

## LOCAL ANTHROPOGENIES – PHYLOGENESIS

### A PHOTOGRAPHIC HISTORY OF PHOTOGRAPHY

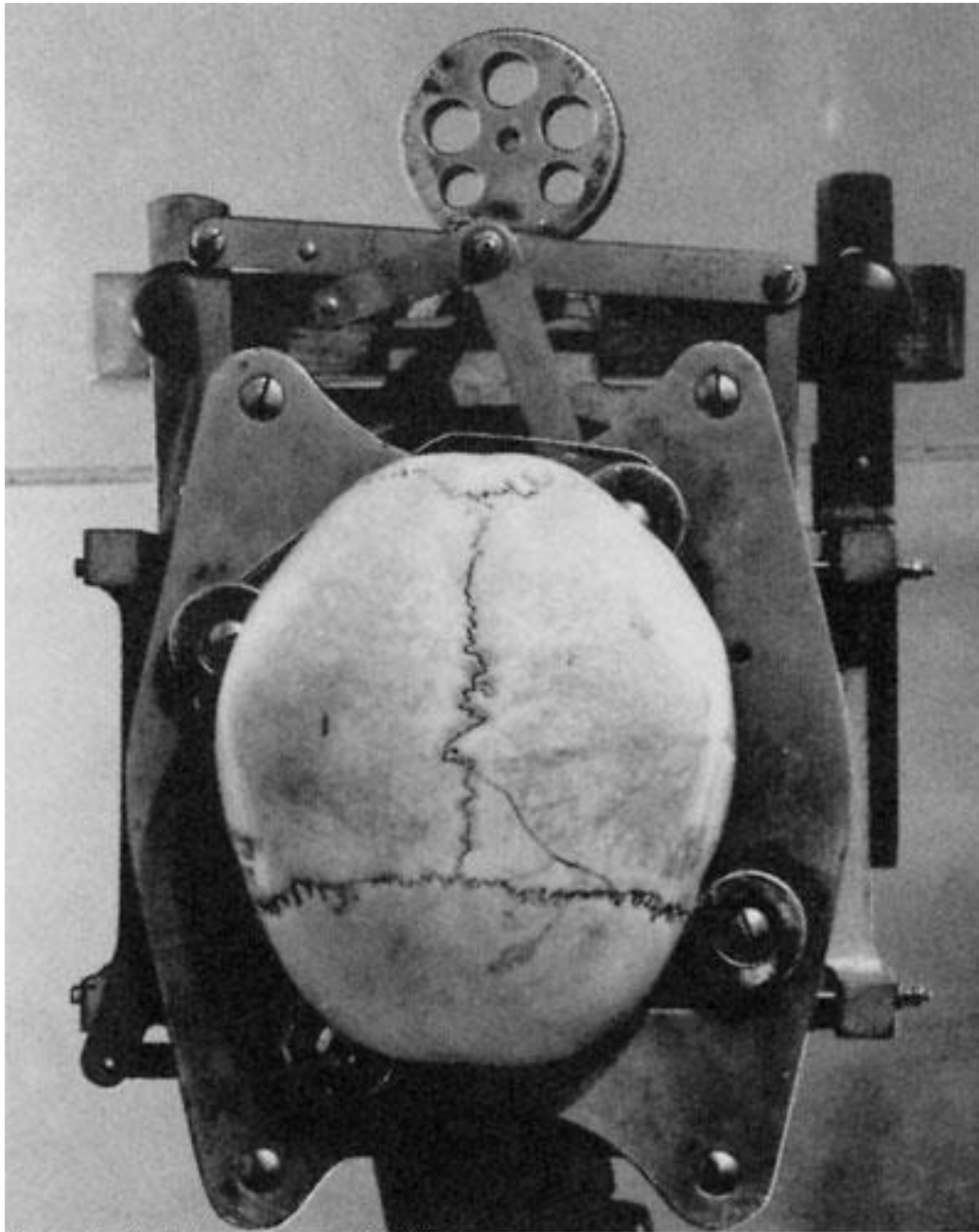
## 24. DIETER APPELT (Germany, 1935)

### Explosive-implosive interfaces

Giacomelli and Jorge Molder forced us to envisage the Italian genius and the Portuguese language. Similarly, to situate Dieter Appelt, we must start from the German genius and language.

