

KRIWET

By Tobi Maier (originally published in Spanish by *Exit Express*, Madrid, April 2010)

In the mid 1960's William S. Burroughs recognized that 'written words are images in sequence' (in *The Electronic Revolution*, 1970). Around the same time Ferdinand KRIWET was producing films and radio programs for the regional and state broadcasting system in West Germany and was active as a theater director using a technique that roots in terminology to create meaning. Inspired by compositions of Pierre Boulez and Luigi Nono, KRIWET also published a variety of concrete poetry recordings often based on snippets recorded from popular media. On stage KRIWET performed live e.g. together with *Mothers of Invention* alongside Frank Zappa (during *Mixed Media* in Essen, 1968) and furthermore created a vast output of publications and audio records. From the late 1980's the artist has made only rare appearances and there is little knowledge of new works being produced aside from re-edit's and re-releases of existing sound, film and photographic materials.

Aesthetics of montage have long been in use as a means for propaganda and agitation for the masses. In the German context this has surfaced in the practice of two Dada artists: Kurt Schwitters and in the work of John Heartfield. The political significance of their interventions in language and representation was intentional. Some of KRIWET's most politically engaged work originates in the US American context. The artist traveled to New York several times and during summer 1969 staid at the Hotel Chelsea on West 23rd Street to collate TV footage from the Apollo 11 space voyager launch to the moon, remaining in front of the screen and filming a selection of private channels until the shuttle returned back to planet earth. Upon his return to West Germany and with the help of his friends at public broadcasting he spliced the footage together for a 16mm film sound collage. Entitled *Apollovision* (1969), the film joins different commentaries of enthused TV reporters: "when those two Americans walked on the moon the people of the world were brought closer together." Another excerpt states that "the spirit of Apollo transcends geographical barriers and political differences, it can bring the people of the world together in peace." With US forces elsewhere engaged in war, KRIWET's edit conveys a rather critical hunch.

Besides an interest in the subject of extraterrestrial travel, KRIWET's motivation for the production of this work lies foremost in the media production of private television, at that time non-existent in Germany, its propaganda power and the reception in the living rooms of the many Americans watching. KRIWET clearly saw Apollo as a cover up for the US not winning the war in Vietnam and alongside the film published the book *Apollo Amerika* with edition Suhrkamp. Reading directions alternate on every page, thus forcing the viewer to turn the book by 180 degrees, creating a sense of dizziness - as if looking from the moon to earth and vice versa.

A few years later, in 1972, KRIWET returned to the US three times, covering events during the Nixon and McGovern electoral campaign. Again he was interested in how buying airtime on TV can help a party win the election while elsewhere a war is going on. He published a series of black and white photographs alongside a vinyl record with recordings in 1974 with Droste Publishers Düsseldorf and termed the work *Campaign*. Only recently the artist decided to edit the original black and white prints in 21 frames and present them as a neatly stacked tableau piece (*Campaign Tableau*, 2007). Examining this piece one quickly remembers the last presidential election in the US, when democrats around Obama promised to bring the troops back home from Afghanistan and the Middle East. In the accompanying sound piece *Campaign* (1973), one of the commentators voices sounds from the off: 'Politics is television and television is politics'.

The antagonistic stance of language in his audio and film works continues in KRIWET's visual texts or what he calls 'Sehtexte' (visual texts). They have a sign character, as have all public texts on notice boards, house fronts, lorries on roads and runways. Often designed in layers and circles without direction the work liberates the reader from the hierarchies of text and stimulates a new experience in language. These newly found neologisms in the English language include GLAMOURIVAL, SUBURBANDIT and HOMODELIGHT - KRIWET found a way to articulate his gay pride and to comment on gender issues at the time. However the idea of agency also resonates in these neologisms invented for the Sehtexte. And KRIWET has stated himself that the "publics own reading actively has to complete the text anew in each case ... and thus becomes similar to that of the independent performer of music". Just like artists from the American context, think of Dara Birnbaum, Barbara Kruger or Martha Rosler, KRIWET analyzed in his work the language of television, advertisement and photography. However and this is perhaps one of the reasons an American public is so baffled by KRIWET's work and will need some time to come to terms with it, this work predates the recently rediscovered Pictures Generation by half a decade.