

Maeve Connolly, (exhibition review), Phil Collins, *Artforum*, January 2011: 232-233.

Dublin

Phil Collins

Kerlin Gallery

This exhibition, “*Ich esse keine Bananen mehr und trinke natürlich keine Coca-Cola*,” (I don’t eat bananas anymore and of course I don’t drink Coca-Cola), consisted of two works developed within the context of last year’s Berlin Biennale. The title is a quotation from Petra, one of three former teachers of Marxism-Leninism interviewed by Collins in *marxism today (prologue)*, 2010, a 35-minute HD video linked to a future feature-length project about radical education that Collins plan to undertake in Manchester, England next year. Petra was traumatized by the sudden transition from socialism in the former East Germany to a new regime and—while she has now reinvented herself as a social worker, though she is actually unemployed—she refuses to consume commodities she associates with capitalism, such as bananas and Coca-Cola. She is not the only contributor to communicate an attachment to the old system. Andrea, an expert on neo-liberal economics, claims to continue to rely upon her early training as a “method for thinking.”

Collins is clearly fascinated by the aesthetics of pedagogical discourse. The title sequence affectionately recalls the diagrams on overhead projectors used in the days before PowerPoint, and the interviews are intercut with archived footage from sources such as a studio-based TV show “by teachers, for teachers,” a propagandistic film about classroom techniques, and colorful scenes of a mass athletic spectacle in a huge outdoor arena. The emotional affect of these scenes is amplified through the addition of an alternately joyful and wistful musical soundtrack by Lætitia Sadier and Nick Powell. Collins also explores the dark side of life in the GDR, revealing the psychological and physical damage inflicted upon model students. This becomes apparent in the final interview with Marianne, who readily abandoned the classroom to set up a dating agency called Academia Circle, and her daughter Ulrike, a former gymnast who represented her country at the Olympic Games in 1988. Marianne dreams of retiring to Gran Canaria but will not abandon Ulrike, who is struggling to recover from a harsh training regime that damaged both her spine and self-esteem. In the sequences featuring Petra and Andrea, Collins relies mainly on the juxtaposition of archival

material and individual testimony to communicate tensions between personal values and official ideology. The story of Marianne and Ulrike, however, introduces private archival sources such as family photographs to highlight parallels between the family and the state as pedagogical formations. This final sequence also collapses distinctions between ostensibly public and private media through the repetition of a fragment of television coverage—capturing the injury that ended Ulrike’s Olympic career.

The exploration of boundaries and convergences between public and private continues in *free fotolab (berlin)*, 2010. Consisting of fifty-two photographs printed from exposed but undeveloped 35mm film rolls donated anonymously by Berlin residents and presented as eight individual panels, this work initially suggests a pseudo-ethnographic study of amateur photography, incorporating portraits, landscapes, holiday snaps and domestic interiors. On closer inspection it becomes apparent that several images are repeated within the composition to create a sense of symmetry and order. Unlike the mass spectacles depicted in *marxism today (prologue)*, the creation of this unified structure does not effect a subordination of individual components. Instead, it elicits connections between otherwise disparate images, such as the peculiar combination of hope and anxiety evident in the expressions of many young people, recalling the faces of students and teachers from another era and enabling ordinary photographs to resonate with historical significance.

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