A language that consists of the crushing of phonemes that are so closely linked in their affricatives, of words that are so compressed in their of monemes, of a syntax that so constantly breeds anticipation and retention that it already deflagrates before we even saw what is was speaking of. Using this language, Hölderlin and Nietzsche switched to Empedocles and its four main elements in hatred and love. A language possessing an ‘Ur’ prefix marking that there is a beginning before the beginning, and an ‘Er’ prefix signalling that some processes are simultaneously active and passive. There, where every surface is merely an interface, the gravitational and chemical resultant between two milieus and two densities. The language of chemists and alchemists. The language where the space-time was conceived, the packaging of time into space. The language of Alfred Wegener, who first thought that the terrestrial crust consisted of tectonic plates in reciprocal adjustments.

In the book-catalogue *Dieter Appelt*, published by Dirk Nishen in 1989 (DA), let us stop before the photograph of a skull, clasped in a metal yoke where the seams between the cranial plates stand out (\*DA, 79). In front of that, it is difficult not to understand that the citadel of thought, and thought itself, rely on the local and evolutionarily transitory encounter of several bone formations sticking somehow each to the other from a dura-mater, then other meninges, then of a brain, tightly but by chance accounted. For the rest, this *Schädel/Maschinen* (skull/machines) is part of a series entitled *Erinnerungsspur* (traces of memory), where space and time meet as closely as can be.

