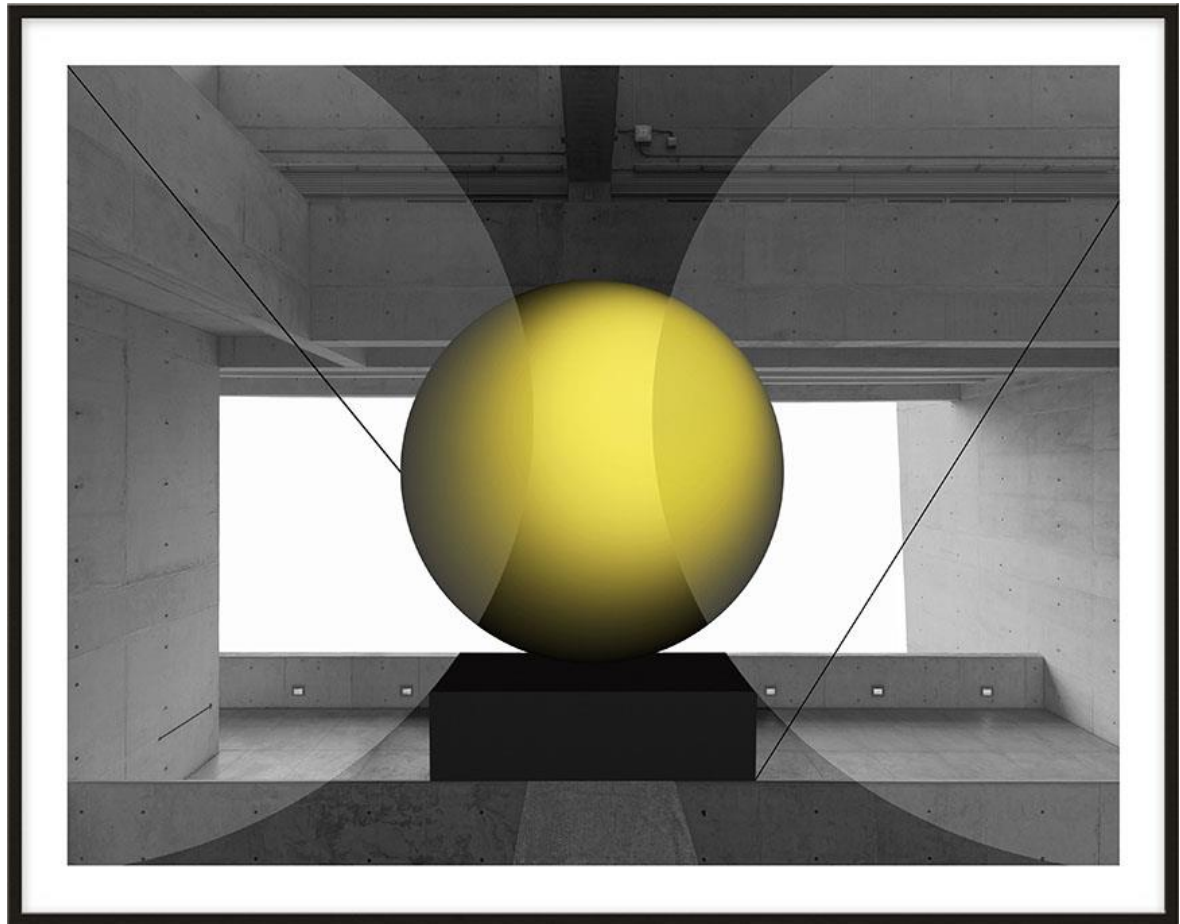# walter storms galerie

Roland Fischer | Transhistorical Places

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Transhistorical Places (Lima), 2018, 162 x 204 cm

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Transhistorical Places (Paris), 2018, 204 x 149.7 cm

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Transhistorical Places (Rio), 2018, 204 x 152.9 cm

