

# Notes on the Cover Image: Networks of Exchange

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Daniel Spoerri's *Seville Series n. 6: Dessert Table, Heimberger (Anker) Dishes* was created in the Swiss village of Ueberstorf at the end of October 1991 and exhibited soon after in southern Spain at Expo '92 in Seville. Like many of Spoerri's trap pictures, it consists of an actual table-top—its contents glued down and the whole raised and hung vertically on a wall.

Spoerri's Spanish-Swiss dessert table offers unexpected vantage points on the networks of exchange featured in this volume. The details of this sculpture, which has received little scholarly attention, are frequently lost in standard photographs of the work. However, a closer examination of the piece reveals much about not only the individual work, but Spoerri's oeuvre as a whole as well as themes addressed in this book such as topography, territory and travel.

Despite the seeming fixity of *Seville Series n. 6*'s upended meal, its petrified micro-territory of chance and communal exchange is anything but stationary. A quick survey of several presentations of *Seville Series n. 6* shows that Spoerri's 'topographies' nimbly defy expectations. While the work is best known through photographs that present it facing in one direction, after opening its transportation box, surprised gallerists have found it equipped to be hung the other way.<sup>1</sup> The work's internal components also refuse to stay put: a bowl of meringues in fig. 1 is visibly less plentiful in fig. 2, aptly suggesting the friable foodstuff's tendency to disintegrate over time.

While the physical topography of this sculptural relief is dynamic, markers of territory nonetheless abound. Red napkins adorned with the white cross of the Swiss flag advertise 'Swissness,' while a business card bearing the name of a potter based in Kiesen, a village near Heimberg, signposts a specific region. Indeed, questions of territory lie at the heart of much of Spoerri's practice, as referenced in the artist's thought-provoking discussions of exile and

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<sup>1</sup> Email correspondence, Dr. Stephan Geiger, Galerie Geiger, to Jill Carrick, October 19 2020.



- 1 Daniel Spoerri *Sevilla-Series No. 6, Ueberstorf Schweiz Ende Oktober 1991, Dessert, Heimberger-(Anker)-plates eaten by... Guests of Edith Talman and the designer of the plates, 1991, dimensions à l'accrochage : 80 x 160 x 40 cm*

displacement.<sup>2</sup> For Spoerri, the trap pictures testify to a fundamental lack or loss of territory. Yet Spoerri's paradoxical strategy of staking claims while unmooring physical coordinates of space and place also thrives on rich, entangled experiences of encounter and exchange.

As outlined in our introduction, the present book traces interconnections in Spoerri's oeuvre across time and place by identifying four guiding themes or 'red threads.' These threads—which we identify as sentimental attachment, anecdote, art/life encounters, and humour—come to the fore in *Seville Series n. 6*.

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2 Discussing both territory and tabletops, Spoerri elaborated: "a table is a meeting of different types of things and it isn't such a directed order. It's a question of territory. Because I had lost my territory since childhood, and even during childhood, I never had a territory. As I said before, I was a Romanian Jew, evangelical in an orthodox country, whose father was dead, without being certain he was really dead. I swear to you, the first things I glued down were all that, that feeling." Daniel Spoerri, interview by Giancarlo Politi, published in Giancarlo Politi, "Today at my age I know the faults that stopped me from becoming better know" [sic], *Daniel Spoerri from A to Z*, exh. cat., Milan, Fondazione Mudima, May 1991, p. 9. For further discussion of questions of territory by Spoerri, see Déborah Laks, "Daniel Spoerri: Hi/Stories and Geographies" and "My Capital is My Statelessness: Interview with Daniel Spoerri, by Déborah Laks, January 19, 2012", in *Daniel Spoerri Eats At Les Abattoirs / À table aux Abattoirs !*, exh. cat., Milan/Toulouse, Fondazione Mudima/Les Abattoirs, 2018, pp. 98–99 and 321–329; and Déborah Laks, *Des déchets pour mémoire. L'utilisation de matériaux de récupération par les nouveaux réalistes (1955–1975)*, Dijon, 2017.



- 2 Detail of Daniel Spoerri's *Sevilla-Series No. 6, Ueberstorf Schweiz Ende Oktober 1991, Dessert, Heimberger-(Anker)-plates eaten by... Guests of Edith Talman and the designer of the plates*, 1991, exhibited at the Galleria civica di Modena, Modena, in 2015

Its details suggest the importance of interpersonal networks and collaboration in Spoerri's art.