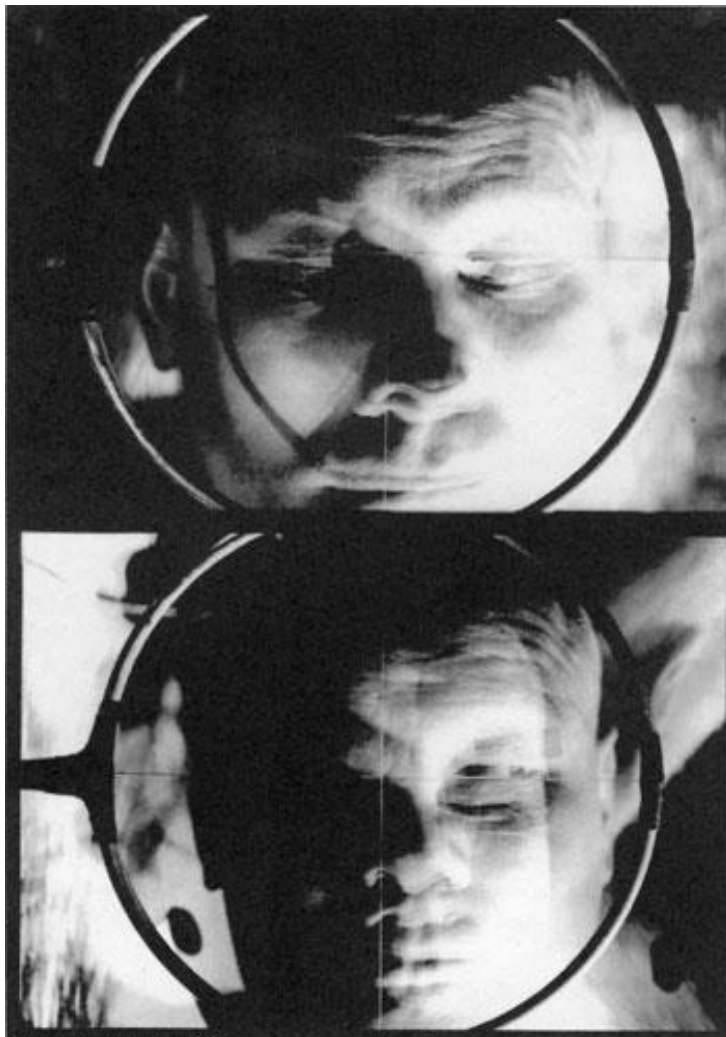


Dieter Appelt, *Erinnerungspur*, DA, 79

All of Dieter Appelt's themes hence refer to forces accumulated up to the crushing or combustion. A stack of wood (DA, 46), a dense and frontal underbrush (DA, 31). Some naked sapwood (DA, 34). Wooden beams that are lying down or standing in the manner of Bernt Lohaus (DA, 47). Bodies covered in mud, bandages, digits (DA, 28). In a sequence titled *Carnac*, a forearm and an extended hand in the gaping fracture of a rock take us back to the first lithic divisions (DA, 61).

Could this attention to evolutionary interfaces give way to a photographic subject? Yes, because photography is itself a double interface: chemical interface through its films and physical interfaces through its lenses.

The only thing to do was to take Man Ray's means and re-use them. This time, the solarisation will suppress the skin of a dog to put its internal energies bare (DA, 7). The rayograph rendered everything weightless; now, it will serve as the instrument of a direct and wrapping palpation of the object by the photons. The superimpositions that made everything float and slide multiply the layers in layering. The bizarre focals that contented with bloating or stretching will locally vary the thicknesses and thinness so that they might con-penetrates, consolidate, re-envelop. The magnifying glass – archetype of every focal (DA, 20, 21) – opens the book. Shortcuts, which had sometimes dispersed the bodies, will pick them up eruptively from the feet (DA, 71), from the head (DA, 38, 85), whist the 90° or 180° rotations, in the manner of Baselitz (DA, 77, 85), will dig their ravines again. Finally, taking four very detailed views of the three-quarters of a face, without a magnifying glass (DA, 49, 59), or with one (\*\*DA, 57, 56), by slightly displacing them, we can hope to obtain 'das Licht der Gedanken' in 'der Schatten der Körper'.



Dieter Appelt, DA, 57-56

To situate Dieter Appelt better, it is not useless to evoke German sculptor and performer Joseph Beuys. When Beuys' plane crashed on the eve of the Second World War, his skull was fractured. The fracture was sufficiently important that he could no longer envisage a head without imagining what was inside. He always wore a hat, which, in his case immediately evoked a skull, a brain, the circumvolution of a brain. And the brain is the best summary of our near universe, because its organised neurones are the most elaborated produced of phylogenies, and because it renders the packaging and layering so important in the epigenetic. Dieter Appelt – on the page facing his *Schädel/Maschinen* – photographed a dish and a head that turn their concavities one towards the other. This earns them the title of *Quelle (source)* (DA, 78). The 'source' is probably the supreme inside as origin.

In Dieter Appelt, we can see a sort of opposite of Mapplethorpe, who practiced Apollo while he practices Dionysus. This is not a reason to print it in the saturated blacks that make him an emulator of performer Hermann Nitsch. The research of the inside of the inside, of the former of the former (Ur-) – in a word, of the internal shadow – supposes a very fine grain, as in the Dirk Nishen book-catalogue that we have followed. There is nothing less brutal, there is nothing more delicate than a post-modernism that does not feed off stories as anecdotes or as events, but as 'Urgeschichte'.

Walker Evans showed us a poet archaeologist. Ansel Adams a poet geologist. Sander is a poet sociologist. Is there a poet palaeontologist? This could very well be Dieter Appelt's case.

We spoke about him using many classic German quotations, invoking Schiller or Novalis. Let us fall to the temptation and evoke a verse by Hölderlin in *Der Archipelagus*: 'Komm'ich zu dir und grüss in deiner Stille dich, Alter!'. 'Stille' is 'silence' and 'Alter' is an old man.

**Henri Van Lier**

**A photographic history of photography**

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*List of abbreviations of common references:*

*The acronyms (\*), (\*\*), (\*\*\*) refer to the first, second, and third illustration of the chapters, respectively. Thus, the reference (\*\*\*) AP, 417) must be interpreted as: "This refers to the third illustration of the chapter, and you will find a better reproduction, or a different one, with the necessary technical specifications, in The Art of Photography listed under number 417".*