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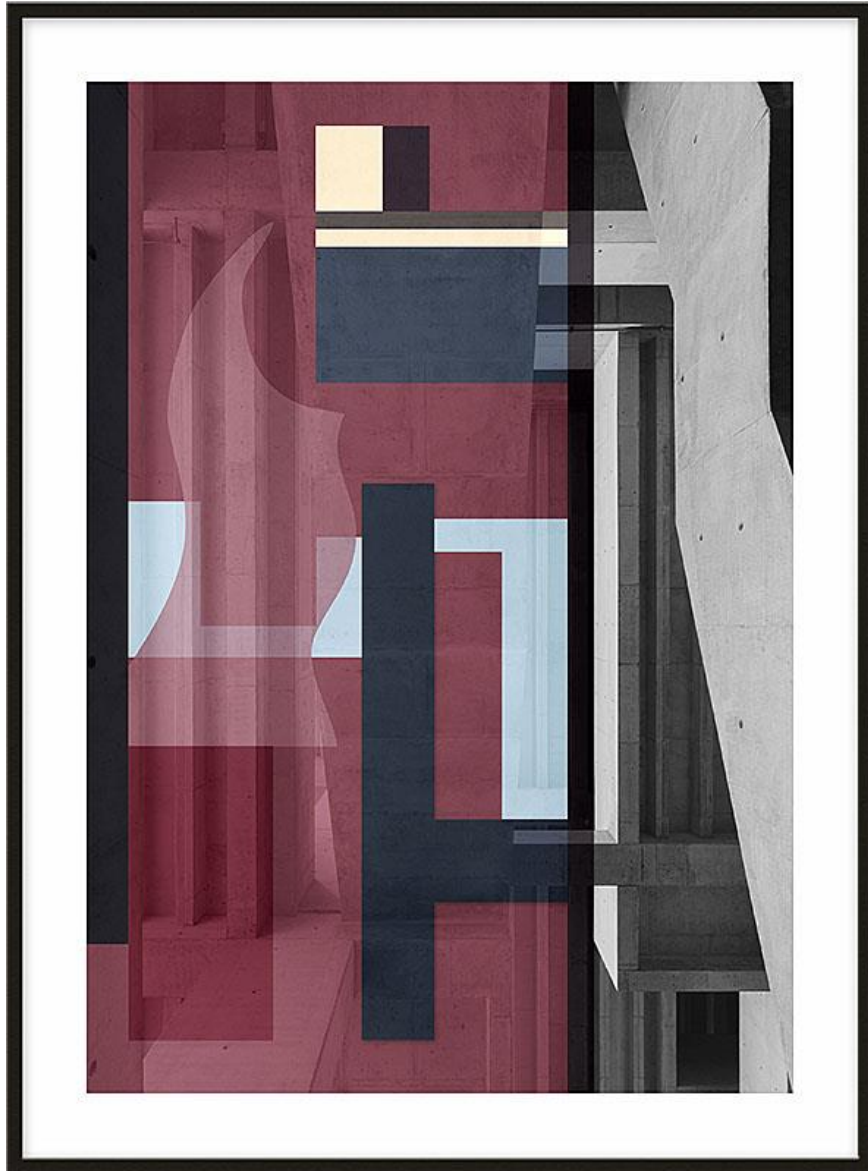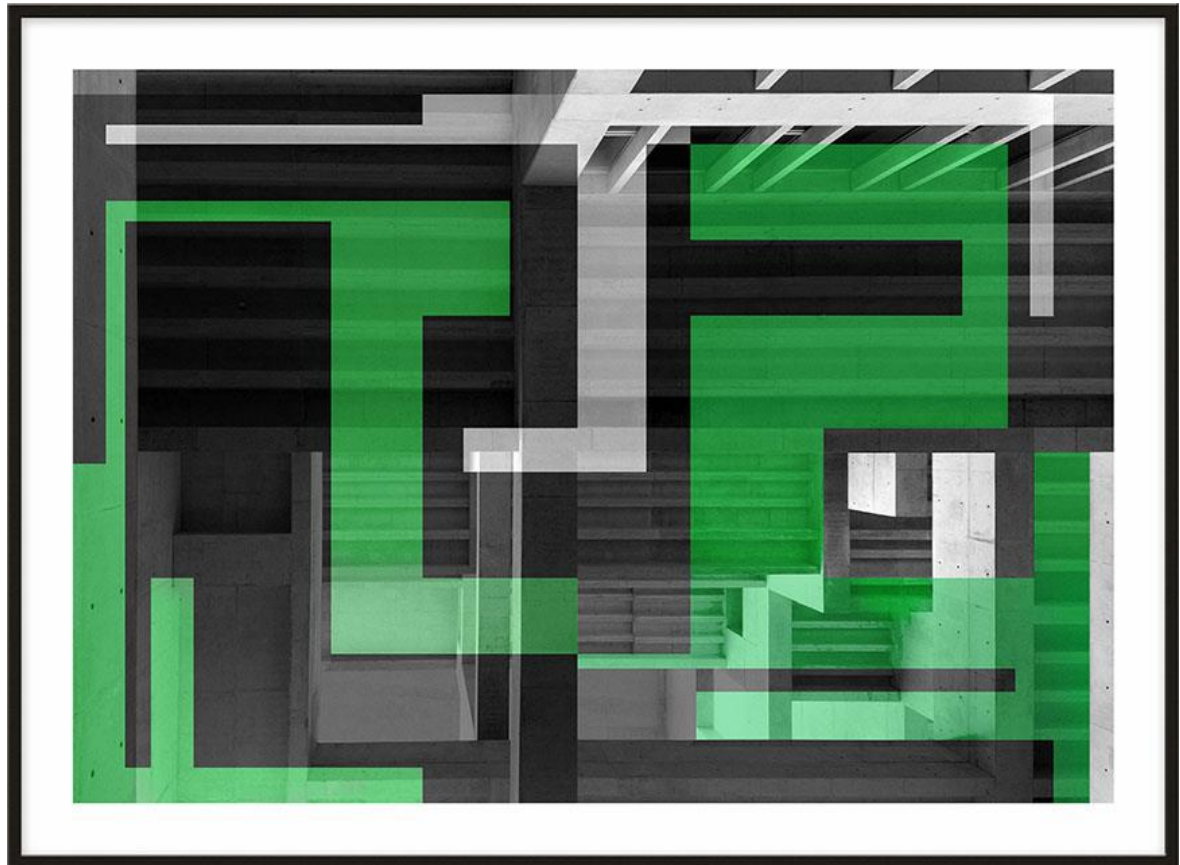Ismaninger Str. 51, 81675 Munich

