THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF ABSENCE
monochrom's Zeigerpointer
The wonderful world of absence' presents monochrom's collection of so-called 'Zeigerpointers'.

Until an official term for the media phenomenon 'Zeigerpointer' has been found, this placeholder describes a widespread form of representation used by the print media. This has until now neither been perceived nor defined as a specific form. With the collection (www.monochrom.at/zeigerpointer) and the sequence of images 'Zeigerpointer', monochrom wants to contribute to the examination of the 'Zeigerpointer' as a category of representational aesthetics.

We define the 'Zeigerpointer' as images (in the scope of printed media reporting) of crime scenes, locations of accidents as well as other locations in which some kind of thing has happened that can no longer be seen because the reported happening is already over and no traces are visible (either because none were produced or because they were already removed during the reinstatement of the status quo). Because in these cases there is nothing to take a picture of, the photo journalist generally asks certain people – eyewitnesses, concerned parties or somebody in charge – to point to the spot where 'it' happened. 'Zeigerpointers' can unambiguously be defined with a couple of criteria they have to fulfil and therefore distinguish them from other pictures of people pointing at something. The reported event must not be visible through any other means than the pointing at the spot where 'it' happened.

monochrom has been collecting such images for several years in the form of
newspaper clippings (which ideally should also contain the captions), at first from Austrian print media, later some international exhibits were also added. They are published on our website (after diligently ascertaining their validity) and in the form of e-mailings and word of mouth we regularly call for entries.

With the project 'The wonderful world of absence' monochrom wants to present the findings of this media-cultural archaeology to the public for the first time, also changing the media, in the form of an exhibition. The exhibits will be selected examples painted in oil.

The 'Zeigerpointer' appears with an especially high frequency in the magazines and booklets that are distributed free of charge in the semi-urbane and rural fringes of the Austrian media landscape, the local media, notice sheets and the like that report on local events. However, it also appears in that supra-
regional form in which the provincial Austria returns as a nationwide tabloid with wide circulation which structures, coins and lays the foundations of the day-to-day perception of wide swathes of the population.

Therefore, the quality of the pictures and the print varies (see image 1). Most 'Zeigerpointers' however, have a rather poor image quality which, painted in oil, displays a singular aesthetic attraction comparable to the photo-realistic paintings of the 1970s.

The often poor image quality does not strive for the aesthetics of so-called glossy magazines, but rather reproduces the cheap and poorly produced quality which is characteristic for a considerable percentage of the Austrian print media.

It thereby contains, in a specific form, the characteristics of usage and product of these images. At times they pursue the intention of producing authentic impressions. They do this in order to conjure up an aura of immediacy and closeness to the event, the absence of which they however document. The event has passed irrevocably and pointing to it tries to helplessly reactivate one of the most ancient historico-cultural methods of validation: pointing, if somewhat without success. The shown does not appear where the fingers and hands of the depicted persons point.

Probably to compensate for this defect, the 'Zeigerpointers' often appear as unspirited and unschooled snapshots although in fact they are mostly painstakingly arranged images produced by professional photographers. This is evident in the often very contrived way in which the respective locations are pointed at (see image 2).

The depicted person often appears to be haphazardly and unfavourably posing in an image that tries to convey an impression of not being composed through the amateurish and hasty arrangement. They are neither made up nor otherwise prepared for the media, but rather accentuate the non-banality of the events by pointing to charmless locations in a charmless environment as charmless day-
to-day people, where there is nothing to be seen but where shortly before the
continuation of the daily routine was interrupted for a moment of happening.
In the specific and mostly loveless form of the 'Zeigerpointer' the agitation
and short lifespan of certain media and their event horizons has inscribed
itself.

'The wonderful world or absence' wants to lift day-to-day media events
from their trivial and pure consumer usage in which we encounter them
when paging through newspapers and magazines. They may momentarily
amuse us or touch us only to be swept away by the unstoppable torrent
of information based on the assumption turned into proverb that nothing
is as old as yesterday's news. From the breathless torrent of words, the
'verbal diarrhoea' of the media, we want to isolate that single image which
constitutes the flow of information without being perceptible or questionable

Image 2
The railway station tobacconist Andrea Fröschl (31) at
the scene of the accident: "The man was in flames and
rolling on the floor, screaming", 2011
as such – as an image, i.e. a consciously staged informational aesthetic event.

