

Cuts in the Continuum

On the series *From Dates* by Paul Heimbach

In 2005, when Paul Heimbach began to produce works according to the system of his two series *From Dates*, he not only adopted a new structural model, but also embarked on a new complex of work. Since the 1990s, he had been producing a large number of artist's books and series of graphic artworks in which serial structures had been realised with all their possible permutations: magic squares as number fields and visual representations, binary numbers depicted using horizontal and vertical lines, sequence and superimposition of colour spectrums, and so on. While the essential aesthetic attraction of these works lay in their completion, in the manifest implementation of every possible combination of their elements, in *From Dates* Paul Heimbach breaches the model of completion for the first time. It is no longer possible to experience the full continuum of possibilities; here, it is only a conceptual significant to which individual works of the series refer back.

Paul Heimbach conceived two series entitled *From Dates*: vertical-format pen and ink drawings and horizontal-format inkjet prints. The dates of birth and death of artists, composers and literary figures are translated into a colour code and superimposed onto one another. The ink drawings consist of 200 narrow lines running horizontally; staggered but parallel to each other, they fill the picture space. The date of birth 25.12.1946, for example, is encoded so that first – counting from top to bottom – 25 lines representing the day remain empty and then 25 lines are drawn in blue. Another empty space follows, 25 lines in all, and another 25 lines in blue, and so on until all 200 lines of the sheet of paper have been filled. After this, twelve lines are left empty for the month of December, and then twelve lines filled in red. Again, this is repeated until the space of 200 lines has been completely used up, whereby red and blue lines occasionally overlap (violet), red or blue lines stand alone, and some areas remain blank. The same process is repeated for the number of years, (46 lines blank or yellow) and - in early examples of the series - also for the number of the century (19 lines blank or grey). A linear structure emerges in this way, consisting of blue, red, and yellow, the colours that can be mixed from them, and white.

In the first studies for this series of pen and ink drawings, Paul Heimbach realised the dates of death as a strip of lines parallel to and right of the dates of birth, whereby he reversed the structure for this: the number of lines corresponding to a day, month or year were – again counting from top to bottom – first drawn in their respective colours and then left blank. However, Heimbach soon superimposed a person's dates of birth and death in a format-filling strip of 200 lines.

The inkjet prints of *From Dates* differ from the ink drawings only inasmuch as the dates of birth and death do not overlap, but interlock in a comb-shaped pattern because of the greater precision of the technical process – the lines of birth project by 1% on the left, the lines of death by 1% on the right. The horizontal format emphasises the greater concentration of the lines (400 instead of 200), but may also be understood as a reference to the first person portrayed in this way: video-artist Nam June Paik.

In earlier series, Paul Heimbach had always visualised the total number of possible permutations offered by a serial principle – e.g. the 720 permutations of a colour spectrum in *Sequences* (2001). Now, in *From Dates*, individual derivations arise from an infinite number of possible combinations. These individual sheets, which have connotations of content unusual in Heimbach's work due to their reference to the biographical dates of the artists portrayed, always point beyond their uniqueness to the serial structure from which they originate. Just as Heimbach's *Daily Calendars* from 1992 recorded every minute of a day, thus transcending the temporal structure of an arbitrary day and passing on to the structure of all conceivable days, the individual sheets of *From Dates* appear to cut through the continuum of time in two ways: birth and death as the contingent limitations of a life, and the graphic representation of a lifespan as an arbitrarily variable symbol of a phase of time as measured by the calendar.

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