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Transhistorical Places (Boston), 2018, 143 x 195.6 cm

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Transhistorical Places (Berlin), 2018, 125.5 x 277.6 cm

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Transhistorical Places (Algier), 2018, 180 x 180 cm

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Transhistorical Places (New World), 2018, 143 x 195.6 cm

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Transhistorical Places
by BJÖRN VEDDER

For the series *Transhistorical Places* (begun in 2018), Roland Fischer has taken photographs of Brutalist architecture and overlaid these with coloured planes and forms that recall Modernist paintings from twentieth-century Avantgarde art.

This reworking connects *Transhistorical Places* to *New Architectures*, a series of architectural photographs Fischer started in 2005 which is still in progress. It is an essential feature of Fischer's architectural photographs that, through the reworking and recomposition of an image's object, they reduce the photograph's reference to the depicted structure while underscoring its pictorial nature.

In this the combination or confrontation of figurative or concrete and abstract elements play a crucial role. Fischer's series *Pool Portraits* (ongoing since 1990) already shows not only people in a pool but also the monochrome surface of the water. These are pictorial elements of equal value and thus they collapse the iconological difference between the image's foreground and background against which the sitters appear.

The colour fields and figures in *Transhistorical Places*, too, are equivalent to photographed or construed spaces, respectively. They are not decoration but part of the architecture, as it were, and they cause the spatial experience the viewer can enjoy. That is particularly well exemplified in the picture *Berlin*. The intersecting circles, rectangles and contrasts pierce the three-dimensionality of architectural space by juxtaposing a colour field and a contrast field, thereby establishing a new line of vision that runs not just from front to back but also from left to right (or vice versa).