### Sentimental Attachment

*Seville Series No. 6*'s subtitles shed light on various sentimental geographies and bonds of attachment commemorated in the work. One extended title reads: *The Seville Series No. 6. Dessert Table, Heimberger (Anker) Dishes "eaten by...": guests of Edith Talman and the ceramicist of the dishes.*<sup>3</sup> Ties of friendship

<sup>3</sup> Daniel Spoerri "eaten by ...": *The Seville Series. Die Sevilla-Serie. La série Sévillane*, exh. cat., Basel, Galerie Klaus Littmann; Paris, Galerie Beaubourg, Marianne et Pierre Nahon, 1992, p. 34.



in fact link Spoerri with Edith Talman and her late husband, artist Paul Talman (1932–1987), whose art explored optical effects caused by motion and colour. Edith Talman hosted the meal in the village of Ueberstorf, welcoming guests such as the local potter Hans Steiner, whose traditional circular-patterned tableware is featured on the tabletop. In a decentering gesture typical of the artist, the title of the image emphasises the involvement of the participants.

For Spoerri, the site where *Seville Series No. 6* was made also holds sentimental value. Although little discussed in the existing literature on Spoerri's work, the artist resided in Ueberstorf next to the Talmans for five years when he was not teaching in Munich at the Academy of Fine Arts.<sup>4</sup> His residence in a schoolhouse originally run by nuns beside the Talmans' sixteenth-century home (the latter once known as Schloss Englisberg) is perhaps one of Spoerri's lesser known "territories."<sup>5</sup>

Exuberant sentimental imagery bordering on kitsch is on full display in *Seville Series No. 6*, which doubles as a tongue-in-cheek ode to Switzerland. The trap picture has snared not only Swiss-flag paper napkins, but also horn-handled knives and the uncoiled metal mainspring of a watch. In addition, two printed napkins prominently display the image of an alpenhorn: a long, carved musical instrument historically used by shepherds to communicate in the Alps. Each of the tabletop objects are situated on a traditional lace tablecloth decorated with net- and web-like patterns (fig. 2). A wide band of interlaced threads punctuates the tablecloth's surface and forms a central axis that comes into view when examined from the side but fades into the background when viewed from the front. Spoerri's multilayered topography interweaves traditional crafts with elements of mass-produced popular culture, mixing different triggers of sentimental affect. This is the playful work that Spoerri, who holds a Swiss passport, sent with other *Seville Series* reliefs to decorate the walls of the Swiss Pavilion restaurant at Expo '92.

## Anecdote

Spoerri has provided anecdotal accounts of the conception and construction of his 1992 *Seville Series*.<sup>6</sup> His stories whisk the reader from Switzerland to Paris,

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4 Akademie der Bildenden Künste München. Spoerri lived in Ueberstorf between 1985 and 1989. Heidi E. Violand-Hobi, *Daniel Spoerri: Biographie und Werk*, Munich/London/New York, 1998, p. 96.

5 For more on Schloss Englisberg, see <http://www.ueberstorf.ch/files/BXMediaPlusDocument4965file.pdf> [accessed: 31.05.2020].

6 Exh. cat., Basel/Paris, 1992 (note 3), pp. 19–21.

Italy, and finally Spain, where they chronicle various vicissitudes and perilous events that occurred during the installation of the exhibition. Vignettes include the near destruction of the reliefs by drunken “super Swiss precision workers” (to use Spoerri’s humorous description of the Swiss pavilion staff) during a pre-exhibition dinner.<sup>7</sup> Another Spoerri story recounts how he broke his arm while preparing for the installation. While the anecdotes foreground the ‘roll-of-the-dice’ nature of chance, a different text by Spoerri printed on the Swiss Pavilion restaurant’s menu offers a more theoretical account of his intentions.<sup>8</sup> Three of his reflections deserve particular attention, namely his labelling of his works as “memento mori,” “object-photographs,” and “miniature theatre pieces” fixed in time.<sup>9</sup> Spoerri’s choice of vocabulary sharpens our understanding of the trap pictures as both material records of the past and performance traces. His description of the works as vanitas reminders of “the final and ultimate fixation, death,” however, also targets modern culture and consumerism. As the menu puts it, “Thus my ‘snare pictures’ are ‘memento mori’ reflections on the vanity of our on-going struggle to survive in the mechanized, aseptic, rationalized and hygienic consumer society today.”<sup>10</sup> Might this pithy message have offered diners seated in Switzerland’s hypermodern Expo ’92 pavilion further food for thought?