We want to crystallize it as an isolated and perceptible image event and, through the change of medium, reshape it into an artistically designed artefact in order to contemplate it (critically), savour it (aesthetically) and contextualize it (as a strategy of representation).

We are most of all interested in the stories behind the stories recounted in the image and that normality which was interrupted by the event (as the tangible reason of depiction), which, however, at the time of the depiction already has devoured and overgrown the event again.

We focus our attention on the specific aesthetics of the 'Zeigerpointers' and their discursive implications, which should be emphasized by the isolation and
the change of medium. The artefacts collected up to now contain the whole repertoire of human relationships and affects in a form of multiple layers or degrees, drastic (e.g. image 2) and tragic (image 3) events colliding with the banal (image 4) and all too human, the aggression and violence (image 1) which the Austrian society can only sublimate inadequately, the social fault lines which are perceptible through the lapidary form of reporting or are rather mentioned bluntly. These fault lines are examples of the medial shift from the causes to that which is visible and therefore presentable. The pride and joy that some of the pointers obviously exhibit on their faces – due to their medially noticed relevance – recounts the relationship between the Austrians and 'their' media. The subliminal racism that has become commonplace in Austria, which treats ethnic status as part of the report as a matter of course and which utters such phrases as 'the Serb' (image 5) seemingly without problems, is a constitutive part of many 'Zeigerpointers'.

Image 4
The "ombudsman" Viktor Zenz has solved the problems of lighting at the Alleeweg. Now, the Freedom Party of Gössendorf wants to shut him down, 2011
‘Zeigerpointers’ generally are used when the places where things have happened are not considered to be worthy of an image of their own because they do not have an image tradition of their own (such as historico-cultural buildings or representative places of politics).

The depicted people, however, do not only point to crime scenes and places of accidents, but rather also point at the medial principle of representation itself. Where there is nothing (left) to see, a place holder and medial contrivance has to be introduced – in the act of pointing – in order to affirm the visibility and clearness, internalized by the media as a formal necessity and ideological structure, also in the face of the invisible.

‘Zeigerpointers’ therefore not only represent events alone, but that representative necessity of a media landscape which relies almost exclusively
on the self-explaining suggestive power of image and caption and whose competing information products are dependent of quick understandability and a compact, seamless visualization.

Yes, the necessity of representation is parodied in a certain way. It might seem that the 'Zeigerpointers' are an over-affirmation of the banality of the medial image: in the depiction of the banality of those void spaces where nothing is left.

'Zeigerpointers' therefore represent in a threefold sense: They represent events in the form of their unrepresentability, they represent the representational necessity of the information society. They also represent that trace of trivialization which applies the principle of (medial) representation (also as the mutilation of content which has to be reduced to information) in a world of fates and consequential events, societal conflicts and unresolved aggressions. The often grotesque and mutilated captions transpose the tragic and trivial to the reaches of the absurd-poetic. The exalted in a counter-factual form is nearly contained in the captions.

The 'Zeigerpointers' can also be interpreted as verbal-pictorial forms of stringency of the terrible, as compressed micro-dramas that create tension in the viewers of the exhibition through the absence of essential contextual information which originally was contained or reconstructible, but which also in its original context of the cursory lecture is rarely perceived.

These micro-dramas are compressed and concentrated versions of events that above all in their enigmatic and eccentric quality represent Austrian reality and day-to-day normality.

The poetry of presenting the non-present shifts the focus to moments, situations and 'places' which otherwise would rarely be worthy of an image, places whose normality and casual functionality (fences and curbsides, hedges and pavements etc.) is normally concealed from our perception. Specifically their lack of charm constitutes their specific lure. The pictures point to that
which is concealed behind the cultural or touristic Austrian self-images and which is visible in such a way that it is excluded by the selective perception. The shown sameness, the illuminated void, the lack of events only interrupted for the blink of an eye – all these are common moments of configuration of the local day-to-day culture where the terrible thrives within the inconspicuous and which can only be captured as the inconspicuous in mimicry of its environment.

The 'Zeigerpointers' point to the transience of the tragic as well as the tragedy of transience. They are perhaps the most beautiful side-conflict of the human fight against the void.
monochrom
THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF ABSENCE
monochrom's Zeigerpointer

PostScript® #8
Series edited by Janez Janša