Obviously, the painterly dissolution of the picture's mapping function loosens its reference to the photographed building and opens the newly created spaces for the viewer's powers of association. So when the titles of works allude to places – for example, *Algier*, *Rio* or *Berlin* – then that does not mean they are necessarily intended to denote a particular place but rather to open up a space of association. This is similarly perfectly exemplified in the picture entitled *Berlin*, which recalls the Berlin Wall more than it prompts us to imagine a concrete architectural space.

Such associations naturally go hand in hand with historical and political content. If, for instance, *Berlin* sets up a twofold eye movement – on the one hand front to back, or we could say into the distance, and on the other hand a lateral movement from left to right or from right to left – and if the image makes us think of the Berlin Wall, then it opens up two different representations in virtue of these eye movements: one gaze that glides along the wall, and another that pierces the wall or recedes into the distance.

Thus *Transhistorical Places* fashions architectural spaces as spaces of the imagination in which historical experiences and memories combine with current impressions. However, this mode of retrospection, which brings experiences and memories into the present, also places these current experiences in the flow of time, marking them as finite, transient, and soon-to-be-no-longer. Hence the visualisation of the past directs the gaze to the future. *Transhistorical Places* are spaces of temporalisation.

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This entails some quite sobering perspectives. For temporalising exposes everything to finitude. Anything that exists exists in time, comes into being and eventually ceases to be. Thus history becomes more contingent. For if historicity is temporalised, then 'all previous experience might not count against the possible otherness of the future', to use historian Reinhart Koselleck's phrase.1On the contrary, what will be remains undetermined. We cannot derive it from the past. Received ideas of continuous improvement become obsolete, as does any conjecture of an ultimate purpose of history. Therefore the *Transhistorical Places* are also sites 'of a breaking up of origin and future'.2This certainly also opens up a new kind of scope. For, if the future is open to coincidence, then improvement cannot be ruled out, either. I also get the sense that the photographs want to preserve precisely this kind of openness to the principle of hope: at least, that is what the formal quotations of Avantgarde painting would suggest, since they point to a historical period particularly rich in ideas and utopian thinking.

Moreover, the temporalisation of experience makes it clear that time does not possess a reality independent of the subject, and that there is no access to the world that is not constrained by the conditions of our finite knowledge. In doing so *Transhistorical Places* steer our gaze not only towards the primacy of intuition over thought but also towards space and time as core conditions of being-in-the-world.3

It is, therefore, not without reason that the title mentions space and time.

To examine the spatial aspect of experience that the works enable, it is helpful to describe the function of the architectural elements that Fischer adopts or repositions as well as those of the coloured figures he adds. He employs both structural and dynamic elements. They open and close spaces. Therefore, architecturally speaking, they are walls, and I believe the concept of a wall affords a good opportunity to find a common denominator for the equivalence of the pictorial elements – even if only in a very wide sense.

Declaring the fundamental architectural elements to be walls derives from Frank Lloyd Wright's *Deconstruction of the Box*, which, similar to Fischer's works, dissolves the building into its constituent parts before recombining the basic elements. The recombination renders the particular elements equivalent, which also requires a common name. Wright writes: 'These unattached side walls become something independent, no longer enclosing walls. They are separate supporting screens, any one of which may be shortened, or extended or perforated, or occasionally eliminated.'4

Walls are elements screening spaces. Architecture is the art of screening spaces.

When used as screening, walls posit a difference between inside and outside. This holds true not only of the architectural forms in the narrowest sense – those that actually create space and hence an inside and an outside – but of all forms. For, as Fischer demonstrates with his abstract forms, all forms posit a difference and distinguish an inside from an outside.It is not only the positing of form, and hence the differentiation of inside and outside, that happens in time but also its contemplation or reflection: that is, the transition from inside to outside, and vice-versa.

This structure-forming and dynamic function of forms is enhanced by their combination or composition. The viewer can trace the developments and movements of the forms Fischer has put in place. That experience has a strongly dynamic character.5The interaction of the walls screens a

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manifold of spaces, which open and close and appear to emerge from each other as though they were in a kaleidoscope. The spaces screened off by them present themselves to the viewer's gaze as condensations and releases, interlacings and stretchings, accelerations and decelerations. Fischer's *Transhistorical Places* are transitory spaces.