### Art-Life Encounters

In positioning his works in the busy Swiss Pavilion restaurant, Spoerri once again staged a richly layered conceptual encounter between art and life. As he explains in his text on the menu: “I have long wanted to juxtapose these relics of survival with life-in-progress. Finally, in this ‘eaten by...’ restaurant in Seville I am able to do so.”<sup>11</sup> The text concludes with the words: “Although ‘eaten by ...’ means nothing more than eaten by you and me, the actors and observers in this ever-changing, ever-repeating act of life are ourselves: For we are all seated at one and the same table.”<sup>12</sup>

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7 The catalogue describes the workers as the “ouvriers du pavilion Suisse”, “die ganze Belegschaft des Schweizer Pavilion”, or the “Swiss pavilion staff”. Ibid., pp. 13, 17, 21.

8 Daniel Spoerri, “Text of the menu of the ‘eaten by ...’-restaurant”, in *ibid.*, p. 9.

9 Ibid. In his trilingual text, Spoerri uses the German and French terms “dreidimensionalen Objekt fotografien” and “minipièce de théâtre.”

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

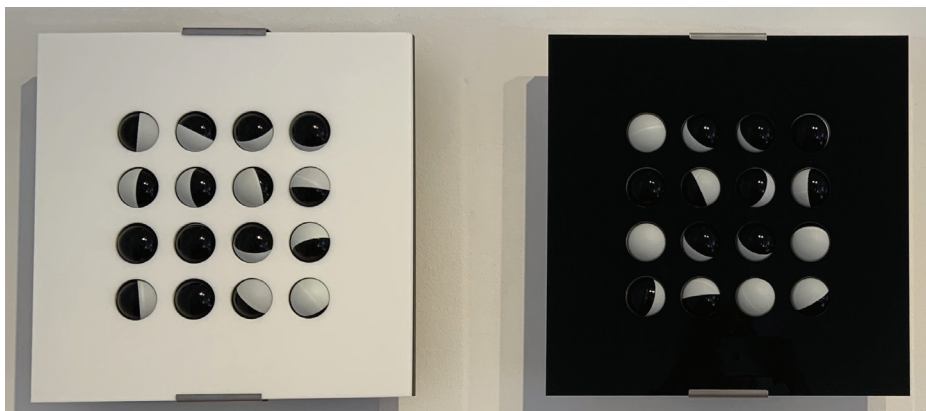
12 Ibid. Art and life, if not one and the same, are revealed here in Spoerri’s terms as intimately intertwined.



3 Albert Anker, *Stilleben : Tee und Schmelzbrötchen / Gediegener Tee*, 1897, 51 x 42 cm

## Humour

Spoerri's art frequently intermeshes art and life with humour. *Seville Series n. 6* is in fact crammed with art history jokes. The name "Anker" in the title, for example, references Albert Anker (1831-1910), a painter known for both his genre scenes of traditional Swiss village life, and his still lifes. The latter include



4 Paul Talman, *Objekt*, 1964, *Edition MAT* multiples exhibited at Ausstellungshaus Spoerri, Hadersdorf am Kamp, in 2019, 40 x 40 x 5 cm

works such as *Stilleben : Tee und Schmelzbrötchen / Gediegener Tee* (1897), which, like Spoerri's still life, presents the viewer with a cup and saucer, milk jug, and sweet pastries on a white decorated tablecloth (fig. 3). Spoerri's trap pictures are themselves a sophisticated interrogation of the art historical genre of the still life, here turned on its head through the use of black humour and abject material remains. Although Philip Morris cigarettes have replaced the typical pipe, and Hans Steiner's business-card image of a tiny pot stands in for older *mise-en-abîme* devices, the traditional vocabulary of the European still life, that stretches from seventeenth-century Dutch genre painting to nineteenth-century paintings by Anker is still discernible.

