre-histories of their journey.

Shortly before the photographer Stefan Hähnel left for Portugal, Gabriel informed 'his curator' Julian M. H. Schindele that the tenth pair of shoes is now in the process of disintegrating. Schindele intuitively thought of a pair of shoes that he had confiscated when he left his parents' house. They had been a long-term fascination and curious object (unfortunately, they were three sizes too big). His father had told him, already in early childhood and with very rich imagery, of their history and 'areas of use':

Bernd Bublitz had bought these combat boots in 1967 while studying medicine. The reason for the purchase was his joining of the communist *Thälmann-Kampfbund* [Thälmann Combat Association] in Kiel, northern Germany. He was spurred to make the purchase by the thought of political agitation, demonstrations and more. Agility and movement on the streets in the time of the gentle revolution of '68 is their origin.

Another important date in the course of the shoes is February 28, 1981, when, despite a ban on demonstrations, a large demonstration took place near Brokdorf in the Wilstermarsch. Around 100,000 people gathered to demonstrate against the continued construction of a nuclear power plant. A symbol of resistance and a key date that many in Germany will probably still remember, it was also a central moment for the then very young Green Party, which has become so influential in the narratives of our world today.

With these thoughts in mind, Schindele gave the shoes to the photographer Hähnel on his way to Portugal. They went from hand to hand, from generation to generation over a period of over 50 years. Perhaps it is no coincidence that the journey of the shoes began in the political sphere and disembogues in the spheres of art.

Karte I – 15.9.2015–7.8.2019 [Map I – 15.9.2015–7.8.2019]

„We have two jewels, the world and time.“ This statement of Gabriel’s is reflected in the art work *Karte I – 15.9.2015–7.8.2019*. We see a section of our blue planet. This ranges from east to west, from the eastern shore of the Caspian Sea to the Azores in the Atlantic Ocean. From north to south we see the fjords of Norway, the tip of Sinai and the Red Sea as boundaries. „Pilgrimage is always also a testimony and my trace, laid on this map like the fleeting touch of a thread, is just that. Testimony and memory. I see the ancient paths and trails as the blood vessels that have bound and still bind our continent.“

The titular dates mark the beginning of the pilgrimage – the performance *WEG* – on September 15, 2015. The ‘recording’ ends with the performative narrative *Marianische Antiphonen III* [Marian Antiphons III] on August 7, 2019.

The map is based on the aerial photo mosaic that is freely available on the Internet from ESRI (Environmental Systems Research Institute), a software manufacturer of geographic information systems. It was chosen because of the details in the presentation, the varied color and the rich color spectrum.

This object was created in collaboration with the geographer Peter Hintze.

Two figurations of the Madonna: The Wayside Chapel Madonna and an unknown pewter Madonna

Gabriel sees his thinking and acting as strongly inspired by the *Imjaslawije* movement. This movement has its origins in Russian monasticism and is considered one of the most important reformatory currents of the Orthodox Church in the 20th century. Its core principle states, „The name of God is God himself.“ Pawel Alexandrowitsch Florenski (1882–1937), one of *Imjaslawije*’s most important representatives, summarized this idea in the following words, „But at that time I grasped the thought that was fundamental for my later world view, namely that in the name the thing named, in the symbol the symbolised, in the representation the reality of the represented is present, and that therefore the symbol is the symbolised.“² These thoughts were later formulated in analytical philosophy – with a completely different aim – in the succession of Searle and Wittgenstein.

For Gabriel, the presence of the two Madonna figures in the exhibition means that they also evoke a real presence of the represented. Or are, at least potentially, able to evoke it. We encounter the Mother of God in two different modes. Two heroine figurines.

The lettering at the foot of the Madonna figure, which sits enthroned on a wooden wall console, reads *ND de LOURDES*. This stands for ‘Notre Dame de Lourdes’. The found Madonna, created by an unknown French artist, thus points to Lourdes, the second largest Marian pilgrimage site in Europe after Fátima. Lourdes was founded about seventy years earlier than Fátima, also after an apparition of Mary appeared. Gabriel alludes to this recurring phenomenon by doubling the figures of the Madonna as well as the thematization of Lourdes itself. This takes shape in a French statue of the Virgin Mary from the late 19th century situated on an ornate pedestal, on the front of which the Lamb of God is encased in a wreath of rays. This figure seems to be in motion. Her hands clasped devoutly, nothing abject emanates from her. Above all, beauty, grace and dignity.

² Florenski; 1961; To my children. Memories of a youth in the Caucasus

For a description of the *Wayside Chapel Madonna*, please read the text about the work *Zwei Antlitze - Die Wegkapellen-Madonna und die ephesische Artemis* [Two Countenances - The Wayside Chapel Madonna and the Ephesian Artemis].

Some concluding passages of theoretical reflection

The narrative and analytical investigation of contemporary mythologies (understood as complex poetic narratives that primarily, but not necessarily, react to preceding mythological sign-cosmoses, thus continuing them) is the focus of the exhibition cycle *μυθοποίηση - mythopoesis*. It was launched in February 2020 with the exhibition *Tempel auf Zeit* [Temporary Temple] at *Bublitz. Thesaurós. Uhlandstraße*. The starting point for the mythopoetic observations are the works, personalities and -cosmoses of the artist group *Thesaurós* and the narrative interests of Julian M. H. Schindele.

In *Art and Person* the figure and the art of Gabriel, the boundaries between fantasy, staging and reality become blurred. Particularly in the *Marianische Antiphonen* [Marian Antiphons] we encounter – even more so than in his previous political activist or psychological performances – a confluence of history, symbols, gestures, and narratives from the spheres of myth, the sacred, and the real.

The performances are new and individual rituals. Sequences of symbolic actions that do not originate in a private language, but stand on solid, i.e. legible, cultural-historical ground. Through their execution, they become self-fulfilling prophecies. Imagination becomes manifest. The ‘mythical age’ in which Gabriel locates himself is not the irretrievable splinter of a distant past, but rather the possibility, available at any time, to confront the whole world, no matter which signs shape the respective historical present.

The mythopoetic quality is present in that he appears before us as an artist (and not ‘only’ as a religious ecstatic or mystic). This means that in his works he creates forms and leaves traces that make his inner experience accessible to us. With one of the most powerful aesthetic methodologies of the last 150 years, it can perhaps be expressed as follows: The individual enters the oceanic sphere of the Dionysian and, as an artist and therefore a Apollonian form seeker, brings these experiences back into our shared world.

We as viewers become witnesses of a real, yet invented mystical and mythical plot, which Moes/Gabriel experiences wholly. Maybe for us, one might say. Beyond art, but through its means. The „marriage between artist and pilgrim,“ as he says.