Fischer's works, therefore, render architecture as a visible language that allows the artist to communicate with the viewers or users, just as the author of this text communicates with his readers. However, the communication is different, since the medium in which it is conducted and the elements that constitute it are different. The viewers of *Transhistorical Places* do not read a text by connecting words; rather, they observe painterly and architectural forms. They note the differences and transitions between these forms: how they relate to and evolve from one another. The medium of architecture is space; its elements are walls. Yet these elements are also pieces of information that enable us to communicate with each other.

The series *Transhistorical Places* showcases space as a medium by allowing us to perceive the spatiality of existence. In doing so they supplement the perspective adopted by the group of works entitled *New Architectures*. For, while the latter displays the spatiality of Being-in-the-world in a concrete manner, the former, *Transhistorical Places*, presents it in an abstract way. To put it another way: *New Architectures* shows buildings as objects or elements in space. *Transhistorical Places* shows space.

The *New Architectures* achieve this by emphasising the phenomenal dimension of the structures and the sting of the concrete. The series renders things tangible as objects – as *Gegen-Stände*, in Martin Heidegger's terminology: that is, as something that fundamentally stands in our way and must be handled accordingly.6

In doing so the photographs open up the 'spatiality of Being-in-the-world', which, according to Heidegger, we get a sense of in the fact that things vary in their proximity and distance to us – not with regard to their measurable physical distance from us but with regard to how close they are to our (everyday) concerns.7For concern strives to draw the important things close to us, to 'de-sever' them, in Heidegger's coinage: 'In *Dasein* there lies an essential tendency towards closeness.' (p. 140) Because we see things as objects (*Gegen-Stände*) we discover the 'spatiality of Being-in-the-world', namely such that the objects' spatial relations to us – or, more precisely, our relations to the objects – also offer a sense or a reference which these things have for us. Being-in-the-world means bearing a spatial relation to objects that make sense to us; that is, spatial relations are relations of sense or reference. And this is precisely what *Transhistorical Places* convey, albeit from the other side – not from the side of the objects but from space. Comprehending the screening of space makes it observable as something in which sense can appear. Space demonstrates how this appearance of sense ties in with the coupling of elements that generate meaning.8

It is no coincidence that, in this context, Fischer concerns himself with the buildings of Brutalism. For this style not only coincides with the system and information theories of the 1960s but, as a computer-based architecture, it also relies heavily on a code of differentiation. By emphasising the informational

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character of form, Fischer mirrors the informational character of architecture: 1 and 0, inside and outside, opening up and enclosing. Forms are information; information is form.

Moreover, Fischer is also interested in the subversive quality of Brutalist structures. The fact that they ostensibly have a politically destabilising effect on the totalitarian regimes under which many of them were built is also connected to their formal character – which Fischer highlights in the *Transhistorical Places*. For, by marking difference as the basis of form, it renders all kinds of ultimate justifications (whether metaphysical, theological or ideological) redundant. In so doing, it sets the viewer in its place.9This enhances its antiauthoritarian effect: individuals – be they artists, observers, alter egos or, indeed, egos – together with coincidence are seen as the ground of form and all structures. Perhaps it takes nothing more than this to feel free of ideological claims of validity.

Therefore Fischer's *Transhistorical Places* are to a lesser extent images of architecture than they are images about architecture. They show architecture as a form of communication – and that means as a genuinely social phenomenon.

Björn Vedder

Dr. Björn Vedder was born in Brakel, Germany, in 1976, lives as a writer and curator in Munich. His focus lies on contemporary art and literature.

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1 Reinhart Koselleck,'"Space of experience" and "Horizon of expectation": Two Historical Categories',Chapter 14 of: Futures Past. On the Semantics of Historical Time, transl. Keith Tribe, Cambridge/Mass. MIT Press 1985, p. 280.