Twentieth-century avant-garde art is also slyly referenced in *Seville Series n. 6*: its white crosses, red triangle, trapezoidal forms, and circles on a white ground easily suggest the Suprematist motifs of Malevich, an artist of long-standing interest to Spoerri.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, the circular ornaments on the plates may also evoke Spoerri's personal network of artistic exchange. In 1964, Spoerri's future Ueberstorf neighbor Paul Talman contributed a kinetic work to Spoerri's pioneering series of artists' multiples known as *Edition MAT (Multiplication d'Art Transformable)*. The latter was originally conceived in 1959 as an edition of moving or 'transformable' objects, each identically priced despite the varying

13 As Spoerri notes, in the 1950s, "in Bern, I had been passionate about the writings of Malevich and Moholy-Nagy. Since there were no paperbacks then, I recopied, with a typewriter, Malevich's *The Non-Objective World*." (à Berne, j'avais été passionné par les écrits de Malevitch et de Moholy-Nagy. Comme il n'y avait pas encore de livres de poche, j'avais recopié, avec une machine à écrire *Le Monde sans objet* de Malevitch.) Otto Hahn, *Daniel Spoerri*, Paris, 1990, p. 20.





5 Daniel Spoerri,  
*Der Alphornbläser*  
(*Albert Anker Tisch*), 2014,  
3D-Construction,  
113 x 63 x 4 cm



6 Detail of Daniel Spoerri's *Der Alphornbläser*  
(*Albert Anker Tisch*), 2014,  
3D-Construction

fame of the participating artists.<sup>14</sup> “Kollektion 64” of *Edition MAT* presented the work of twelve artists. Paul Talman’s multiple, titled *Objekt*, consists of black-and-white bicolored ping pong balls on a reversible black or white ground. (fig. 4).<sup>15</sup> If we view Talman and Spoerri’s works together, we can see that *Objekt* visually rhymes with the white polka dots on the black milk jug and the other light-on-dark/dark-on-light motifs in *Seville Series n. 6*.

In 2014, Spoerri created a multiple from his *Seville Series n. 6* called *Der Alphornbläser (Albert Anker Tisch)* (The Alphorn Player (Albert Anker Table)) (fig. 5). Like Paul Talman’s *Edition MAT* contribution, it is both a limited

14 The contributing artists were Arman, Jean Arp, Karl Gerstner, Raymond Hains, Man Ray, Arnulf Rainer, Diter Rot, Soto, Daniel Spoerri, Niki de Saint Phalle, Paul Talman and Jean Tinguely. Katerina Vatsella, *Edition MAT: Daniel Spoerri, Karl Gerstner und das Multiple. Die Entstehung einer Kunstform*, p. 81.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 246.



edition multiple and an optical game. The piece consists of a three-dimensional cardboard construction based on a photographic print of the Seville relief. Although slightly miniaturized, the toy-like reproduction accurately captures the colors of the original, including the green vegetal details that embellish the circular disks, and the hues of the plates with their varied cream, pink, blue, and black grounds. The topography of the work, however, has undergone some curious transformations: cut-out images of plates, saucers, knives, and spoons now hover above the surface of the tabletop, some raised by small pieces of foam, others fixed to the transparent surface of the glazing. The relief's built-up layers of superimposed images create several surprising optical effects. Viewed from the side or while in motion, the vertical multiplication of flat forms can produce the effect of a slight blurring of contours, somewhat comparable to that of a misaligned print registration (fig. 6). Challenging our eye while affectionately poking fun at techniques of multiplication, Spoerri's trapped "territory" once again shifts before our gaze. In so doing, it lives up to the initial promise of the 1959 *Edition MAT* manifesto, which reads: "When the objective work is non-static, and constantly alters itself, or finds itself constantly altered through the collaboration of the public, it can gain a great deal through multiplication. It is in fact through multiplication that it approaches its endless possibilities."<sup>16</sup>

As discussed in our introduction, the present book looks beyond Spoerri's trap pictures. While Spoerri cannot be reduced to these works, a detailed re-examination of his best-known artistic strategy can nevertheless provide new insights into the artist's broader concerns highlighted in this volume. *Seville Series no. 6* helps us explore Spoerri's fluid, transitory, overlapping territories while sensitizing us to the complex relations of enmeshment and exchange at the heart of his oeuvre.

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<sup>16</sup> Daniel Spoerri *from A to Z*, Milan, 1991, (note 2), p. 109.