2 Joachim Ritter, Hegel and the French Revolution, Cambridge/Mass., London: MIT Press 1982, p. 45.

3 Compare the very first sentence of the Critique of Pure Reason: 'In whatever way and through whatever means a cognition may relate to objects, that through which it relates immediately to them, and at which all thought as a means is directed as an end, is intuition.' And a little later on: 'Time is therefore merely a subjective condition of our (human) intuition (which is always sensible, i.e. insofar as we are affected by objects), and in itself, outside the subject, is nothing. Nonetheless it is necessarily objective in regard to all appearances, thus also in regard to all things that can come before us in experience.' Immanuel Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, B 33, B 51, quoted from: The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant, transl. and ed. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood, Cambridge: CUP 1998.Heidegger follows this up with the statement that to say 'I think' always means to say 'I say something'. And whenever I say 'I' I am referring to myself at a particular place at a particular time: 'In saying "I", Daseinexpresses itself as Being-in-the-world', in:Martin Heidegger, Being and Time, transl. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, Oxford: Blackwell 1962,p. 368.

4 Frank Lloyd Wright, 'The Destruction of the Box', in his *Writings and Buildings,*New York: Meridian Books 1960, pp. 284–289, here p. 286.

5 Niklas Luhmann, on whose description of form as the structural principle of the artwork I draw heavily here, writes: 'From a structural point of view, the two-sided form only exists in the temporal mode of simultaneity; operationally considered, however, the two-sided form can only be actualized in consecutive operations since operations that proceed from one side exclude operations that proceed from the other side. The form is the simultaneity of sequentiality.' Niklas Luhmann, 'The Paradox of Form', in: Dirk Baecker, Problems of Form, transl. Michael Irmscher with Leah Edwards, Stanford: Stanford University Press 1999, pp. 15–26, here p 19.

6 Compare my introductory words to Roland Fischer's exhibition New Architectureat Kunstverein Rosenheim, 24 September 2016; manuscript available at www.rolandfischer.de

7 Martin Heidegger, Being and Time, §23: The spatiality of Being-in-the-world, ibid., p. 138.

8 On Heidegger's notion of space in relation to space as medium, seeBeing and Time, §24, ibid., p. 145: 'In this disclosedness which is closest to us, space, as the pure "wherein" in which positions are ordered by measurement and the situations of things are determined, still remains hidden.'

9 That even God is an observer has already been written by Niklas Luhmann, who, however, ennobles Him to be an observer without a blind spot: 'In particular, there is a special status of this observer God that is correlated with the transcendence value of religion's code. God does not need a "blind spot". He can realize every distinguishing schema simultaneously as a difference and as a unity of the distinguished.' (Niklas Luhmann, A Systems Theory of Religion, transl, David Brenner with Adrian Hermann, Stanford: Stanford University Press 2013, p. 114.) In a common observer this blind spot consists in the fact that he does not see what he does not see. The observer is not conscious of the blind spot at all. The blind spot is only noticed by someone observing the observer, a second-order observer. On this point Luhmann's student Baecker writes: 'Both the fascination and the skandalon of the observer's discovery lie in the simple and yet confusing fact that we have to recognise the blindness and insight of all cognitive processes as one side of a coin, the other side of which we do not know. […] Only on the level of second-order observation, of the observing of observation, it is conspicuous that states of affairs are only states of affairs for an observer and that the observer does not see what he does not see. From the Enlightenment via the novel and the critique of ideology through to hermeneutics and psychoanalysis this fact is utilised by observing the observer instead of the states of affairs. But the problem lies deeper. The problem lies in the fact, as Heinz von Foerster formulates succinctly, that the observer does not see that he does not see what he does not see. Insight and blindness are one side of a distinction, the other side of which we do not know.'(Dirk Baecker, 'Kybernetik zweiter Ordnung', in: Heinz von Foerster, Wissen und Gewissen, Frankfurt/Main 1993, pp. 17–23, here p. 18f.) In system theory this second-order observer is Luhmann himself. Of course, the same is true of the observer God. However, the 'first observer of God's observing' (Luhmann, ibid., p. 119) is none other than the devil (or Lucifer).